

F. Wayne MacLeod

The Gospel of Matthew

Light To My Path Bible Notes

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

*Light To My Path Bible
Notes Series*

F. Wayne Mac Leod

Light To My Path Book Distribution



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CONTENTS

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Matthew 1](#)

[Matthew 2](#)

[Matthew 3](#)

[Matthew 4](#)

[Matthew 5](#)

[Matthew 6](#)

[Matthew 7](#)

[Matthew 8](#)

[Matthew 9](#)

[Matthew 10](#)

[Matthew 11](#)

[Matthew 12](#)

[Matthew 13](#)

[Matthew 14](#)

[Matthew 15](#)

[Matthew 16](#)

[Matthew 17](#)

[Matthew 18](#)

[Matthew 19](#)

[Matthew 20](#)

[Matthew 21](#)

[Matthew 22](#)

[Matthew 23](#)

[Matthew 24](#)

[Matthew 25](#)

[Matthew 26](#)

[Matthew 27](#)

[Matthew 28](#)

[About The Author](#)

INTRODUCTION

This is the account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as written by Matthew. Matthew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus (see Matthew 10:3) and as such experienced the events written in this gospel firsthand. Before becoming a disciple, Matthew was a customs officer or tax collector known as Levi (Mark 2:13-16). As a tax collector, he gathered taxes for Rome and was generally despised by the Jewish population who frowned on the Roman occupation and taxation of their nation. Matthew seems to identify with the

sinner Jesus encountered in His ministry. Jesus met Matthew while he sat at his booth collecting taxes (Matthew 9:9). He left that booth and his career as a tax collector to follow the Lord Jesus. Possibly one of his greatest roles as an apostle was to give us this detailed record of the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW 1

Verse 1

Matthew was a tax collector by trade, but Jesus called him as one of His twelve disciples. He was also known as Levi. We read about his calling in Matthew 9:9:

9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

Verse 1 gives us the book's title – "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of

Abraham.” While this may have been its original title, it would be better known by the author’s name.

The title tells us something about Matthew’s intention. Notice first that it is a genealogy. It traces the roots of the man Jesus Christ.

Of particular note is that Matthew traces Jesus’ roots through two very important Jewish ancestors, Abraham and David.

According to the apostle Paul, Abraham is the father of those who believe by faith:

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

God promised that Abraham would be the father of a great kingdom. The kingdom's citizens would be Jews and Gentiles who had come to Christ by faith. Abraham represents the great spiritual nation of men and women around the world who, by faith, have become children of God.

David was one of Israel's great kings and a man after God's heart. Isaiah tells us that his descendant would be the hope of the Gentiles:

12 And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." – Ro 15:12

This Christ of whom Matthew gives an account was of Jewish descent, but His ministry was not limited to the Jews. He fulfilled God's promise through Abraham and David to the whole world.

Verse 2

This list of Christ's lineage is very brief. It does not start at the beginning but rather with Abraham, whom the Jews considered to be the father of their nation.

Matthew traces Abraham's line through Isaac and his son Jacob. Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, but the line of Jesus was through Jacob's son Judah. Jesus would be a descendant of the tribe of Judah.

Verse 3

The line of the Lord Jesus was filled with ordinary people who were far from perfect. Of note is "Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar." Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law. Genesis 38 recounts how Tamar, without children after the death of her two husbands,

disguised herself as a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law Judah to conceive. By this unlawful means, the line of Christ was preserved. Matthew traces the line of Christ through their son Perez.

Verse 4

After the line of Christ was threatened by Judah's refusal to give Tamar his youngest son, it continued unhindered by Tamar's trickery through the line of their son Perez. Matthew lists the descendants of Perez for a number of generations through Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon and Salmon.

Verse 5

We encounter two more women in the genealogy of Jesus. The first of these women is Rahab. The only reference to Rahab in the Bible is found in Joshua 6,

when Joshua sent spies into Canaan. They came to the home of a woman named Rahab, identified as a prostitute (Joshua 6:25, Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25). While there is some debate as to whether this is the Rahab who married Salmon, she certainly would have lived at this time.

After the death of Joshua, Israel was ruled by a series of judges. Rahab, the prostitute, would have lived at this time. The book of Ruth, written about this period of Israel's history (see Ruth 1:1), mentions Salmon and his son Boaz:

21 Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz
fathered Obed, – Ru 4:21

It is possible then that Rahab, the prostitute of Joshua 6, married Salmon and became the mother of Boaz.

Ruth, who married Boaz, was a Moabite, not an Israelite. The law of Moses forbade any Moabite from entering the assembly of the Lord because they hired Balaam to curse the people of Israel:

3 "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, 4 because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. – Dt 23:3-4

The line of Jesus Christ would be traced through a Moabite ancestor. Ruth, the Moabite, would give birth to Obed, whose son Jesse would father the great king David.

Verse 6

Jesse, the grandson of Ruth the Moabite, became the father of "David, the king."

What is of particular note here is that David would become the father of Solomon through the wife of Uriah. David committed adultery with Uriah's wife, and when she became pregnant, he killed Uriah to cover it up. He then took her as his wife, and she gave birth to Solomon.

Matthew does not attempt to hide this fact. He draws attention to it by mentioning that Solomon was born to Uriah's wife through David.

Verse 7

Three kings are listed here as descendants of Solomon.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son rejected the advice of his father's counsellors and was responsible for the division of Israel into two separate nations, Israel and Judah.

Abijah or Abijam is described in 1 Kings 15:3 as a king who turned his back on the God of his fathers:

3 And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. – 1Ki 15:3

Asaph or Asa followed in his father's footsteps and also turned his back on the Lord as recorded in 2 Chronicles 16:12:

12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek

the LORD, but sought help from physicians. – 2Ch 16:12

Not all of the lineage of Christ walked with God. Some, in fact, turned their backs on Him.

Verse 8

Matthew continues his genealogical record through a series of kings in Judah. Jehoshaphat was a faithful king who walked with the Lord and even made peace with Israel in a time of division (1 Kings 22:43-44).

Joram or Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat (1Ki 22:50), did not walk with the Lord but is described as doing “evil in the sight of Jehovah” (2 Kings 8:18).

It should be noted that Uzziah was not the direct son of Jehoram. Several kings in Judah are omitted here. Uzziah

became quite powerful as a king but, in his pride, abandoned the Lord and was struck with leprosy. (2 Ch 26:21).

Verse 9

Next on the list of kings in Christ's line is Jotham. 2 Kings 15:34 describes him as a good King who walked with the Lord. Ahaz, however, turned from the Lord and worshipped other gods, even burning his son on an altar in a pagan ritual (2Ki 16:2-4).

Hezekiah was one of Judah's best kings and walked faithfully with the Lord through his entire reign (2Ki 18:3-7).

Verse 10

Manasseh, the next king on Matthew's list, was an evil king who set up pagan altars to Baal and encouraged the worship of the stars and planets. He

desecrated the temple by placing pagan altars in the temple court. He was involved in child sacrifice, witchcraft, and shed much innocent blood in Jerusalem. (2Ki 21:2-17).

His son Amon followed the ways of his father and first the Lord God of Judah (2Ki 21:20-22).

Josiah was a refreshing change for the nation of Judah. He served the Lord with all his heart, bringing many positive returns to the nation (2Ki 23:25-26)

Verse 11

Jeconiah is also known as Jehoiachin. He was the grandson of Josiah, so Matthew skips a generation in his list. 2 Kings 24:9-10 tells us that he was not a good King, and during his reign, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and

captured Jerusalem taking many captives.

Verse 12

To this point, Matthew's genealogy has covered the line of Christ from Abraham to the time when Judah was taken captive by the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar. This event was significant in the nation's life as they were exiled from their land and lived in Babylonian captivity for seventy years. It was also a reminder of their sin and the punishment of God upon their nation for turning their backs on Him.

Matthew continues the genealogical line of Christ after the return of the exiles from captivity with Shealtiel. Little is known of him apart from the fact that he was the father of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel would become the first governor in Jerusalem when Israel returned from her seventy-year captivity. He was likely born in Babylon, and his name means “seed of Babylon,” probably a reference to where he was born.

Verse 13

The name Abiud is only found here in Matthew’s genealogy. There is no other reference to his name in the Bible. Eliakim appears to be a fairly common name. We read of a priest by that name in the days of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, but he is not likely Eliakim, the son of Abiud found here.

As with Abiud, the name of Azor is only found here in Matthew’s lineage and appears nowhere else in the Bible.

Verse 14

Sadoc, Achim and Eliud are the next three individuals in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. There are only mentioned here in Matthew's gospel. We have no record of these names in the rest of Scripture. They are unknown apart from their names.

Verse 15

While the name Eleazar is found in the Old Testament, the Eleazar Matthew mentions here is unknown. Matthew's record here is the only mention of his name in the Bible.

This is the only time the name Matthan occurs in the Bible and is unique to Matthew's genealogy.

Jacob is a familiar name in Scripture. However, this is the only record of

Jacob, the son of Matthan, in the Bible. The individuals mentioned here are unknown, ordinary people.

Verse 16

All of this brings us to Joseph, the son of Jacob husband of Mary, to whom Jesus Christ was born.

Matthew's line is traced through Joseph as the earthly guardian of the baby Jesus. Let me make a couple of points about this here.

Notice here how careful Matthew is with his wording in this verse. He declares Joseph to be the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus. He does not call Joseph the father of Jesus.

Scripture teaches that Jesus was born to Mary as a virgin. Joseph had no sexual union with his wife until after He

was born (see Matthew 1:25). Jesus was not the biological child of Joseph. What is the purpose of this genealogy, then, if Jesus was not an actual biological descendant of any of the people mentioned in the list?

What Matthew is doing here is recognizing Joseph as the guardian of the Christ child. While not the biological father, Joseph played an important role in the life of Jesus as a child. He would raise Jesus as his earthly son.

It should be noted that Luke records the line of Jesus through Mary's ancestors, and those names differ from other genealogies tracing the line through Joseph.

Jacob is a familiar name in Scripture. However, this is the only record of Jacob, the son of Matthan, in the Bible. The individuals mentioned here are unknown, ordinary people.

Verse 17

Matthew summarizes the genealogy for us here. He tells us how he organized the list into three groups of fourteen generations.

The first grouping is from Abraham to David. The second is from David to the exile in Babylon. The third is from the return from Babylon to the birth of Jesus.

There may be some significance to the numbers used here, but the organization of the list into three groups ending with a significant event may be to help the reader remember it more easily. To create this structure, Matthew has to leave out certain generations. Genealogies were of more significance in those days than they are today. Without books in most homes to refer to, these genealogies were often committed to memory.

Verse 18

Having traced the line of Joseph, Matthew now gives his account of how the birth of Jesus took place. This was no ordinary birth, so Matthew takes his time to explain the details. He carefully lays out some specific information here. First, Mary was betrothed to Joseph when she knew of her pregnancy. The betrothal or engagement was a legally binding agreement between a man and a woman to be married. While a sexual relationship was forbidden at this time, the partners committed themselves to each other. Any advance toward another person would be considered adulterous and treated as such. This engagement could only be broken by divorce.

Notice second that Mary discovered she was “with child” during this engagement period. Matthew clearly states that this pregnancy was “before

they came together” or they had any sexual relationship.

Third, observe that this child in Mary’s womb was “of the Holy Spirit.” The life of the Christ child was placed in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit bypassed the normal means of conception and miraculously placed the embryo in Mary’s womb to develop and be cared for.

There is nothing sinful or sexual in this act of the Holy Spirit. Doctors today can implant embryos into a mother’s womb through a simple medical procedure. This does not take away the miraculous nature of this event, for what occurred with Mary that day was without a doctor or any medical procedure. It was a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 19

The news of Mary's pregnancy put Mary and Joseph in a difficult situation. It would be known that this occurred during the engagement when sexual union was forbidden. If Joseph was the father, then he had acted inappropriately toward Mary. If he wasn't, Mary must have been guilty of unfaithfulness.

Verse 19 begins by calling Joseph Mary's husband. What we need to understand, however, is that it is not until verse 24, after God convinced him that the child in Mary's womb was from the Holy Spirit, that Joseph would officially marry Mary.

20 But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in

her is of the Holy Spirit... 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife – Mt 1:20, 24

While they were not married, Mary and Joseph were engaged. This engagement was legally binding and could only be broken by divorce. Mary and Joseph were bound together as partners. In this sense, they were husband and wife, but they did not live together, nor were they sexually active until after the child was born.

Joseph is described as a “righteous man.” He observed the law of Moses and walked in the purpose of God. Because he was righteous, when he discovered that Mary was pregnant, and knowing that it was not his child, he determined to divorce her privately. Let me point out a couple of details here.

Why would Joseph divorce Mary if he were a righteous man? Remember first that, as a righteous man, Joseph wanted his home to be established on the principles of the Law of God. At this point, Joseph did not truly grasp that the Holy Spirit had placed this baby in Mary's womb. All he knew was that Mary was pregnant and it was not his child. Could he establish a godly home on this foundation?

Second, if this child was not Joseph's, then in Joseph's mind, it belonged to another man. As a righteous man, he would not take a child that did not belong to him. It was the father's responsibility under the law of God to marry the mother and raise the child.

Observe here that because Joseph was a righteous man, he determined that he would divorce Mary privately. The divorce could have occurred before a judge, but this would have made it a

public scandal. Instead, Joseph, out of respect for Mary, chose to make the divorce a very quiet affair. Deuteronomy 24:1-2 describes how a husband could do this:

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, – Dt 24:1

In the event of this kind of divorce, the woman was free to remarry (see Deuteronomy 24:2).

Joseph was considering how to preserve Mary from public scorn and possibly also for the child's father (as he understood it) to take on the responsibility of raising the child as his own.

Notice one more detail here. The verse tells us that Joseph was “resolved” to divorce Mary. The word used here is βούλομαι (boulomai) which expresses a willingness. The idea here is that he had come to a place as a righteous man where he was willing to give up his fiancée and the hope he had of a future with her. This would not have been an easy decision for Joseph, but just as Abraham had to be willing to surrender his son Isaac so Joseph had to give his wife to God before he could receive her back. God required Joseph to surrender his wife to Him for His purpose. Only when Joseph was willing to offer her to Him did God fully reveal His purpose to Joseph.

Verse 20

Verse 19 tells us that Joseph resolved to divorce Mary. Notice, however, that he still “considered these things.” The

word translated “considered” here is ἐνθυμέομαι (enthuméomai). It is derived from two words, “en” meaning in, and “thumós” referring to the mind, thought or even anger. The idea here is that his mind was in turmoil and possibly even angry. With this news, his life plans had been changed.

It was in this state of confusion and agitation that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. God was aware of the pain in Joseph’s heart at this time.

The angel told Joseph not to fear taking Mary as his wife. This shows us that Joseph was afraid.

We can only imagine what was going through Joseph’s mind then. Had Mary deceived him? Had she been unfaithful to him? Did she love Him? What was he getting himself into? Could he ever trust her again? All these questions

likely flooded his mind causing doubt, confusion and grief.

The angel's words, however, were powerful and spoke directly to those fears – "do not fear to take Mary as your wife." These words revealed God's will for him.

In that same dream, God revealed to Joseph the source of Mary's pregnancy – "that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." These were words that Joseph needed to hear from God. Mary may have told him this, but no one but God could truly convince him of this truth. God brought that assurance to Joseph that night.

Verse 21

The angel tells Joseph several details about the child that Mary carried.

First, the angel told Joseph that the child Mary would bear would be a son. There is significance to the word “son.” It is true that the child would not be a biological son to Joseph, but Joseph was to be an earthly father to Him.

Second, the angel told Joseph what he was to name this child. The angel gives Jesus His name. The name Jesus, while common enough in that day, means, “Jehovah is salvation,” a reference to the fact that this child would become the salvation of Jehovah.

Finally, this child who would be born would be the One to save His people from their sins. He would pay for their sin and bring God’s salvation to the earth.

Verse 22

Notice finally that the angel of the Lord told Joseph that what was about to happen to him and Mary was in fulfillment of prophecy. God had been planning this from eternity past, revealing it to Israel through His prophets, and now fulfilling it through a relatively simple and unknown couple. Certainly, this was something Joseph would have had a hard time believing had it not been revealed to him by an angel of the Lord.

Verse 23

The angel that communicated to Joseph that day told him that what was about to happen to him was fulfilling a prophecy. The angel then quoted from Isaiah 7:14. Notice what Isaiah prophesies in this verse many years before the birth of the Lord Jesus.

First, Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would be with child. We can only imagine how that verse must have struck Joseph that day as the angel quoted it.

Second, the child born to that virgin would be a son. The angel told Joseph in verse 21 that the child born to Mary would be a son.

Third, Isaiah prophesied that the child's name would be Immanuel which means "God with us." We should not see it as a contradiction that the angel told Joseph to call the name of his child Jesus. The Lord Jesus has many names. Immanuel is one of the names by which He is known.

Verse 24

The angel of the Lord spoke powerfully to Joseph through a dream. He

challenged Joseph not to fear taking Mary as his wife and showed him that Mary had not been unfaithful. The child in her womb had been miraculously implanted there by the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of prophecy.

Verse 19 tells us that Joseph had resolved to divorce Mary, but after that encounter with the angel of the Lord, everything changed. When he woke from his sleep, he took Mary to be his wife. The dream and the encounter with the angel of the Lord reassured and convinced him.

Verse 25

Matthew tells us that Joseph had no sexual relationship with Mary until after Jesus was born. Let me clarify two points here.

First, Mary conceived as a virgin. No man was involved in the conception of our Lord. He was miraculously placed in her womb by the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah put it this way: "the virgin shall conceive." Matthew teaches the virgin conception of Jesus.

Beyond this, however, Matthew tells us that Joseph had no sexual relationship with Mary until after Jesus was born. It is from this fact that we get the doctrine of the virgin birth. Not only did Mary conceive as a virgin, but she also gave birth to Christ as a virgin. She had no sexual relationship with any man during the conception, development and birth of Christ. She devoted herself exclusively to the Lord Jesus during that time and kept herself pure and undefiled. Christianity stands firmly on the virgin conception of Mary and the virgin birth of Christ.

Notice finally here that Joseph called the child born to Mary, Jesus, as the

angel had commanded.

MATTHEW 2

Verse 1

Matthew gives us three details about the birth of Jesus here.

First, He was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Bethlehem was a respectable town located about five miles or eight kilometres south of Jerusalem.

Second, Jesus was born in the days of Herod, the king. Herod was a Gentile established by Rome to rule in that region. Israel was, therefore, at this time under Roman control.

History indicates that Herod was a ruthless leader who thought nothing of killing those who got in his way.

Matthew recounts how Herod determined to kill Jesus as a child after hearing the prophecies about Him (Matthew 2:12).

Third, Matthew mentions wise men from the east who came to see the Lord Jesus. It should be noted that by the time the wise men arrived, Joseph and Mary had moved into a house (see Matthew 2:11).

19 And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. – Dt 4:19

Verse 2

We see here the reason the wise men came to Bethlehem. They were seeking the King of the Jews. Matthew tells us that they saw His star and came to worship Him.

Matthew is not condoning the practice of astrology here. Nor is he telling us that he believed Christ had a star in the heavens representing Him. He is simply conveying the reasoning of these pagan astrologers.

These wise men spent their time studying prophecies and examining the stars for signs of when these prophecies might come true. In the history of Israel, there was a prophecy given by a Mesopotamian prophet by the name of Balaam that said this:

17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.- Nu 24:17

Consider Balaam's prophecy. He predicted that a star would arise from Jacob in a future time. He describes that star as a sceptre. A sceptre was a symbol of a king's authority. This powerful king would crush his enemies.

This prophecy delivered by a wise man from the east many years prior may have been on the mind of the astrologers of Jesus' day. Seeing a special star in the sky, they interpreted this to refer to this great king of Israel.

Verse 3

The arrival of the wise men from the east was a big deal. In those days, these men were respected for their craft, and people listened to them and took their predictions and warnings seriously. King Herod heard they had come seeking the King of the Jews whose star they had seen. This was cause for great concern.

It was widely held that the day would come when the Jews would be delivered from Roman oppression. The news of these wise men seeking the "King of the Jews" would have stirred up this belief. Herod understood that he could not afford to have the city of Jerusalem rebel against Roman authority. He took the matter seriously. Notice that Herod was not the only one to be troubled. Matthew tells us that all of Jerusalem was also concerned. The birth of a Jewish king would have rekindled the hope of many in Jerusalem that they could be free from

Rome. It could also mean Rome would tighten its control of Jerusalem and cause greater unrest in the city.

News of the birth of the Christ child brought great fear to the hearts of the people in Jerusalem.

Verse 4

King Herod called for an assembly of the chief priests and scribes when he heard that the wise men had come to the region seeking the king of Israel. His purpose in this meeting was to get any information from them about “where the Christ was to be born.”

The phrase “where the Christ was to be born” is significant. It shows that Herod understood that this king was prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures. Not knowing these prophecies, he

brought in the experts to show him where this anointed one (Christ) was to be born.

Verse 5

The chief priests and scribes were aware of the prophecies of the coming Messiah and could tell Herod what he wanted to know. According to the Scriptures, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, about 5 miles or 8 kilometres to the south of Jerusalem. By telling us this fact, Matthew is not only recounting the events that took place but also revealing how Jesus was born as the prophets had predicted.

Verse 6

The chief priests and scribes directed Herod to the prophecy of Micah about the Messiah (Micah 5:2). Micah predicted that a great ruler would come

out of Bethlehem. This ruler would be a shepherd to the people of Israel. The word used here for “shepherd” is ποιμαίνω (poimaínō) which means to care for and provide. This was the special obligation of kings and leaders of that day.

Verse 7

After consulting with the chief priests and scribes about the location of the Messiah’s birth, Herod then called for a meeting with the wise men. His goal for this meeting was to determine when the star they saw had appeared.

Notice that this meeting with the wise men was held in secret. The secretive nature of the meeting reveals that he did not want his true intentions to be discovered by the Jews. They had pinned their hopes on this Messiah, and if they found that Herod was doing

anything to hinder that prophecy, they would not have taken kindly to it. Herod's intention is likely to determine what the age of the child king would be. This would enable him to find the baby.

Verse 8

Notice how Herod used the wise men to search for Christ. He commissioned them to go to Bethlehem and commanded them to bring him word when they had found the child.

By using the wise men to find Jesus, Herod removes the need to send his men to question people in Bethlehem, which might have aroused suspicion among the inhabitants.

Herod told the wise men that he wanted them to report back to him so he could also worship this child. The

idea of Herod worshipping his rival was quite questionable from the beginning, but Herod somehow believes that he could deceive the wise men into believing this untruth.

Verse 9

After they met with Herod, the wise men set out to find the Lord Jesus. By this time, Mary and Joseph had moved from the stable to a home (see Matthew 2:11).

The question of how to find Jesus was resolved by a star that went before them and shone over the house where he was staying.

God intended that these wise men find the Lord Jesus. Just as the Lord God led Israel through the desert by a fiery pillar, he led those wise men by the star's light to where Jesus was staying.

God has many ways of revealing His Son to the world.

Verse 10

Notice the response of the wise men to seeing the star. Matthew tells us that they rejoiced.

The word “rejoice,” however, was insufficient to describe their reaction, so Matthew qualifies what he says with the word σφόδρα, (sphódra) meaning exceedingly or very much. The hearts of these wise men rejoiced very much or greatly.

The word “exceedingly” still does not quite capture the sense of what the wise men felt, so Matthew adds the word μέγας (mégas), meaning great or large. The rejoicing these men experienced was more than exceeding joy but mega exceeding joy. What

Matthew is describing here is the maximum joy and rejoicing possible.

Verse 11

Matthew tells us that the wise men entered the house where Jesus was staying. This shows us that Mary and Joseph had moved out of the stable where Jesus was born and found a more suitable place to live by the time these wise men arrived.

Upon entering the house, the wise men saw Jesus with his mother, Mary. Jesus is identified here as a child. The Greek word παιδίον (paidíon) can refer to an infant or baby. The fact that he is with his mother, Mary, may indicate that he was still an infant.

The response of the wise men was to fall and worship. While Mary

worshipped God for giving her this child, this is the first reference to the Lord Jesus being worshipped. These Gentile astrologers bow down to the ground in reverence of Jesus, the infant child.

As part of their worship, the wise men bring three gifts to the Christ child.

First, they offered Christ gold. This was a precious metal used as a currency and for producing rich ornaments and jewellery.

Second, the wise men gave frankincense to Jesus. Frankincense was derived from a certain species of tree. An incision would be made in the tree so the sap would ooze out. When this hardened into gum, it was harvested and burned as incense.

The third gift the wise men brought was myrrh. Myrrh is harvested from a

small thorny tree. Like frankincense, an incision is made into the tree, so the sap begins to flow. This hardens into gum and is harvested. Myrrh is burnt as incense or added to perfumes. It also has medicinal value and can kill bacteria, heal sores, reduce swelling and ease pain.

Some believe that these three gifts have a symbolic meaning. They teach that gold represents the kingship of Jesus, frankincense His deity and myrrh, His suffering. There may be some truth to this, but there is no direct scriptural reference to back this up.

Verse 12

After they visited Jesus, the wise men had a dream. Matthew does not tell us whether they all had this dream or whether one of them had a dream for them all. Nor does he give us any

details about this dream. What he tells us, however, is that it was a warning to the wise men.

The warning related to Herod and his intentions. The wise men understood that they were not to return to Herod. Remember in Matthew 2:8 that Herod sent the wise men to search for Christ and commanded them to return to him with information about his identity. This dream was a warning to the wise men about doing this.

Taking this warning seriously, they disregarded the command of Herod and returned to their country by an alternative route. The main road by which they came to Israel went through Jerusalem. The wise men could not return to Jerusalem without their presence being noticed by Herod. They likely chose instead to continue southward, where they would find

another road to their country, escaping without Herod seeing them.

Verse 13

It would not be long before Herod realized that the wise men had tricked him by leaving the country without reporting back. This would mean that Herod would have to look for Jesus himself. He knew where to begin, for the chief priests and scribes had told him where the Messiah was to be born.

At this time, the angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph in a dream. The angel told Joseph to flee to Egypt with the child because Herod wanted to kill Him. Mary and Joseph were not given a time frame on how long they would be in exile. The angel told them to stay there until they were told to return.

Historically, there was a healthy Jewish population in Egypt when Joseph took His family there. What is clear is that God was protecting Jesus by removing Him from Herod's grasp. God could have removed Herod or protected Jesus in Israel, but in this case, He chose instead to send Him to Egypt.

Verse 14

In response to the angel's warning, Joseph took his family and left at night to go to Egypt. This was not the normal time to leave for such a trip unless you were trying to hide where you were going from your friends and neighbours. In this case, they may not have wanted to leave clues about their whereabouts, so Herod could not find them or get information from neighbours.

Verse 15

Joseph and Mary stayed in Egypt until Herod died. Opinions vary as to how long they remained in Egypt.

What is clear from this incident is that Matthew tells us that Hosea prophesied it in Hosea 11:1:

1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. – Ho 11:1

While the passage in Hosea speaks of Israel, Matthew tells us it also predicted what would happen to the Lord Jesus as a child. This being the case, the command of God to Joseph to flee to Egypt was not a reaction to Herod's plan to kill Jesus so much as it was the purpose of God many years before it even happened. God had a solution way before there was a problem. We ought to take comfort in this.

Verse 16

Herod eventually understood that the wise men would not report back to him. This infuriated him. His anger was so extreme that he determined that he would kill every male child in the region of Bethlehem, two years old and under. This age was determined by what he had discovered from the wise men about when the star had appeared to them.

There is an intense spiritual battle raging here. The wise men consulted the stars for guidance in a practice God forbade. It was during their presence in Jerusalem that Herod discovered that a child king was born to the Jews. Their trickery infuriates Herod so much that hundreds of infant children are slaughtered in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph are forced to leave their home and family to flee to Egypt.

On the other hand, we see how God used these wise men to announce the birth of the Messiah to His people. We watch them fall in worship, declaring this child to be king of Israel. We see how God warns them not to report back to Herod, and they listen by taking a more difficult road to their country.

The work of God and the forces of evil collide in this story. Through it all, the Lord Jesus is protected. No power of hell could keep Him from the task to which He has been called.

Verse 17

Herod lashed out in anger against Bethlehem. Many young children were slaughtered as a result of that fury. This did not take God by surprise. He had predicted that this would happen through the prophet Jeremiah.

One of the great themes of Scripture is the free will of humankind. God allows us this privilege. He could remove all freedom from us and force us to obey Him in every way, but that is not His purpose. He allows us to make mistakes. He allows us to turn from Him and rebel against His purpose. All the while, however, He will demand an accounting and punish disobedience. Herod made his choice to kill the children of Bethlehem. Where there is the freedom to choose, there will be, of necessity, the freedom to make bad decisions. Herod's decision was a bad decision, but it was his decision alone, and God would hold him accountable for it.

Verse 18

Matthew quotes the prophecy of Jeremiah here (see Jeremiah 31:15).

There appears to be a two-fold application to this prophecy.

First, the context speaks about the massacre of the children of Bethlehem by Herod. Jeremiah speaks in his prophecy about Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted. We can only imagine the intense weeping of mothers in Bethlehem with the slaughter of their innocent children at the hands of an evil king. Matthew sees the prophecy of Jeremiah as looking ahead to this tragedy in Bethlehem.

Notice, however, the reference to the city of Ramah. Jeremiah 40:1 tells us that Ramah was a location where the children of Israel were held in preparation for their exile in Babylon:

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let

him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. – Je 40:1

Matthew speaks here of how Joseph, Mary and Jesus were forced by the hand of an evil king to leave the land of Israel and live in exile until he died. It may also be that Matthew sees the prophecy of Jeremiah to predict how Jesus and His family would be exiled from their homeland due to Herod's murderous plans.

Verse 19

When Herod died, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph again in a dream. While Mary and Joseph lived in exile, God was watching over them. There were months and possibly years of silence as they waited for direction. It is

not always easy to wait. In God's timing, however, they heard from God, which would begin the next stage of their walk with Him.

Verse 20

When the angel of the Lord finally spoke to Joseph in that dream, He told him to return with the child and his mother to Israel. He informed him that those who had sought to kill Jesus were dead.

We can only imagine what it would have been like to return to a region where the children of Jesus' age had been killed. Imagine knowing that your child had aroused the fury of the angry tyrant Herod to slaughter these children. According to Matthew 2:23, Mary and Joseph did not return to Bethlehem but settled about 150 kilometres north in Nazareth.

Verse 21

Apart from a brief reference to Jesus being the son of Joseph in Matthew 13:55, verses 21-23 are the last record of Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew. This is not to say that he did not have a role to play in the upbringing of Jesus. From this point forward, however, we have no further reference to his role.

According to Matthew, Joseph listened to the words of the angel of the Lord in his dream, took Mary and Jesus, and returned with them to Israel.

Verse 22

Matthew tells us that when Joseph returned to Israel, he discovered that Archelaus, the son of Herod, was now reigning. When he heard this, Joseph was afraid. Possibly the connection to

Herod was too close for Joseph. He was likely fearful for his family.

As he reflected on this, once again, he had a dream. In this dream, he was warned of danger through Archelaus.

As a result, Joseph determined he would distance his family from Bethlehem and Jerusalem and settle in northern Galilee.

Verse 23

Joseph decided to settle his family in the city of Nazareth. The town was an isolated town which had a somewhat questionable reputation. While it was not a highly respected city in Israel, it was the perfect place for Joseph and his family to keep away from the attention of King Archelaus.

Matthew tells us that the fact that Jesus was called a Nazarene was prophesied. The problem is that we have no clear

reference to such a prophecy in Scripture. One solution to this has to do with the reputation of the people of Nazareth. Consider, for example, the words of Nathanael in John 1:

46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." – Jn 1:46

Consider also the words of Paul's accusers in Acts 24:

5 For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. – Ac 24:5

Paul's accusers associated the word Nazarene with riots, plagues and dissension. Compare this with the description of the Messiah as prophesied by Isaiah:

3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. –Isa 53:3

Our Lord was called a Nazarene. As Isaiah prophesied, He was despised and rejected and considered as one who was not worth looking upon.

MATTHEW 3

Verse 1

Verse 1 begins with the words, “in those days.” We ought not to confuse this with the time spoken of in the last chapter when Jesus was a child settling in the town of Nazareth. Twenty-some years have passed, and John, called the Baptist, is now preaching in the wilderness. He was the same age as our Lord.

The reference to the wilderness here refers to the rural areas of Judea.

Verse 2

Matthew summarizes the essence of John's message.

2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." – Mt 3:2

First, John preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. For any kingdom to exist, three things are required. There must be a king. There must be subjects of that King. There must be a rule that binds them together as one.

In this case, Jesus, the son of God, was the king of that kingdom. His subjects were those who willingly submitted to Him and His work. What bound them together was the forgiveness of sin and the new life of the Spirit in them.

Notice that John preached a message of repentance. The Greek word used for repentance here is μετανοέω (metanoéō). The word is derived from two smaller words, μετά, meaning

change and noé?, meaning think or mind. Together the word metanoé? means to change the mind or way of thinking. In the case of John's message, he was calling for people to change their hearts and lifestyles in light of the coming king. They were to turn from their sins. What would change for you if you knew Jesus was coming today?

John was announcing the coming of a king who would bring the kingdom of God to this earth. He was calling the people of his day to prepare for that kingdom and turn from their evil ways to seek after that kingdom.

Verse 3

As with many of the events that took place during the birth and childhood of Jesus, Matthew seems keen to show how the ministry of John the Baptist

was also prophesied. Here he quotes from Isaiah 40:3. Notice three details in Isaiah's prophecy.

First, Isaiah prophesied that a voice would cry out in the wilderness. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist ministered in the wilderness or rural regions of Judea (see Matthew 3:1).

Second, Isaiah tells us that the voice that cried out in the wilderness would "prepare the way of the Lord." John's message was that the kingdom of God was at hand and that people needed to prepare themselves for His coming (see Matthew 3:2).

Finally, Isaiah prophesied that the voice crying out in the wilderness would call people to make the paths of the Lord straight. Imagine a king entering a city as a distinguished guest seated in his great chariot. As he approaches, his horses must climb a dangerously steep

incline strewn with obstacles and debris. What kind of welcome would this be for the king?

To ensure the king's uneventful entrance, the road into the city would be repaired, strengthened and levelled. Isaiah prophesied that the voice in the wilderness would call people to make the changes necessary for the king's coming. Matthew tells us that John, as that messenger, called his people to repent. In other words, they were to clean up the mess in their lives and confess their sins as they welcomed the holy King of righteousness.

Matthew shows us here how John perfectly fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Verse 4

We catch a brief glimpse of John the Baptist here in this verse. Notice the details about him here.

First, he wore clothes made from woven camel hair. Nowadays, we have ways of mixing camel hair with other fabrics to create a warm and luxurious fabric. This was not the kind of fabric John wore. Camels were quite common in those days, and the cloth that John would have worn would likely have been quite coarse. Listen to the description of how Elijah the prophet dressed in 2 Kings 1:8:

8 They replied, "He was a hairy man, and he wore a leather belt around his waist." "It was Elijah from Tishbe!" the king exclaimed. – 2Ki 1:8

Elijah and John the Baptist dressed the same. This type of clothing was likely very simple and not the most

comfortable to wear in those days. It may have identified John as a prophet. According to Zechariah 13:4, the prophets tended to wear a "hairy cloak."

4 "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive. – Zec 13:4

Second, John also wore a leather belt. The camel's hair cloak was not custom-made. If John wanted it to fit, he would likely have to use a belt to tighten it around his waist. The picture I get here is of the poor young boy whose pants are too big for him, but they are all he has, so he wears a belt to make them fit the best he can.

Third, Matthew tells us that John's diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. This would have been available in the

desert at no cost. John did not come well-dressed and cultured. He was a poor man who chose this simple life of devotion to God without the luxuries of this world.

Verse 5

While John lived a simple life, his message drew a crowd. John preached in the rural areas of Judea, but people from Jerusalem were coming out to hear him. We are not told why John did not choose to preach in the town where the crowds were. What is clear here is that you don't have to minister in urban centres to have an impact. You have to be faithful where God has put you.

Matthew tells us that people came from Jerusalem, every section of Judea, and all over the Jordan Valley to hear John preach in his camel skin cloak with a leather belt to make it fit. He was a

simple man that God anointed for a particular task.

Verse 6

John's preaching had a powerful impact on those who heard him. Notice two things that were happening through his preaching.

First, people were confessing their sins. John was announcing the coming of the Messiah. This is something the Jews had been waiting many years to see. John challenged those waiting for the Messiah to cleanse their hearts, mend their ways, and get right with God. That message struck home, and people were confessing their sins.

Second, when the people who heard John preach confessed their sins, he baptized them. The phrase "when they confessed their sins, he baptized them" seems to indicate that this

confession was a requirement for John's baptism. The baptism of John was a public confession of sin and a looking forward to the saving work of the Messiah who was to come.

We must understand that John's baptism differs from the baptism Jesus would institute later in His ministry. John's baptism still looks forward to the work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus' baptism looks back to the cross and the work of the Spirit in applying that work to individual lives.

Verse 7

While John had great crowds coming to hear him preach, his message was not always an easy one to hear. We have an example of this in verse 7.

Among those who came to hear John were the Pharisees and Sadducees, the

religious leaders of the Jewish faith. On this occasion, they came to be baptized by John. Remember that John baptized those who confessed their sin (Matthew 3:6). John would not make any exception to this for the Pharisees and Sadducees. He brutally confronts them by calling them a brood of snakes.

The word translated "brood" here is γέννημα (génnēma) which comes from the phrase genná?, meaning to give birth to. It is translated by the word "generation" in the King James Version of the Bible. The sense here is that the Pharisees and Sadducees were descendants of snakes and were producing a new generation of snakes.

The Greek word for snake occurs five times in the New Testament. Four of those times, it is used to speak of the religious leaders of Israel. The only other occurrence of this word is in Acts 28, where we read:

3 When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. 4 When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." – Ac 28:3-4

In Acts 28:3-4 we see that the actual snake being referred to here was a poisonous snake. John calls the religious leaders of his day poisonous snakes who harmed and killed the people they led with their hypocrisy and legalism.

Notice John's question to the Pharisees and Sadducees here: "Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment? This question is very important. Consider what John is asking here in light of the role these men played.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the teachers of the law. They were constantly telling others how to live their lives. They corrected, rebuked and challenged the people of God regularly. What John is asking these men, however, is this: Who rebukes and corrects you? Who among the people of Israel dares to stand up to you when you do wrong? Would you even listen to anyone who came to you with a correction? You who teach the law, are you holding yourself up above the law? Are you beyond rebuke? Will you not suffer God's judgement, too, if you do not walk in obedience?

How hard it is for those who teach the word to be corrected. The true pastor and leader, however, will accept rebuke and learn from it. In this verse, John the Baptist stood up to these religious leaders and rebuked them for their failures as men of God.

Verse 8

John's challenge to the Pharisees and Sadducees was to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

As people came to be baptized by John, they confessed their sins and looked to the coming Messiah for forgiveness. I imagine that there were many sincere confessions and many tears shed in those baptisms.

Not everyone who "confesses" their sin, however, has a change of heart. It is relatively easy to say, "We have sinned against God." Everyone knows that none of us are perfect. But we need to go further than this. We need to recognize our guilt and failure. The reality of this sin needs to become real to us. I need to acknowledge that I am personally guilty before God and under His judgment.

John addresses this in the lives of the religious leaders of that day. He challenges them to demonstrate their repentance through how they live. They came with a spiritual front, but inside, nothing had changed. True repentance is revealed in a change of heart and behaviour.

Verse 9

Notice how John addresses false confidence here in this verse: "And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,'"

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, God's chosen people. Many Jews believed that because they were born into the family of Abraham, they were secure, and their salvation was guaranteed.

John rejects this misconception, however, by reminding them that God good take the stones of the river bed and make them into his children. He was saying that it was not because they were special or better than others that God chose them for His children. They were no better than the pagans or the stones that lined the river. Moses himself said something very similar when he wrote:

7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. – Dt 7:7-8

Our salvation and favour with God are not because of who we are but because of who God is. He chose us and accepted us when we were sinners. It is by His grace that we know His favour and blessing.

John the Baptist puts these religious leaders in their place by showing them they were no better than anyone else. They were undeserving of God's grace and favour and needed to recognize that were it not for His mercy and love, they would be eternally lost.

Verse 10

John paints a picture of God's judgement upon those not walking in righteousness. The axe of God's judgement was now in the hands of God, coming down with force upon the tree's root. The life of the tree was about to be taken from it.

John tells the religious leaders of the day that this axe is coming down speedily upon them. Everyone who did not “bear good fruit” would be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Some commentators see a reference in using the word “fire” to eternal judgment in hell. While there is certainly a case for this, John may also be speaking of a present-day sentence on those who mislead God’s people and did not walk in His purpose. We should not assume that all judgment is in the future. God also pours out His wrath in our day as well.

Verse 11

Continuing with his illustration of fire in verse 10, John tells the Pharisees and Sadducees, who came to him for baptism, that he was baptizing

with “water for repentance.” Let’s consider this for a moment.

The word translated “for” here is εἰς (eis) in the Greek language. It carries a variety of meanings, one of which refers to a response to one’s condition. The condition here was a repentant heart. The response was to be baptized with water. John’s baptism was a public declaration of repentance. Those who repented symbolized their need for cleansing through the act of baptism. Mere water, however, would not cleanse the stain of sin. Sin could not be washed off like dirt on the skin. True cleansing could only come by refining fire. John told those present that the One who came after him would cleanse with holy fire.

John told his listeners that he was unworthy even to carry the sandals of the coming Saviour. In those days, it was only the lowest slaves who would

carry the sandals of their masters. It would insult anyone else to be asked to do this task.

John recognized that the Lord Jesus was mightier than him. He bowed in humble submission to Him.

According to John, the Lord Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. The context of these words is John's baptism of repentance and the need for victory over sin.

Because water was insufficient to cleanse the stain of sin, the Holy Spirit and fire were required. Only the Spirit of God could give victory over sin. Only He could apply the forgiveness of Jesus Christ to the individual heart. His cleansing fire alone could burn away the sin and remove its stain in our life. Jesus would make all of this possible through His death on the cross. The Holy Spirit would then apply it to individual hearts and lives.

The baptism of the Spirit, in this sense then, is the outpouring of God's Spirit into the heart of an individual, bringing repentance, forgiveness and cleansing of sin. It is the implanting of the life of Christ in the heart of the believer and the empowering of that believer to live for Him. This is the privilege of every Christian.

Verse 12

In times past, after the harvest, the grain needed to be separated from the straw and chaff. It was thrown up in the air with a fork or shovel, and the wind blew the straw away while the heavier grain fell to the ground.

John uses this illustration to picture the judgement of God. God was coming with His winnowing fork to separate the wheat from the straw. The wheat

farmer would gather the grain and stored it safely in the barn, but the chaff was useless to him, so it was burnt.

Notice something very important in Matthew's illustration here. He tells us the chaff would be burnt "with unquenchable fire." This fire of God's judgement would never go out. The judgement of the unrighteous will be for all eternity. These are powerful words and show us the wrath of God will never be quenched against sin and evil.

Verse 13

Matthew tells us that Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to have John baptize Him.

From the perspective of what happened that day, the verse is quite simple. The

problem arises when we ask why Jesus was baptized and what it meant for Him. There are several points we need to examine here.

There is a difference between John's baptism and what Jesus would institute later. Those who John baptized looked forward to the Messiah who was to come. The Messiah was unknown to them. New Testament baptism was done in the name of the Lord Jesus and recognition of His work on the cross. Those baptized by John knew nothing of this, nor had they experienced new life in the Spirit. The baptism Jesus took part in here was John's baptism.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Jesus had not sinned, nor was there anything to confess. Why, then, does Jesus submit to this baptism? There may be several reasons for this.

First, by submitting to John's baptism, Jesus affirms John and his ministry. John was the one who had been called to announce his coming. Jesus identifies with the message and ministry of John.

Second, by being baptized by John, Jesus made a statement about himself. Here was the only person baptized by John who had nothing to confess. He was making a statement about his character and fitness for the task. Third, by accepting John's baptism, Jesus was openly declaring his willingness to take on the sin of the world and be our Saviour. He who had never sinned would take on our sin so that we could be pardoned. Finally, Jesus' baptism was, in many ways, His ordination into ministry. By means of this baptism, Jesus was introduced to the world, and after this event, He would begin his public ministry.

Verse 14

Notice John's response to Jesus coming to be baptized. He did not want to baptize Jesus. He felt unworthy to carry His sandals. It did not make sense to baptize Jesus. He had nothing to confess. He was the Messiah. Matthew tells us that John would have prevented Jesus from being baptized.

John believed that he was the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus and not the other way around. He felt he was the one who should fall on his face before Him confessing his unworthiness. John has a high view of Christ.

Verse 15

Hearing John's objection, Jesus insisted: "Let it be so now." Jesus makes it clear to John that this was His

wish. He wanted to identify with sinners in this baptism.

Jesus also told John that this baptism fulfilled all righteousness. The idea here is that this was the purpose of God the Father for Him, for through this act, Jesus publically accepted His role to be the Lamb of God who took away the world's sins.

Verse 16

Immediately after John baptized Jesus, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ.

It was only when Jesus had "fulfilled all righteousness" that the Holy Spirit fell on Him. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus was an anointing for ministry. Jesus was set apart from birth for this role, but now at the outset of His public ministry, He is anointed, ordained and

empowered for the task. By His baptism, Jesus publically declared His willingness and commitment to exercise that role. God responded by filling Him with the Spirit and power for that calling.

Notice also that the Holy Spirit descended on Christ, like a dove and rested on Him. John would bear witness to this when he said:

32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. – Jn 1:32

It is uncertain how many others saw this, but it was a clear sign from God that His anointing was on Jesus.

Matthew tells us that the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus. That is to say, He remained with Jesus at that time and certainly throughout His ministry. If

Jesus needed the empowering Spirit,
how much more do we need Him in our
ministries and personal lives.

Verse 17

Along with the anointing of God's Spirit,
a voice was heard from heaven
declaring Jesus to be the Son of God
and one in whom the Father was
pleased.

Recognize here that the pleasure of the
Father was in the character and work of
His Son. Jesus had just publically
accepted His role as Saviour. This would
lead Him to the cross for our sins. This
was the greatest work of all time. The
Father's pleasure is in a Son who
willingly lays down His life to save a
sinful race. His pleasure and anointing
were on Jesus, and He proudly declared
His delight before those present that
day. We can only imagine the impact

that these events had on those who
witnessed that day.

MATTHEW 4

Verse 1

We are told that Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Let me make a couple of points in this regard.

First, notice that the Lord Jesus was led into the wilderness. The Israelites, under Moses, also were led into the wilderness. For forty years, they wandered there, being tested by God as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. During that time, they grumbled and rebelled against God. In fact, because of their sin, everyone who left Egypt except Joshua and Caleb would

die in that wilderness. Jesus spent one day for every year the Israelites spent in the desert. He, too, was tempted and tried just as they were, with one big difference. Where they failed, Jesus overcame. He demonstrated that He could overcome Satan and all his angels.

The second point we need to make here relates to the word translated "tempted" in the English Standard Version. The Greek word used here is πειράζω (peirázō). It describes a trial or experience designed to test or prove. For example, metal is put into a fire to strengthen it.

The word "temptation" is often seen in a negative sense, but it is not necessarily so in this verse. It is the purpose of the Lord God to refine us to remove sin and rebellion from our hearts. Listen to the words of the Lord through Isaiah to His people in Isaiah 48:

10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. – Isa 48:10

Speaking through the prophet Zechariah the Lord says something similar:

9 And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" – Zec 13:9

The intention of the Spirit of God in the life of the man Christ Jesus was to refine and strengthen Him. While there were no sins to purge, His human body was like ours. He experienced temptations of body and mind, just as we do. Just as He had to learn to walk and talk like every other boy, He also

needed to learn to overcome and walk in the Spirit. These days were a time of intense spiritual growth and maturing for Jesus.

It would be easy to assume that Jesus, being God, never had to learn. Listen, however, to the words of Hebrews 5 concerning Jesus:

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him – Heb 5:8-9

The wilderness was a time of learning through suffering. It was intended to prepare Jesus for the ministry that was ahead.

Verse 2

Jesus fasted in those days in the wilderness. Matthew tells us that Jesus had not eaten for forty days and, by the end of this time, was hungry.

Generally, if we know we will face a busy week, we will do our best to prepare for that week. One of the key ingredients to facing the struggles ahead is to eat well and rest well so we can achieve peak performance. Jesus, however, does not eat. Physically He would be weak. Mentally, being like us, He may not have been as sharp as He could have been had He been eating. What Jesus understood, however, is that the battle belonged to His Father. For us as sinners, the great enemy is our flesh. We can feed that flesh and keep it at its sharpest, but the flesh will not conquer in a spiritual battle. Jesus denies His earthly body and relies instead on the Spirit.

Verse 3

At the end of forty days, Satan, knowing that Jesus was hungry, approached him and told him to command that the desert stones be turned to bread so He could eat.

The statement of Satan would make sense to human logic and provide a simple solution to the hunger Jesus experienced. But there was something very hideous in this request of Satan that repulsed the Spirit-filled Christ. Satan asked Jesus to take matters into his own hands and use the power he had been given for His own need and benefit. All too many servants of God have fallen into this trap. They use their influence and ability to suit their own needs. They build their big churches and make a great name for themselves, but God is not leading them. Jesus would not allow his hunger for food to overrule his obedience to God. Nor

would he let his physical need tempt Him to listen to Satan.

Verse 4

In response to the temptation of Satan, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3:

"It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." – Mt 4:4

Notice that Jesus tells Satan that "man shall not live by bread alone." The idea here is that we do not allow physical, emotional, sexual or relational needs to determine how we live our lives and decisions. As believers in the Lord God, we are governed first and foremost by the word of God. Suppose that means sacrificing our physical needs, then we are willing to do so. Jesus willingly denied food for His body to walk in

obedience to the purpose of the Father. He was governed by a higher principle than physical need and desire.

Verse 5

Matthew tells us that the devil took Jesus to the holy city (Jerusalem) and set him on the pinnacle of the temple. Commentators differ in how they understand these words.

Some believe that Jesus left the wilderness and went into the city of Jerusalem and was standing on the highest point of Herod's temple when this temptation occurred. If this is the case, these temptations happen over several days or weeks.

Other commentators see the temptation in a vision while Jesus is still in the wilderness. Those who believe this would remind us that verse 1 tells

us that Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. They interpret this verse to mean that the temptations took place in the wilderness and not in Jerusalem. If that is the case, the only way the devil could take Jesus to Jerusalem was in a vision.

Verse 6

Here on the pinnacle of the temple, the devil tempts our Lord to cast Himself down to prove that He was the Son of God. To justify this horrible act, the devil quotes from Psalm 91:11-12:

"He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

According to Satan, if Jesus were truly the Son of God, the angels of heaven

would protect Him from harm. Let me make some observations about this temptation.

First, notice that this act of jumping off the temple was not the leading of the Spirit. It was Satan who was telling the Lord what to do. The Lord Jesus would not take His directions from Satan.

We must understand this principle. Shall we take our leading from Satan and expect God to bless our decisions? Shall we be directed by the sinful flesh and expect God's favour? God blesses what He leads and calls us to do.

Second, Satan promotes a "faith" that demands signs and proof before believing. I put the word faith in quotation marks because this kind of faith is not faith. Consider the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1:

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. – Heb 11:1

Faith is the conviction of things not seen. The people of Jesus' day were constantly looking for signs and wonders. They refused to believe in what they could not see. This kind of "faith" will not support us in the trials of life. If the faith you profess demands constant proof, what will you do when difficulty and pain strike and you can't see God? Genuine faith trusts God when it can't see Him. It believes in God when it cannot understand His ways. It is not moved to despair when there is no tangible proof but believes in God's Word.

All too many people have been lured onto this path. This path has led to many great errors and disappointments. If God doesn't answer my prayer in the way I want Him to,

then how can I believe Him? If I lose my child in a tragic accident, then how can God be real? Doubts plague the minds of those who follow this path. This was not the path Jesus would take. His path led to suffering and death, but it would not distract Him from the truth of God's sovereign and loving care.

Verse 7

Responding to the temptation of Satan, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." In Deuteronomy 6:16, Moses makes a particular reference to what happened in Massah. Here God's people complained because they did not have any water. Because things were not going as they wanted, they asked Moses why He had brought them out of Egypt.

God led the people of Israel out of Egypt, but His people were more concerned with their comfort than following His leading. They were not sure they wanted a God who allowed them to suffer. When things were not going their way, their faith could not carry them through. They demanded that any God they served meet their needs. In essence, they wanted a servant god, not a Sovereign God to who they must bow.

Israel tested God in Massah by demanding He be their servant. They placed themselves above God and insisted He meet their needs or they would walk away from Him. In the case of Satan's temptation here, he was demanding that Jesus take things into His own hands, cast Himself off the temple and demand that God rescue Him to prove Himself.

In my lifetime, I have seen this temptation of Satan take hold of the souls of many. They decided in the flesh what they wanted to do for God and cast themselves off the temple, demanding that God provide everything they needed. The problem is that while their plans were made for God, they were not from God in the first place.

The heart of Jesus was a heart of surrender and faith in the will of the Father. He was a great follower. If there is one thing I want in my life, it is to be a great follower like Jesus, obedient to the will of the father, not to demand my rights but to trust Him in genuine faith, even when I don't always see the evidence with my physical eyes.

Verse 8

In this third and final temptation, Satan took Jesus up to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

A literal interpretation of this verse poses a problem. No mountain on earth is high enough to see all the world's kingdoms. Nor, if there was, could any human eye see all those kingdoms at any time. How could any human eye see the glory of these nations from a mountaintop? Remember that Jesus stood before Satan here as a man, with all the physical limitations that we experience.

This leads us to believe that what Jesus saw from that mountaintop was a vision. Possibly, He looked down over the region of Israel and also saw the kingdoms of the earth and their wealth and power in a vision.

Verse 9

When this great scene of the world and its glory was set before Jesus, the devil said: "All these I will give you, if you

will fall down and worship me.” – Mt 4:9

There was a very subtle lie in these words. Admittedly, the world was under the dominion of sin and darkness, of which Satan was the chief. He offered to surrender this world to Jesus, however, if He would bow down and worship him. Consider what Satan is saying here.

What was the solution to the problem of sin? There was only one solution, and that was the death of Jesus as a legal payment. Apart from His death, there was no hope. The only reason Jesus' sacrifice could be accepted was that He alone was the perfect Lamb of God, in whom there was no sin. If Jesus turned His back on the Father to worship the devil, His sacrifice would be useless, for He would be guilty of sin and need a saviour. Nor would the death of a sinner atone for the world's

sins. The world would remain in sin, and Jesus Himself would be guilty and subject to the devil.

Verse 10

Jesus does not yield to the temptation of Satan, though he promised Him the world. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:13: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

The commitment of Jesus was to serve the Father and to worship Him alone. Not everyone has this commitment. Many will fall prey to the temptations of riches, influence, and glory and compromise the truth of God's word. Notice that after this temptation, Jesus commands Satan to leave. Satan has no authority to resist this and is forced to leave the presence of Jesus defeated.

Verse 11

When Jesus commanded Satan to leave, he was forced to obey. The authority of Jesus was greater than his, and Satan withdrew in obedience. While Satan presented himself as one who had authority during these temptations, we see the truth coming out here. He was never in control. The simple words, "Be gone, Satan." sent him away in defeat.

We can only imagine how forty days of fasting and these intense temptations of Satan took their toll on the physical body and mind of Christ. Matthew tells us that when the devil left Him, angels of God came to minister to Him. Matthew does not enter into any detail to explain how these angels ministered to Christ at this time. Suffice it to say that after their ministry to Him, Jesus would begin his public ministry.

In this temptation, Jesus had been strengthened and equipped by the Spirit to be an effective servant of the Father. For the next three years, He would devote Himself wholeheartedly to pushing back the kingdom of darkness and establishing the Kingdom of God.

Verse 12

Matthew records the beginning of Jesus' ministry close to the time of the arrest of John the Baptist. It appears that John spoke openly about the sins he saw around him. This got him into trouble with King Herod. Matthew explains this more fully in Matthew 14 when he says:

3 For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, 4 because

John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." – Mt 14:3-4

Because Herod was angry with John, he would not take kindly to Jesus and His preaching either, since it was about Jesus that John preached. It may be that for this reason, Jesus withdrew into Galilee.

Verse 13

From verse 12, we discover that Jesus left the region of the Jordan and returned to Galilee. Nazareth, where He grew up, was located in Galilee. Jesus, however, left his hometown and settled in Capernaum. Luke tells us that Christ preached in Nazareth when He began his ministry. Listen to his record of how they responded to that message

29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. – Lk 4:29

It was likely because of that response from His hometown that Jesus left and went to Capernaum.

Verse 14

While Jesus was rejected by the people of God in his hometown, Matthew is keen to tell us that this was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. God's ways are not our ways. What appeared to human eyes to be a failure to win the hearts of His hometown was in the plan of God years before it took place.

Verse 15

Matthew shows us how the prophecy of Isaiah 9 was fulfilled in Jesus' rejection in Nazareth and the decision to go to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Isaiah 9 contains the famous passage connected to the Messiah:

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone... For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be

called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. – Isa 9:1-2, 9

Isaiah foretold the birth of a divine child who would travel to Zebulun and Naphtali to preach the good news. For Matthew, this was yet another clear proof that Jesus was the Messiah who was to come.

Verse 16

Isaiah prophesied that those who were living in darkness would see a great light and that the light would dawn on those who were living in the shadow of death.

Jesus declared Himself to be the Light of the World in John 8:12:

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the

world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” – Jn 8:12

Notice how Jesus tells His listeners that if they followed Him, they would not walk in darkness. In saying this, Jesus pronounces Himself to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. There can be no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah and fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Verse 17

Notice that Matthew summarizes the message of Jesus in the words, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This was the same message John preached.

The kingdom of heaven was not as many had anticipated. It was not a physical kingdom on this earth with

kings and princes. It was the rule of God over hearts and lives surrendered to Him. This kingdom stood in opposition to the kingdom of Satan. It broke the chains and oppression of sin and brought salvation, forgiveness and fellowship with God through the death of Jesus Christ. The kingdom's salvation came through repentance and trust in Jesus Christ alone. All who accepted Him and repented of their sin became citizens of that kingdom.

Verse 18

Jesus chose not to work alone. He gathered around him men and women who would join Him in the advancing of His kingdom in the hearts and lives of those who would believe.

Of particular note, Jesus encountered two men by the Sea of Galilee. Simon

(Peter) and Andrew, his brother, were fishermen. That day they were casting out their nets when Jesus walked by.

These men had no idea of what would happen that morning. They went about their daily routine. They were not looking for Jesus, nor were they necessarily seeking a change in profession. Jesus came searching for them. The Lord knows the plans He has for us. He will reveal those plans to us if we are willing to listen.

Verse 19

Calling out to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." We dare not take those words lightly. There were some serious implications for these men here.

We understand from 1 Corinthians
9 that Peter was a married man:

*5 Do we not have the right to take
along a believing wife, as do the
other apostles and the brothers of
the Lord and Cephas? – 1Co 9:5*

The reference to Cephas here is to
Peter.

*42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus
looked at him and said, "You are
Simon the son of John. You shall be
called Cephas" (which means
Peter). – Jn 1:42*

For Peter, following Jesus meant
significant changes in his family life, not
just for himself but also for his wife.
Following Jesus also implied leaving
family, home and job. Peter likely
depended on his fishing to provide for
his family's needs. What would happen

if he left this business? How would he provide for their needs?

What Jesus was asking these brothers that day was a serious matter. It required sacrifice and commitment on their part. It was not a decision to take lightly.

Verse 20

While the decision to follow Jesus was a serious one and one that demanded great sacrifice, notice the response of Simon and Andrew to the call of Jesus. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. – Mt 4:20

Matthew tells us they left their nets and “immediately” followed Him.

The word immediately is important here. It shows us that despite the sacrifices they would have to make,

these men did not hesitate to say
“yes.”

The phrase “they left their nets” shows us that they willingly left their trade, their income and their way of life behind. They sensed the call of God and held these things lightly in their hands. That same challenge goes out to us. We must never hold so tightly to anything that we cannot leave it behind when He calls us to move forward with Him.

Verse 21

Jesus met two other brothers after his encounter with Simon and Andrew. James and his brother John were also fishermen. They were mending their nets in the boat with their father, Zebedee, when Jesus approached and called out to them.

Like Simon and Andrew, these two brothers did not anticipate what would happen that day. Notice that Jesus does not call Zebedee to follow Him as a disciple. Jesus has particular individuals on His mind here. Zebedee was to remain home.

Understand here that while there was a sacrifice James and John had to make, Zebedee had to surrender his two sons to Jesus that day. They were his support in those days, and losing them would have significantly impacted his fishing business. The fact of the matter is that Zebedee's call was to trust God to provide for His needs as he surrendered these sons to the work of the kingdom of God.

Verse 22

James and John responded in the same way as Simon and Andrew. Matthew

tells us they “immediately” left the boat and their father to follow Jesus.

God indeed calls us to care for our families. James and John knew the implication of leaving their father to care for the family business on his own. I am sure that they did not take this matter lightly. The call of Jesus on their lives, however, demanded they leave this matter in His hands. We can be assured that God will care for those we leave behind when we respond to His call on our lives.

Verse 23

Matthew gives us a glimpse of the ministry of Jesus in the region of Galilee.

Notice first that Jesus “went throughout all Galilee.” The implication is that he

had a travelling ministry and went from place to place in Galilee.

Second, Jesus both taught and proclaimed the gospel. The word for teaching here is διδάσκω (didáskō) and implies instruction given by word of mouth. Jesus also “proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom.” The word proclaim is κηρύσσω (kērússō). It means to preach, herald, publish or announce. Jesus not only announced and proclaimed the good news of the gospel but also taught the truth of that gospel message and instructed those who were receptive in how to live out that gospel.

Third, Jesus taught and preached in the Jewish synagogues. This was where Jews would meet. He did not see what He was introducing and announcing as contrary to the Jewish faith. It fulfilled what every Jew longed for –the coming

of the Messiah to bring the kingdom of God.

Fourth, Jesus also healed “every disease and affliction among the people.” The ministry of Jesus was not just teaching and preaching but also touched the physical and emotional needs of those He encountered.

The word used for healing here is θεραπεύω (therapeúō). It is derived from the word therápōn meaning, servant. The idea is that Jesus served sick people and ministered to their needs. In this case, He healed their maladies, but it could also imply caring for those who were sick and afflicted.

The word “sickness” is translated from the word νόσος (nósos), meaning disease, but can also refer to pain and sorrow, which are more emotional.

Jesus also healed afflictions. The word μαλακία (malakía) comes from the

word *malakós* meaning, soft. The sense here is a sickness or disease that renders a person weak and delicate. By healing this affliction, the individual was restored to strength and hardiness.

Jesus was concerned for the whole person, spirit, mind and body.

Verse 24

News of Jesus began to spread throughout the region. When people heard of His ability to heal, they brought people sick and afflicted with various diseases. Among them were those oppressed by demons, those with paralysis of several types and those suffering from seizures.

Notice the words, “and he healed them.” Let me make a few observations here.

First, there were tremendous needs among the people of Jesus' day. Under the curse of sin, disease and sickness ravaged the land. Demonic oppression, physical afflictions, and emotional pains overwhelmed the people of that day. Beyond all this was the fact that they were under God's judgement. Our world is no different. Pain and suffering abound all around us.

Second, Jesus does not drive those who suffered from sickness and afflictions away. Instead, He takes the time to minister to their ailments.

Finally, consider the vast amount of time and resources Jesus invests in these sick and ailing individuals. Could He not have used this time to preach and teach the gospel? Jesus does not begrudge that people came seeking healing and relief from their pain. He saw this as part of the work of the kingdom. Whether he preached, taught or healed, all of this was part of the

greater purpose of God to drive back the kingdom of darkness.

As a pastor and teacher of the Word, there have been times when I felt that this was to be my only focus. God has shown me, however, that my pastoral care for the flock, in prayer, encouragement and support, is as much part of my work as feeding them with the Word of Life. Jesus demonstrates this through His ministry.

Verse 25

So influential was the teaching and ministry of Christ that Matthew tells us that large crowds followed him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan.

Jesus' fame began to spread. His ministry moved beyond Galilee to other regions. The blessing of God was on

this, and more and more people began to hear about him and came to listen to him preach or to be healed of their afflictions.

Matthew tells us that great crowds “followed him.” Understand that in our days, we can communicate well in advance news of a conference where a great speaker or evangelist will be speaking. This was not the case in the days of Jesus. He travelled from place to place, and no one knew where He would be. People travelled for days to hear him. These individuals would find out where Jesus was and join the crowd that followed him from place to place. The crowd would constantly be changing as people came and left. Instead of bringing a speaker to the people, the people went to the speaker.

MATTHEW 5

Verse 1

Matthew ended the last chapter by telling his readers that crowds of people followed Jesus. They came to hear Him preach and heal their sick.

Chapter five begins with the words, “seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain.” Matthew does not go into further detail about this. There are two possible reasons why Jesus may have gone to the mountain.

First, He may have wanted to be alone. Possibly, He needed a rest from His teaching and ministry to the sick.

Second, He may have wanted to find a place where he could more effectively teach the people. Matthew recounts the sermon Jesus preached when He was on the mountain. Remember that when there were no sound systems, speakers had to find ways to carry their voices to the crowd. A mountain slope may have met this need

Locating a spot on the mountain, Matthew tells us that Jesus then sat down. This was the general practice of a teacher when he taught. Notice how Matthew tells us that when Jesus lay down, His disciples came to Him. They expected that Jesus would teach them. There is some confusion here in this account about whether the crowd was present. Matthew tells us that when Jesus lay down, His disciples came to Him. We learn, however, that when He finished teaching, a great crowd was present:

28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.- Mt 7:28-29

It may be that Jesus began by teaching His disciples, but as He taught, a great crowd gathered to listen.

Verse 2

From this place on the mountain, Jesus began to teach His disciples and those who had gathered to hear Him.

Jesus did speak in the synagogues, but He also took advantage of the opportunities that became available to Him. There were no months of planning or booking of large facilities. There was no advertising or seeking the right entertainment to draw a crowd. What was missing in planning, advertising

and entertainment was made up for in powerful, authoritative and life-changing preaching. When Jesus opened His mouth to preach, the power of God was demonstrated.

Verse 3

Jesus begins His teaching with nine blessings. The first of these blessings are for those who are poor in spirit. The word poor is πτωχός (ptōchós) which refers to someone who is helpless and needy. It is used to describe an individual who has been reduced to begging to survive.

Notice that this poverty is not in terms of earthly possessions but a poverty of spirit.

The word Jesus uses for spirit here is πνεῦμα (pneúma), which comes from the word πνέω, meaning to breathe. It refers to the spiritual dimension of an

individual's life or that part of an individual that can commune with God. It can exist without the body and continues to live when the body dies.

When Jesus speaks about poverty of spirit, He refers to the condition of one's spiritual life. This poverty of spirit refers to every one of us without Christ. We are in darkness until His Spirit comes to live in us. Our eternal spirit is destined for eternal separation from God unless we receive the gift of forgiveness and pardon.

The good news, however, is that Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come to minister to those who were poor in spirit.

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim

liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; – Isa 61:1

There is a great blessing available to the poor in spirit. The pardon of Jesus Christ is available. The fullness of His Spirit is open to all who will avail themselves of this pardon and new life. The kingdom of heaven itself is promised to all who will come to Christ.

Verse 4

The second blessing is for those who mourn. Jesus does not go into detail here about the cause of mourning. It may be related to an awareness of our poverty of spirit or possibly even the result of the curse of sin on this world with its sickness, injustice and afflictions.

What Jesus does tell us is that those who mourn will be comforted. The word Jesus uses here for comforted is παρακαλέω (parakaléō). The term is derived from pará, meaning “to the side of,” and kaléō, meaning to call. The idea here is that those who mourn will have someone to come to their side in support and comfort. They will not have to face these trials on their own.

Listen to the words of Jesus in John 14:16:

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever – Jn 14:16

The Lord speaks here about the Holy Spirit He would send to be with His disciples. What is important for us to note is the word Jesus uses to speak of that helper. The word is παράκλητος (paráklētos), which is derived from the

same root word Jesus used to speak of the comfort He would offer to those who mourned. The Holy Spirit is the one who comes alongside to support and comfort those who mourn.

The promise of God's presence alongside us in our mourning is an incredible promise offered to all who will come to Christ and receive His salvation and forgiveness.

Verse 5

The third blessing of Jesus is for the meek. Meekness refers to an inner attitude of submission and trust. Submission, in this case is to God and His work. The meek person does not fight God but allows Him to work out His purpose in their lives and patiently bears with Him until that work is completed.

Jesus tells those with this meek and submissive spirit toward God that they will inherit the earth. The Psalmist says the same thing when he writes:

11 But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. – Ps 37:11

The idea here seems to be that the blessing and protection of God fall on those who trust Him and His work in their lives.

It is easy to take matters into our own hands rather than wait upon the Lord and submit to His purpose. There are times when the path God has for us brings us through deep valleys and desert wastelands. In those times, we find it hard to submit to His purpose. At other times we rush ahead of God, pushing our agenda and doing things our way. Jesus tells us, however, that the blessing of God falls on those who

will trust Him and submit to His purpose. These individuals will know the fullness of His blessing.

Verse 6

The fourth blessing is for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The word for righteousness here is δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosúnē). It is derived from díkaion meaning just, and sún?, which refers to a state of being. In other words, righteousness relates to being just and right before God.

Those who hunger and thirst to be in a right relationship with God, according to Jesus, will be satisfied. God will reveal Himself to those who seek Him with all their heart.

29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all

*your heart and with all your soul. –
Dt 4:29*

He will satisfy the deep spiritual hunger
and thirst of their soul.

*25 For I will satisfy the weary soul,
and every languishing soul I will
replenish.” – Je 31:25*

Deep and lasting satisfaction awaits all
who will hunger and thirst for a right
standing with God. This was now
possible because of Jesus Christ’s work,
which pardoned our sins.

Verse 7

The fifth blessing of Jesus is for those
who are merciful. The merciful are
those who demonstrate compassion
and kindness. The word ἐλεήμων
(eleēmōn) does not refer to acts of
mercy but to a merciful person. It is

quite possible to do good things for another but not be a merciful person. Jesus speaks about those whose very heart is moved to minister in tender compassion for another. These individuals willingly sacrifice their time, effort and resources for those in need.

Jesus tells those who are merciful that they will themselves receive the mercy of the Lord. Not one act of compassion and mercy will go unrewarded:

41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward. – Mk 9:41

God will care for those who care for others:

25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will

himself be watered. – Pr 11:25

Verse 8

The sixth blessing is for those who are pure in heart. The word pure is καθαρὸς (katharós) which speaks of a heart that is unsoiled, unspoiled and unstained. It is free from sin and guilt. There is only one way that a heart can be pure in this sense, that is, that it is forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is the heart that has been cleansed through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ alone that can see God.

Verse 9

The seventh blessing of Jesus in His sermon is for the peacemakers. The peacemaker reconciles differences between two parties. There are,

however, many to make peace between two parties who could not be called "sons of God." An unbelieving marriage counsellor can restore a husband and wife by helping them work out their differences. A skillful negotiator can restore peace between an employee and the employer. You don't have to be a believer to be a peacemaker in this sense.

It seems that when Jesus uses the term peacemaker, he refers to something more than the simple act of bringing two disagreeing parties to a negotiating table to resolve their issues.

What we need to understand here is that there is no Biblical peace without God. There can be no such peace unless we are reconciled with His purpose for our lives. The Biblical peacemaker seeks to bring everything in line with God's purpose for our personal lives and relationships. That

may come through teaching the Word, counselling, or standing firm for the principles of righteousness in our community.

The true son of God is not just concerned with peace between two human parties. He desires that those two parties be at peace with his Heavenly Father as well.

Verse 10

The eighth blessing of Jesus is for those who are persecuted. Notice that this persecution is for “righteousness’ sake.” The godly living of these individuals makes them the target of their enemies. This is not to be confused with normal trials and suffering we must all face in this sin-cursed world. The cause of persecution is a conscious choice to reject the ways

of the world to live a righteous and godly life.

The word Jesus uses for “persecuted” is διώκω diōkō. The word comes from the Greek “dí?,” meaning to pursue. The idea is that these individuals are pursued with negative intentions because of their godly lifestyle and belief. This pursuit by their enemies makes the life of the righteous difficult or may even place it at risk. These individuals, however, choose to face these persecutions rather than compromise their faith or walk contrary to God’s Word.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to men and women like these. We should not see that these individuals merit their place in the kingdom because of their suffering. No one can merit this. Instead, Jesus reassures His children who willingly suffer for His name that they are part

of an eternal kingdom of righteousness and truth that will never end. That kingdom will triumph, and they will live forever in His blessed presence.

Verse 11

The ninth blessing is again for those who are persecuted. Jesus defines what He means by persecution here by giving some examples.

First, we looked at the word Jesus used for persecution in the last verse. It refers to being pursued with negative intentions because of our righteous lives. This can take many forms. Paul was beaten, stoned, and cast out of cities for the gospel he preached.

The second word Jesus uses here is the word revile. The term is *ὀνειδίζω* (oneidízō) which denotes an attack with abusive comments intended to hurt or

to cause others to think negatively of the individual. Jesus was called a friend of sinners. This was not intended as a compliment but rather to belittle Him in the minds of the Jews.

Finally, Jesus speaks about people who “utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” This takes reviling a step further. The words spoken here are not just belittling and insulting, but they are false. Those who say these falsehoods demonstrate their hatred of believers. The intent is to destroy the reputation and rile up anyone who will believe them against the believer.

Verse 12

Jesus tells those persecuted, rebuked and defamed falsely that they are to “rejoice and be glad.” Now admittedly, these acts and words were not

something the believer was to be happy about or rejoice in. These were sinful acts and words that displeased the Lord, and there was nothing about these ungodly acts to delight in.

While the believer could not rejoice in the ungodliness of those who persecuted the kingdom, there was, nonetheless, something in which they could take great joy and delight – that their reward was great in heaven. Our faithfulness does not go unnoticed. God is aware of our struggle and suffering for the kingdom. The day will come when this will be rewarded.

Jesus concludes this section of His sermon but reminds us that the prophets before us were persecuted because they preached and stood up for the truth. All who want to live for Christ must prepare for similar treatment. We are in the midst of a great spiritual battle. It should not

surprise us that the enemy will aim his arrows directly at us.

Verse 13

In this next section of Jesus' sermon, He challenges His followers to demonstrate their faith before the world through how they live. He begins by using an illustration of salt. He makes three points here in verse 13.

First, Jesus tells His followers that they are the salt of the earth. Notice here that He doesn't say that this is what they should be, but rather, that this is what they are.

Just as salt impacts food taste, so it is with believers in society. Their presence will be evident. Their example will be noticed. Their works will minister to that society. Their prayers will bring

down God's blessing. Their message will bring hope.

Second, Jesus reminds us here that if salt loses its saltiness, it is useless. The value of salt is in its saltiness. This is what gives it its taste and ability to preserve foods. If salt did not have this quality, it would be useless. Similarly, believers in Jesus Christ who do not demonstrate the character of Christ do not fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

Jesus goes further with this illustration. Notice the question Jesus asks here: "If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? Consider this for a moment. Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the world. If we live as tasteless salt, what impact will we have on those around us? What happens when they do not see Christ in Christians? What happens when Christians live just like unbelievers?

What happens with ministries declaring their allegiance to Jesus Christ who are found guilty of sin or dishonesty? How does the world respond to such incidents? When the world sees believers claiming to be “born again” but living like the world, they mock the name of Jesus. How many unbelievers have walked away from Christ because believers have “lost their saltiness?” How many hearts have become bitter because of a poor example from the church? How do you regain your testimony in the community when that happens? When you have misrepresented the name of Jesus by your bad example, how do you ever restore your testimony? Nothing but a miracle of God can restore this saltiness.

Notice what Jesus says here in the closing comments of the verse. Salt that has lost its saltiness is good for nothing “except to be thrown out and

trampled under people's feet." If we as believers do not maintain our integrity, testimony and godly behaviour, shall we be shocked to see the unbelieving world mock and reproach us? Shall we be surprised to see them lose all respect for us and step all over us because we have not stood for Christ and the principles of His Word? Shall we not also have to answer to God for our testimony?

Verse 14

Jesus next compares the believer to a light and a city.

First, Jesus tells us that we, as believers, are the "light of the world." The world in which we live has been plunged into the darkness of sin and despair. Their eyes are blinded to the things of God. Their ears are deafened to His call. How are these

unbelievers to know the truth of God's Word and the hope offered to them in Jesus Christ? Jesus tells us that we are the light they will see. Wherever you work, wherever you do business, you are a light to those around you. Your relationship with Christ and your hope will shine before those with whom you interact.

Notice here that Jesus does not tell us we should be lights to the world but that we are already lights. The presence of Christ and His Spirit in us shines through us. We need to let that light shine. We need to cultivate our relationship with Christ and mature in our faith so that that light shines more brightly, and that people will see Christ in us and our interactions with them. If you know Jesus today, the only way that light will not shine is if you choose to hide it.

Jesus compares the believer to a city set on a hill. How do you hide a city on a hill? People in all directions look up, and there it is. It is in plain sight for everyone to see. If you love the Lord, then you can't hide that fact. If His Spirit is at work in you, it will become more and more evident to those around you. The work of Jesus in the believer's life cannot be hidden. It is meant to be broadcast for all to see.

Verse 15

Who in their right mind would light a lamp and put it under a basket? The whole purpose of a light is to chase away the darkness. It would serve no purpose to light a lamp and hide its light. If you put a burning light under a straw basket, how long would it take for the heat of that lamp to explode the basket into flames?

The purpose of lighting a lamp is to give light to the people in the house. God has ignited His light in you to reveal the hope and salvation of Christ to a dark world. If the light of Christ is in you, that is what it will do. You are the lamp, but the light in you is the light of God's Spirit burning brightly in this world. Let Him burn in you. Surrender everything to fuel that flame.

Verse 16

In this section, Jesus has compared the believer to salt, light, a city on a hill and a lamp in which the light burns. Here in verse 16, He applies these illustrations to real life. He says four things here.

First, in light of these illustrations, we must let our light shine before others. Notice the word "let" here. It is not a

matter of getting the light. That light is already in the life of the believer. The term "let," however, implies that we need to allow or give permission for that light to shine. This is done by surrender. I surrender my life to be the lamp in which that light shines.

Second, notice that this light is to shine "before others." The light is not for you alone. It is intended to shine for others. Your light is to shine so that others can see. It is the purpose of God that your life speaks to others of Christ and reveals the hope and transformation He brings. If you are keeping that light hidden, it is not accomplishing what God intended it to accomplish. The light in you is to shine on the path for your friends, family and co-workers to see. If they do not know that light in you, you need to seek the Lord for what keeps it from shining.

Third, the light of Christ shines through our good works. Now it is true that

Scripture does tell us that we should not always seek attention in what we do. There is a letting others “see our good works” that comes from pride. That is not what Jesus is speaking about here. The “good works” that Jesus talks about here are not about ourselves. The work comes from a heart that God moves to compassion, kindness and love. It is sacrificial love motivated by God to minister to the needs of those in pain and affliction. It cares not to be noticed but cannot help but demonstrate the heart of Christ.

Finally, observe that the result of this shining example of Christ-like attitudes and service is that the Father God is glorified. This is the heart of the believer. They seek no honour for themselves but desire that all praise and glory go to the Father whose light shines in them.

Verse 17

In this section of Jesus' sermon, He speaks about His relationship to the Old Testament Scriptures.

Notice first that Jesus tells His listeners that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. When Jesus speaks about the Law and the prophets, He refers to the Old Testament Scriptures.

The word translated abolish is καταλύω (katalúō). It means to loosen what was bound. For example, an individual carrying a heavy burden unties it from their back and lays it down. The word καταλύω (katalúō) could also be translated as demolish or destroy in the sense of getting rid of something that has no more value.

Jesus tells us that He did not come to dispose of the law and prophets as

something that had no value. Jesus valued the law and prophetic writings of the Old Testament. These Scriptures were inspired by God and were given for a purpose, and Jesus holds them in high regard.

While Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament law and prophets, he does tell us that He came to fulfil them. The Greek word for fulfil here is πληρόω (pleróō) which means to make full. The term would be used, for example, to speak about filling up a container. If the Old Testament was the container, Jesus was what perfectly filled that container. These Scriptures were written about Jesus and His work. They pointed to Him. He fulfilled all the requirements of the law and the prophets. He was what these Scriptures were all about. He gives them meaning and purpose.

Verse 18

Jesus demonstrated his high regard for the Law by telling His readers that “not one iota, not one dot” would pass from the Law until it was accomplished.

Iota was a letter from the Greek alphabet. Jesus is saying that not one letter or dot of the law of Scripture will be left unfulfilled. Everything that the Old Testament prophets predicted, down to the finest detail, would come to pass. Everything the Law demanded would be satisfied. Everything that Law illustrated would be accomplished.

Jesus sets a time limit on accomplishing the prophecies and fulfillment of the Law – “until heaven and earth pass away.” In other words, everything would be executed before God’s final judgement on this earth, as described in the book of Revelation.

Verse 19

The teaching of Jesus here can be somewhat difficult to understand, especially when we compare it to what Paul taught about the law.

Notice first that Jesus tells us here that whoever “relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”

The word translated relaxes λύω (lúō) means to loose or to unbind. Imagine an individual carrying a heavy load, and someone comes to untie that burden from their back. In doing so, this person relaxes the burden of their friend. What Jesus is saying here is that the person who took it upon themselves to release another from their obligation to even the smallest requirement of the law would be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven. God inspired these laws through Moses and held everyone responsible for each letter and dot.

On the other hand, Jesus tells us here that whoever observed the laws of God and encouraged their observation would be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

While the words of Jesus are easy enough to understand, how do they fit into the context of the rest of Scripture, and what is Jesus telling us here?

Jesus seems to be teaching that the law is still in effect and that every believer is accountable to God and must observe every letter and dot of that law. Having said this, however, the writer of Hebrews writes:

13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. – Heb 8:13

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus came to establish a new covenant and, by doing so, rendered the old one obsolete. That is not to say that the old covenant is no longer valuable but that we are no longer under that old covenant. Paul told the Galatians something similar when he wrote:

*18 But if you are led by the Spirit,
you are not under the law. – Ga
5:18*

According to Paul, the believer is no longer under the obligation of the law. Writing to the Romans, the apostle said:

*28 For we hold that one is justified
by faith apart from works of the
law. – Ro 3:28*

Paul believed that salvation was not based on how well one could keep the

law but rather anchored solidly to the work of Jesus Christ alone. He felt so strongly about this that he told the Galatians that anyone who relied on the law for a right standing with God was under a curse:

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." – Ga 3:10

For Paul, if someone relied on the law to obtain favour with God, they were cursed because no one could succeed in this goal. This was because it only took breaking the law a single time to be a lawbreaker. Consider what James tells us in this regard:

10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. – Jas 2:10

Imagine a murderer telling the judge that he should not be condemned because he never told lies or committed adultery. One sin is all it takes to make us guilty.

How can we understand what Jesus tells us here when He says that anyone who relaxed even one of the law's commandments will be the least in the kingdom of heaven, and those who observed the law would be the greatest? The reality is that not one of us can stand before God, having perfectly kept the law. We are all lawbreakers and guilty before God. My friend may observe more of the law than I do, but we are both still condemned before God under the law.

One day a rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked how he could have eternal life (Mark 10:17). Jesus pointed him to the law with its commandments:

18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" – Mk 10:18-19

Strangely, the Lord would point him to the law and tell him to follow the law to have eternal life. What we need to understand here is that Jesus was pointing this man to the law to show him that he was a sinner. When the young ruler told Jesus that he had kept all the commandments, Jesus then told him to sell everything he had to have treasures in heaven. What was Jesus showing this man? He was showing him what was god in his life. Listen to what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:21:

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Mt

6:21

Jesus pointed people to the law to show them their needs. This may be the best way to understand what Jesus is saying here. If you could observe all the laws of the Old Testament perfectly, you would be called great in the kingdom of heaven. If you break these laws, you will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.

How did the great apostle Paul describe himself?

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. – 1Co 15:9-10

If the apostle Paul considered himself “the least,” confessing that it was only the grace of God that saved him and gave him a place in heaven, how can any one of us expect to be the greatest?

Jesus places us before this standard. Observe and teach the law of God perfectly, and you will be great in the kingdom of heaven. Fall short of that standard, and you need what He came to offer.

Verse 20

In verse 19, Jesus told His listeners that if they observed the law and taught others to do so, they would be great in the kingdom of God. He qualifies this here in verse 20. Notice that Jesus says this teaching and observation of the law would have to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

In the Jewish faith, no one taught and observed the law more than the Pharisees and Scribes. These men went to the point of tithing their herbs and spices (see Matthew 23:23). In other words, they were meticulous in observing the law of Moses. Listen, however, to what Jesus says about them in Matthew 23:23:

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. – Mt 23:23

Jesus calls the most religious and meticulous observers of the Jewish law hypocrites. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus goes as far as to say that these careful observers of the law would not even

enter the kingdom of heaven. They observed the law and taught others to do so, but they would never enter the kingdom of heaven, let alone be called great in the kingdom.

Jesus places the people who heard His message under a seemingly impossible predicament. If the most religious people in the Jewish faith were unfit for the kingdom of heaven, what chance did the average Jew have? All this pointed Jesus' listeners that day to their great need of a Saviour, for if their efforts to obey the law could not get them to heaven, their only hope was the grace and forgiveness of a Saviour. That is why Jesus came.

Verse 21

Jesus now addresses the matter of anger and disagreements between individuals. He begins with Exodus

20:13: "You shall not murder." God intended that life be respected. No human being had the right to take the life of another.

Jesus continues here to remind His listeners that whoever disregarded this law and murdered another human being would be "liable to judgment."

Even before Moses, the Lord God sited the punishment for a murderer:

6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. – Ge 9:6

God took this matter of murder so seriously that he demanded the death of a murderer.

Verse 22

Using the law of the Old Testament about murder as a starting point, Jesus now expands on the requirement of God. He does this by using three examples.

First, Jesus tells us that anyone angry with his brother would be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

It is important to note that there is a difference in the Greek manuscripts used to interpret the English language. The Textus Receptus manuscripts include the Greek word ????? (eik?), meaning without purpose or cause. Thus the translators of the King James Version, using these manuscripts, translated:

*22 But I say unto you, That
whosoever is angry with his brother
without a cause shall be in danger
of the judgment – Mt 5:22 (KJV)*

Notice the phrase “angry with his
brother without a cause.”

This word εἰκῆ̃ (eikḗ) is not found in all
Greek manuscripts and, therefore, left
out of the English Standard Version.
The inclusion of εἰκῆ̃ (eikḗ) in the
Textus Receptus may be helpful for us
to understand what Jesus is saying.
Jesus was angry with the money
changers in the temple. God is
described as being angry with sinners.
Consider also the words of the apostle
Paul to the Ephesians:

*26 Be angry and do not sin; do not
let the sun go down on your anger
– Ep 4:26*

Paul does not discourage anger but tells the Ephesians that, in their anger, they were not to let themselves fall into sin. The anger Jesus is speaking about includes sinful attitudes, thoughts and behaviours motivated by something other than principles of righteousness. This may be confirmed by what Jesus says next about this anger.

Second, Jesus tells His listeners that whoever insulted his brother would be liable or accountable to the council. The council referred to here was known as the Sanhedrin, which was a judicial body that tried different cases and determined sentences for crimes.

The word translated as “insults” is ??? (rhaká). This is seen in the King James Version of the Bible, which instead of translating the term, includes it in the text:

22 ... and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council – Mt 5:22 (KJV)

The word ῥακά (rhaká) is an Aramaic word which means empty, worthless or foolish. It was a word used to insult an enemy.

The anger Jesus speaks about here is a rage that lashes out with insulting words. It is a reflection of the inner hatred of the heart towards the individual with whom one is angry. Jesus warns that this kind of anger is sinful and must be judged.

Finally, Jesus describes anger that calls another person a fool and tells them that this kind of anger is liable to hellfire.

The word translated fool, in the Greek language is μωρός (mōrós), from which we derive the English word, moron.

The term is more intense than the word raká. It speaks of someone worthless and foolish in character and heart.

The verse should be taken as a whole, and we should not get too wrapped up in the difference between getting angry and insulting and calling someone a fool. All these things reflect an anger that seeks to harm another through words. Jesus is communicating that while murder is a final act, that act began in the heart with anger. It expressed itself in insults and defamation of character, and ultimately murder, but it was at one point a seed in the heart of an individual who cultivated it and allowed it to grow. Is not the seed as evil as the act itself? Should that seed not be judged as well as its fruit?

Jesus tells us here that the seed of evil in our hearts will be judged. The very

thought of sin is offensive to a holy God. We may never have committed murder, but we have its repulsive seed growing in our hearts, poisoning our thoughts, words and deeds. God sees this and will hold us accountable for allowing it to remain.

Verse 23

Jesus has been speaking about an individual who comes with a gift for the Lord and remembers that they have offended or hurt a brother. Notice what Jesus tells such a person to do.

Jesus tells this individual, first, to “leave their gift before the altar and go.” In other words, they were not to offer this gift to the Lord.

Before offering a gift, the individual was to be reconciled with their brother. It is not enough to bring your sacrifice to

God and seek His forgiveness. We must also seek the forgiveness of the brother we have offended, and if there is anything owed to that brother, it needs to be paid and addressed as well.

Only when we have been restored to our brother can we return to offer our gift to the Lord. What good is seeking the forgiveness and favour of God if we have no intention of reconciling with the brother we have sinned against? What good is it to ask God for forgiveness for a sin you intend to continue living with? Do we not mock God with such hypocrisy?

Verse 24

The nature of living in this world is that we will, from time to time, come into conflict with a brother or sister. This may be the result of angry words or actions or possibly an unintentional

accident. For whatever reason, we will find ourselves guilty before another.

Jesus tells us that when we find ourselves in this situation, we must quickly come to terms with our accuser. The word translated quickly in this verse is ταχὺ (tachú) which means with haste, suddenly or swiftly. In other words, we should not let the sun go down before we seek a resolution with our accuser.

Jesus tells us to do this “when you are going with him to court.” In other words, seek reconciliation even before you stand before a judge. If the matter goes before a judge, you may spend time in prison for your actions. If the issue could be resolved before trial, this prison sentence may be avoided.

We must understand that Jesus is not simply advising us on how to stay out of prison. There is something more we

need to see here. Our Lord is encouraging us not to take any offence of a brother or sister lightly. Our actions not only hurt the individual concerned but also hinder our relationship with God and our testimony before the person offended. We must take this seriously. Sometimes, we must drop other things in our lives to address this matter, lest it festers and grow into something more than it needs to be.

Resolution can be delayed by an unwillingness to accept our fault. The wise and godly believer will do everything possible to make amends and restore harmony in the relationship with the offended party.

Verse 25

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Verse 26

If we do not do all we can to resolve a matter between ourselves and the offended individual speedily, our case might go before a judge who will have no mercy and cast us into prison. If that is the case, we will be forced to remain in that prison until our debt is completely paid and our sentence complete.

Jesus puts it this way: "you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." The word translated "penny" is κοδράντης (kodrántēs). It is the same Greek word used to describe the amount of money the widow put in the temple treasury in Mark 12:

42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. – Mk 12:42

Sin, offence and anger tend to grow. Like weeds left in an untended garden, this offence will soon take over. The

result will often be disastrous. It is far better to address these matters before they worsen.

What is important for us to understand here is that we cannot afford to allow anger and sin to remain in our lives without addressing them. We must learn to recognize these things and deal promptly with them. How many people, by refusing to address a lack of forgiveness in their lives, have found themselves trapped years later in a prison of their own making from which they cannot escape? How many addictions began as sinful desire that was not addressed quickly enough? The application of this teaching of Jesus is immense. Sin and offence will soon expand into something so big we cannot escape its grip. Jesus advises us to be ruthless in rooting it out before it becomes a prison we cannot escape.

Verse 27

Jesus moves now to the law about adultery. He quotes from the commandment of Exodus 20:14. The Hebrew word used in this Old Testament law of Exodus 20:14 is נָאָפַּ (nā'ap) and describes a sexual relationship with someone other than one's marriage partner.

The law of Moses was very severe when it came to this sin of adultery. We catch a glimpse of this when the religious leaders of Jesus' day brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus and said:

4..."Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. 5 Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" – Jn 8:4-5

Death by stoning was the punishment for those caught in adultery.

Verse 28

While the law of Moses forbade a sexual relationship with someone other than a marriage partner, Jesus took this further.

Jesus speaks here about a man looking at a woman with “lustful intent.” The idea here seems to be to allow oneself to desire a sexual relationship with someone other than one’s marriage partner or to entertain the idea of such a relationship. The Lord tells His listeners that entertaining the idea is to be guilty of the sin of adultery in one’s heart.

According to Jesus, it is not just the sexual relationship with someone outside of marriage that is the issue

here. Even to entertain the idea in one's heart is to allow sinful thoughts to corrupt our minds. These evil thoughts are an offence to the Lord God. Our relationship with our marriage partner and God must begin in the heart.

Acting on these thoughts makes the sin all the more grievous, but according to Jesus, adulterous thoughts and intents are sinful and must be addressed.

Verse 29

Jesus speaks here of the right eye causing sin. He continues on the theme of adultery from verse 28 and speaks of the lust of the eyes. We have an example of this in the life of David:

2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the

roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. 3 And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. – 2Sa 11:2-4

David's eyes caused him to sin when he found himself lusting after Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

Jesus tells us here to tear out that eye that causes us to sin and throw it away. It is generally agreed that Jesus is not telling us to pluck out our eyes literally. If we pluck out the right eye, what would keep the left eye from sinning? If we plucked out both eyes, what would keep the ears from sinning?

What the Lord seems to be saying is that if we find ourselves in a situation where we find our eyes sinning, remove those eyes from the object causing us to sin. If you are watching a movie that causes you to lust, turn it off! Don't allow your eyes to dwell on those things that will cause you to commit adultery in your heart (or any other sin, for that matter). Throw out the books and magazines that feed this lust, so they do not tempt you anymore. Jesus concludes the verse with the reminder that it is better to "lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

The word translated, hell in this verse is γέεννα (géenna) which describes the place of the condemned. The context of the rest of Scripture clearly shows that there is forgiveness for those who commit adultery. This is the case with

the woman caught in adultery in John 8:

10 Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." – Jn 8:10-11

The pardon of Jesus is extended to those who confess their sin of adultery. Jesus is not saying that if you commit adultery in your mind, you will go to hell. How, then, should we interpret the words of Jesus about gouging out one's eye when tempted to lust because it is better than going to hell?

The best way to understand this is to see it from the perspective of the crowd that had gathered to hear Him speak. Many among those who gathered before Jesus were uncertain of who He

was. They had not experienced a new birth. It was sin such as this sin of adultery and lust that was keeping them from the kingdom of God. Jesus is showing these individuals that sin was much deeper than many of them realized. The Law of Moses taught them to refrain from the practice of adultery. Jesus, however, showed them that they might be able to refrain from having a sexual relationship with someone other than their partner but still be guilty of sin in their heart. Sin was in their very thoughts and attitudes. It was rooted in the very core of who they were. This sin would keep them from God unless they experienced His forgiveness.

Verse 30

Jesus expresses the seriousness of sin here. He tells His listeners that their sins would send them to hell. It was

better for them to cut off their right hand and live this life without it rather than go to hell and suffer eternal punishment.

Consider the implication of what Jesus is teaching here. If you cut off your right hand because it is causing you to sin, what keeps your left hand from sinning? If you cut that off, what is to prevent your feet from causing you to sin? How many body parts will you have to cut off before you are no longer tempted to sin? If you remove every body part, you still have the temptations of the mind. The only way to be sure that we do not sin is to take our lives, for as long as you and I are living, there will always be the temptation to fall into sin.

Once again, Jesus is demonstrating just how every part of us is affected by sin. He speaks of the sin of the mind in adulterous thoughts, the sins of the

eyes in lust, pride, and jealousy and here, the sins of the hands in physical acts. Not one part of us has not been affected by sin. Not one part of us is not tempted to sin. The only solution is for us to be forgiven and our hearts changed. This seems to be what Jesus is trying to convey to the people of His day. They needed something bigger than themselves if they were going to overcome it.

Verse 31

Jesus has been speaking about faithfulness from the heart in marriage. Not all marriages are perfect. Sometimes adultery and unfaithfulness creep into the relationship. At other times the relationship turns bitter and confusing. The law of Moses recognized that there were times when the marriage relationship created an

excessive burden, risk or grief and permitted a man to divorce his wife.

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, – Dt 24:1

Jewish scholars of the day were divided over the meaning of the words "some indecency in her." Some saw this as pertaining to previous sexual activity before marriage, while others felt the law permitted divorce for various improper actions.

The interaction of the disciples with Jesus in Matthew 19 reveals this debate when the disciples ask:

7 ... "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"

Clearly, the disciples understood that the law of Moses permitted divorce. Jesus' answer to their question is helpful:

8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. – Mt 19:7-8

Jesus defends the law of Moses by telling the disciples that the law of divorce was given because of the hardness of the human heart. In other words, while divorce was not the intention of God, it was permitted because human nature was cruel and unbending. If forced to remain in some marriages, the lives of some partners would be at risk. Others would be

subject to such hardship that it would break their spirit and leave them hopeless. Moses showed compassion to those who were in destructive relationships. In these unique cases, a man could give his wife a divorce certificate and be released from the marriage.

Verse 32

While the law of Moses permitted divorce, Jesus tells His listeners here that this was not the desire of God. Marriage was to be for life. Jesus did, however, permit divorce on the grounds of sexual immorality.

The word Jesus uses here is not the word for adultery but rather πορνεία (porneía), which is translated by the word “fornication” in the King James Version. For example, a man may find

that when he married his wife, she was not a virgin and had deceived him.

The word πορνεία (porneía) covers any number of sexual sins and is not limited to premarital sexual relationships or adultery. Paul speaks about prostitution as sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:13-15). In 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, he tells the Corinthians that sexual refusal in marriage by one partner was a sin. Jesus speaks in Matthew 5:28 of the lustful thoughts of the mind as being ungodly. The word πορνεία (porneía) seems to cover all these sins.

Jesus goes on to say that if a man divorces a wife apart from sins covered by the word πορνεία (porneía), he makes her commit adultery. Adultery is a sexual sin committed with someone other than one's true marriage partner. The assumption is that the woman Jesus speaks about here was divorced for a reason other than sexual

immorality and married another partner. Because her divorce was not based on sexual immorality, it was not legitimate before God, and her marriage to her former partner was still binding when she engaged in a sexual relationship with her new husband. This means that she was guilty of adultery.

The same was true for a man who married a woman who was not legitimately divorced. Her former marriage was still binding, and for him to engage in a sexual relationship with her was to become guilty of adultery.

All too often, we focus on the issue of divorce in this passage, but is this really what Jesus is trying to get across here? Of greater importance is what Jesus is saying about the permanence of marriage and the temptation to sexual immorality and unfaithfulness in that marriage. You can give a certificate of divorce and not be divorced in the eyes

of God. You may never be guilty of adultery in your marriage but still, be guilty of sexual sin in your heart by refusing your partner. Jesus takes his listeners beyond the externals of the law of Moses to the very heart of the matter before God.

Verse 33

Jesus moves now to speak about taking oaths or vows and promises. Such oaths, vows, promises or commitments would be made between two parties. For example, two men might make a business deal where each one commits to a certain action or payment. We might also see these vows in an agreement between parties on a personal level. There are any number of oaths or vows an individual might make to another or possibly even to God.

The law of the Old Testament made it clear that if an individual made a vow to another, they were to take this very seriously and be faithful to their commitment.

2 If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. – Nu 30:2

The law of the Old Testament required absolute honesty and faithfulness to the commitments made to another.

Verse 34

When an individual made a vow to another, it was often witnessed by someone else or guaranteed by some form of security. This sealed the commitment and demonstrated the

seriousness of both parties. For example, if I take out a loan from the bank, I may put up my house as security. If I do not pay the loan, the bank can take my house.

Sometimes, people would seal the oath by invoking God as their witness, saying, "As God is my witness." The idea here is that if they were unfaithful to their commitment, they would answer to God. In other cases, people would swear by heaven or the throne of God by saying something like "heaven is my witness" or "I swear by the throne of heaven."

Jesus tells His listeners here that they were not to make such commitments in the name of heaven because it is the throne of God. The throne of God is awesome. It is upon this throne that the sovereign, holy, and just God sits. Shall we take what is sacred and defile it by our unfaithfulness to a vow? Can

we risk blaspheming the name of God by our inability to keep our promise?

Verse 35

Some might say, "If I can't make an oath by God, heaven or His throne (verse 34), then I will swear by earth or the holy city of Jerusalem." These individuals might say, "I swear by the holy city," or "I swear by all that is good on this earth." Jesus tells His listeners, however, that the earth is the footstool of God, and the holy city is where He reigns. Consider the words of the Psalmist in this regard:

1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, 2 for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. 3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his

holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. – Ps 24:1-4

Notice that the Psalmist tells us that the earth belongs to the Lord and that only those who do not swear deceitfully can ascend to the hill upon which Jerusalem was built.

Once again, Jesus is reminding us that we dare not take what belongs to God and treat it with contempt by failing to keep the vows we swore by this earth or by the holy city.

Verse 34 tells us not to swear by God or by his throne. Verse 35 reminds us that this earth belongs to God, and we must not swear by it either. Finally, in verse 36, Jesus speaks about swearing by our heads. For example, an individual might say, "I swear by my own life." When I was a child, the

common way of confirming a promise to a friend was to say, "Cross my heart and hope to die." In other words, may I die if I do not keep my promise.

Jesus reminds us here, however, that we do not have any control over our destiny. There is nothing secure about our lives. Notice that He tells us here that we cannot make a single hair on our head black or white. We do not know if we will have a tomorrow. What use is a promise on my life when it may be taken from me today in an accident or tragedy over which I have no control?

Verse 36

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Verse 37

Our Lord concludes His teaching about oaths by saying, "Let what you say be

'Yes' or 'No.'" Don't risk blaspheming the name of God by bringing His name into a promise you cannot keep. Don't swear, by what belongs to God, to do what you cannot do. Just say "yes," or "no" and be faithful to your words.

Notice how Jesus tells us anything beyond "yes," or "no" comes from evil. Consider this for a moment. When you say, "May God curse me if I do not accomplish my vow," you are calling down the curse of God upon yourself. When you invoke the name of God in a business deal and fail to follow through, you have been unfaithful not only to your business partner, but you have lied to God and treated Him with contempt. None of this is from God. It is serious enough to make a promise and not keep it. It is worse, however, to invoke the name of God and take that name in vain by our failure to be true to our word.

Verse 38

The law of the Old Testament required justice. Listen to how that justice was applied in Leviticus 24:

19 If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. – Lev 24:19-20

If you got into a fight and punched your enemy in the face, causing him to lose a tooth, the law reserved the right to take your tooth as punishment. If you killed the man you were fighting with, the law could require your life as payment for your crime.

Verse 39

The law that required an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth created a system that demanded justice. It was easy for the individual to say, "I'm going to do to you what you did to me."

Jesus presented a whole new way of thinking. Notice His words here: "Do not resist the one who is evil." The Greek word for resist here is ἀνθίστημι (anthístēmi). It comes from two words. The first is "antí," meaning against. The second is "hístēmi," meaning to stand. To resist, in this sense, is not to stand against someone evil.

We must understand the context of this statement of Jesus. Consider, for example, what the apostle James had to say about resisting the devil:

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. – Jas 4:7

The apostle Peter said something similar when he wrote:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. – 1Pe 5:8-9

Both apostles use the same Greek word Jesus uses.

Writing to the Romans, however, Paul says:

2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. – Ro 13:2

Paul uses the word “resist” three times here in this passage. The first use is the word ἀντιτάσσω (antitássō), which

means to arrange against. It speaks of an army that sets itself up against a government. The other two uses of the word resist in Romans 13 are the same as the word Jesus uses. In both occurrences, Paul speaks about resisting or standing against God by revolting against the government He has set up.

While it is clear that Peter and James teach that we are to resist the devil, Jesus teaches us to accept what God allows. It is not always easy to distinguish between what the devil is doing and what God is allowing for our good. It is hard to imagine how God permits an enemy to slap us on the right cheek. Yet we know that the Father allowed the enemy to do this to His Son. He even permitted them to kill His Son. God allowed Joseph to be put in prison so that he could become the second in command in the nation of Egypt. God sometimes works in ways

that are very confusing to us, but when He takes us through the valleys of life, he intends to mature us in our walk with Him. Satan, on the other hand, will only seek to defeat us and destroy our fellowship with the Father.

Jesus tells His listeners that when the enemy slapped them on the right cheek, they were to turn the other cheek to him as well. This is not to say that we are to seek affliction from the enemy. Jesus tells us we are not to retaliate when our enemy strikes us. We must also be aware that the Lord can use what even our worst enemy does to us to build us up in our faith and expand His kingdom.

Verse 40

Jesus gives an illustration here of an individual who, through legal action, succeeds in taking his brother's tunic. The fact that this tunic is taken through

legal actions reveals a certain hatred. The tunic is not freely given from one brother to another but forcibly removed.

How are we to respond when people are cruel to us? Jesus tells us that we sacrifice our cloak. In other words, we respond to evil with good. We offer generosity to those who are mean to us. We show compassion and kindness to our enemies.

Verse 41

Jesus uses another illustration of an individual who was forced to walk a mile with another. The word used for “force” is ἀγγαρεύω (aggareúō), which means to press someone into service.

There have been times when I felt that people were taking advantage of me. There have been things I had to do that I did not want to do but felt

compelled by someone to do so anyway. I wonder how Jesus felt when the crowds surrounded Him, demanding that He heal their sickness, sometimes leaving without a word of thanks.

When Jesus speaks of an individual being forced to walk a mile with someone else, it is not likely that the one forcing him will truly appreciate this effort, nor will he offer a word of thanks for that effort. What do you do when people take advantage of you? How do you respond when no one even thanks you for your efforts? Jesus tells us to press on doing good for great is our reward in heaven.

Verse 42

The Lord challenges his listeners to have a generous spirit. I remember being in Haiti many years ago. It seemed that everywhere I went, people

were begging for something from me. I quickly realized that I could not possibly give to everyone who begged.

Jesus did not heal everyone who came to Him. There were times when He would take His disciples and escape from the constant demand of the crowds. Jesus is not telling us that we must give to anyone who asks from us for whatever reason. What He is telling us, however, is that we are to cultivate a generous attitude toward those who are in need. We should live a sacrificial life, willing to part with our blessing for another. We are to realize that what God gives is not for us alone but to serve as a blessing to others.

Verse 43

In this final section of chapter 5, Jesus addresses loving one's enemies. He begins with the words: "You have

heard that it was said.” Jesus did not give details about the source of this saying. It is comprised, however, of two points.

The first point they heard was that they were to love their neighbour. These words come from Leviticus 19, which says:

18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. – Lev 19:18

The law of God required that the children of Israel love their neighbour. The word neighbour is not limited to the person who lives next door. Those we meet and interact with regularly are our neighbours. We must demonstrate our love through respect, generosity and compassion.

The second part of the saying Jesus declared the Jews had heard was that they hate their enemies. Now admittedly, there were times when the people of God spoke harshly toward their enemies. There were times when they cursed them for afflicting them or persecuting them. We even see the psalmist openly declare hatred for those who took God's name in vain.

20 They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? 22 I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.- Ps 139:20-22

Some did hate their enemies and justified this hatred on the basis that these enemies were evil. All foreigners were forbidden access to the temple of God. No Jew was to marry a non-Jew.

It was even frowned upon for a Jew to enter the home of a Gentile. You can see where some would get the idea of hating one's enemy.

What we need to understand, however, is that the words "you shall hate your enemy" occurs nowhere in the Old Testament as a command of God. It may certainly have been inferred by some to be an acceptable practice and experienced in the life of others, but it is not a direct command of God.

Jesus addresses it because while it was not the command of God to hate ones neighbour, it was accepted by the Jews as a legitimate practice.

Verse 44

While The Jews of Jesus' day accepted the saying, "love your neighbour and hate your enemy, Jesus taught that

they were to love their enemy and pray for those who persecuted them.

First, Jesus taught love for one's enemy. The word for love here is ἀγαπάω (agapáō). This is the word used to describe God's love in sending His Son to die for us. This kind of love ministers to those who are in need. It does not deprive an enemy of good when it is in its capacity to do so. It will sacrifice itself to bless an enemy. This is not a natural love but a demonstration of the heart of God in us.

Second, Jesus tells His listeners to pray for those who persecuted them. Jesus does not tell us what we should pray for these enemies in this verse. However, he demonstrates what he was teaching when He was persecuted. When His enemies beat Him and crucified Him on the cross, Jesus prayed for them with these words:

34... "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." – Lk 23:34

If we are to follow Jesus' example, one of our first prayer requests for our persecutors should be that God forgives them for what they are doing. Once again, this is not an easy thing to do. It does not come naturally to us to forgive or pray for the forgiveness of those who harm us. Jesus asks us to do what we can only do through His divine power.

Verse 45

Jesus told His listeners to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Notice why they were to do so – "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

The idea is that the child will take on the father's characteristics. The work of

the Holy Spirit in the believer is to transform us into God's image and create His character in us. Evidence that we are children of God is found in the transforming work of the Spirit in us that enables us to love our enemy and pray for our persecutors. This is not natural to our flesh.

Jesus reminds His readers here that the Father makes the "sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

There are blessings that God showers even upon the ungodly. Even the sinner experiences the blessing of God in their life. Those who reject God still have life and breath and live a full life. All this is evidence that God cares for even those who reject Him and mock His name.

Verse 46

Verse 46 must be taken in the context of verse 45. Jesus told those who listened to Him that day that they were to be children of their Father, who allowed His sun to shine on both the righteous and the sinner. Those who loved their enemies and prayed for those who persecuted them demonstrated that the life of God was in them. His character was shown through them. In other words, we can have the assurance of our relationship with God through the evidence of this character in us.

It is in this context that Jesus tells His followers that if they only loved those who loved them, they had no assurance of reward because even the tax collectors did that.

The tax collector was one of the most despised of all citizens in Israel. He collected the taxes imposed on the Jews and made his money by overtaxing. This created hardship for

many Jews who struggled to find the funds to get from one day to another. Jesus tells His listeners that even the most hated tax collectors loved those who loved them. They treated people well when it was to their advantage. There was nothing godly in this attitude. To love others who love you is something that even the worst sinner can do.

What assurance do you have that you are a child of God if you only love people as sinners love them? What confidence do you have of eternal reward if you are no better than the worst sinner?

Verse 47

Jesus reminds us that there ought to be a difference between the sinner and the child of God. Even the worst sinner will greet their brother.

To greet someone is to pay your respects, to recognize them, their value and their dignity. Essentially, we are telling those individuals that they are important and worthy of recognition and a moment of our time.

Even the worst sinners will greet those they consider worthy of their respect. Are you willing, however, to welcome the outcast? Will you recognize the value of the beggar on the street? Will you take a moment to cross the street to greet your enemy? Those who do so demonstrate that there is a power at work in them that is not from the flesh. They give evidence of the power of God and His transforming love in their lives.

Verse 48

Jesus concludes this section of His sermon with the words: "You therefore

must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The word Jesus uses for perfect is τέλειος (téleios), which comes from the word télos meaning, goal, or purpose. The idea here is that something has reached its destination and is complete and not lacking in anything.

Jesus is setting the standard for all who would follow Him. That standard is perfection in every way. Our goal is to be like the Father in character and holiness. All too many believers have settled into the fact that they will never be perfect in this life, so they stop trying. Indeed, not one of us will ever reach this goal, this side of heaven, but that does not mean we stop moving in that direction. Will we allow a sinful attitude to remain in our hearts when God calls us to be like Him? Will we compromise the standard of God’s Word when God has called us to walk in absolute obedience?

Jesus indeed places us before an impossible standard. How can any of us be perfect? There was only one person who reached that standard, and that was Jesus. When Jesus tells us to be perfect just as His Father is perfect, He sets a standard for us to strive after. This must be our passion in life. We want to be like Christ and His father. We want to address even the smallest sin in our life. We ruthlessly drive out all rebellion. We strive to be like Him in every way. This will be a lifelong battle, but a battle in which we must be engaged as we strive toward becoming like our Heavenly Father.

MATTHEW 6

Verse 1

Jesus begins this next section by speaking about the practice of righteousness. Practicing righteousness has to do with living out our faith. This might include attending worship services, giving to the poor, praying, or any other service we do in the name of God.

Jesus speaks here about practicing righteousness “before other people in order to be seen by them.” This is a temptation for every one of us. We can give so that people will praise us for our giving. I can preach a sermon and

be more focused on what people think about my insight into the Word than communicating the heart of God to them. Our service for God can be more about us than about God.

Jesus warns believers about taking the glory of God for themselves. He tells us that those who do so will have no reward from the Father in heaven. Shall the Father reward those who use His name to glorify themselves? Shall He honour those who steal the honour due to Him to elevate themselves?

Verse 2

The Lord gives a first example of how people can practice their “righteous” deeds to be seen. He illustrates His point by speaking about an individual who gives to the needy. Notice, however, how this individual gives – he sounds the trumpet. The idea is that he calls the attention of everyone to what

he is doing. "Look at me, everyone," he says, "I am giving this money to a needy person." Jesus tells us here that this individual wants others to see what he is doing so they will praise him.

Notice what Jesus tells His listeners about this individual that wants the praise of his fellow humans: "Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." What is the reward they have received? They have received the praise of others.

Consider this for a moment. Those who perform their religious duties to be seen will receive the praise of human beings. That, however, is where it will end. They will receive no recognition from God. They will stand before God, having been elevated in the minds of their brothers and sisters, only to be condemned by God, for their lives brought Him no glory. Everything they did was for themselves. Their reward

was in this life, but there will be no reward in heaven. There will be no smile of approval from God. There will be no commendation for a job well done – only the shame of a life lived for themselves alone.

Verse 3

Jesus encourages giving to the needy. Notice, however, that He teaches that our left hand should not know what the right hand is giving.

The concept of not letting our left hand know what the right hand is doing refers simply to not broadcasting what we do for others. Jesus encourages taking steps to do things in such a way that we are not noticed. If we want the Lord God to receive the glory, we must get out of the way.

Consider this for a moment. Everything we have is from God. He has the right to use what He gives as He pleases. He may provide us with something to divert it to someone else. We become the channel through which God blesses others and answers their cry for help. Now imagine that I gave a friend a gift to bring to someone else. That friend takes the gift to the person intended, but when he gives it to that person, he insinuates that it was from him instead of me. He receives the praise and thanks for a gift that I gave. What would you think of such a friend? Would you not think he was taking advantage of you and profiting from your generosity for selfish reasons? How can we, who have been given all things by God to bless others take the glory from Him? We must do all we can to ensure that the Giver receives all the praise and that we recognize that we are merely the channel.

Verse 4

You can be a secret giver and still be filled with pride. What Jesus is telling us here is that we need to get out of the way so that God receives the glory. If people look at me and do not see the Lord in my practice of righteousness, I need to get out of the way.

What kind of person is the secret giver? This person is humble and does not seek attention. The secret giver does not need people to see them. They want the glory to go to God. They delight more in watching those who receive the gift bring glory to God than themselves. Human praise seems hollow and empty to them. These individuals have surrendered everything to God and recognize that God has the right to request that they give what He has given them to others. They do not take credit for giving what is not theirs.

They are merely channels of the blessing of God. He is the true Giver.

The Father rewards those who are obedient to His call on their lives. He blesses those through whom He can channel His blessings.

Verse 5

Jesus speaks here about individuals who stood up in the synagogue or on the street corner to pray with a desire to be noticed. Observe several details here.

Jesus calls these individuals hypocrites. They used the opportunity to pray to make people think highly of them. They wanted to “be seen by others.” They intend to impress people with their words and piety. They used the name of God and spoke eloquent words about God, but they wanted to focus on

themselves. On the outside, they appeared pious and righteous, but their hearts were filled with pride and selfish ambition.

Jesus tells His listeners that these individuals have received their reward. They gained the admiration of those they deceived. That, however, was all they would receive. There would be no commendation from God. There would be no eternal prize. Their only reward would be the shallow and passing admiration of those they deceived.

Verse 6

We need to understand this verse in its context. At first glance, it might appear that Jesus is forbidding public prayers when He says:

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to

your Father who is in secret.

Most references to prayer in the Scripture are indeed private. Scripture does, however, record incidents of public prayers. Consider the public prayers of Solomon at the dedication of the temple in 2 Chronicles 6.

Ezra prayed before the people of his day, confessing their sin:

1 While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. – Ezr 10:1

There is evidence of the followers of Jesus gathering together to pray in Acts 1.

14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. – Ac 1:14

Paul and Silas prayed together in prison:

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. – Ac 16:25

Jesus is not forbidding public prayers here. In the context of this passage, Jesus is addressing those who pray to be seen by others. That is to say, their purpose in standing up to pray is to have others notice them and think highly of them. Our Lord is telling us here that it is preferable to pray in secret rather than pray to be noticed. There is no reward for praying to be noticed. On the other hand, when we

pray in secret, God will see and hear and reward us.

The difference between praying in public and private is that private prayer removes all temptation to be noticed and focuses exclusively on God. This principle needs to be applied to public prayers. They, too, must be directed to God without wanting to draw attention to ourselves.

Verse 7

Jesus tells us not to “heap up empty phrases” in prayer. The word He uses here is βαττολογέω (battologéō). This word is derived from báttos, meaning stammer and λόγος, meaning word. The idea is to speak foolishly or to speak words without meaning.

Notice also that the English Standard Version speaks of “heaping up empty

phrases” Jesus adds to this when He says, “they think that they will be heard for their many words.” The word used here for “many words” in Greek is πολυλογία (polulogía). It is derived from polús, meaning much and lógos, meaning word. The idea is that those who pray use many words that have no meaning to them personally. The words are repeated from their mouth but not from their heart.

Probably one of the best examples of this comes from the words of the prophet Isaiah where God says about His people:

*13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, –
Isa 29:13*

Isaiah speaks of people who spoke great words to God and about God with their mouths, but their hearts were far from God. What they said with their lips did not come from their heart.

Verse 8

Jesus tells us we should not be like those who heap up empty phrases in prayer. These individuals believed they would be heard because of their many words.

It is all too easy to take credit for the answers to our prayers. We get the idea that if we pray long enough, have enough people praying the same thing or repeat our requests enough times; God is bound to hear us. When the answer comes, we congratulate ourselves for having so much faith and perseverance. Sometimes we can

believe that were it not for us and our prayers, this world would fall apart.

Jesus reminds us here, however, that our prayers don't inform God of anything He does not already know. Nor can our prayers instruct Him in what to do about the world's problems. Jesus tells us that the Father knows what you need even before you ask Him. He knows the answer before there is even a need.

We do not merit an answer to prayer because we prayed well or long enough. Nor is it telling God what to do about needs He already knows about. Instead, it is humbly receiving from our Heavenly Father and submitting to the answer He has prepared for our needs. Jesus will demonstrate this more fully as He teaches them how to pray in the following verses.

Verse 9

Jesus is teaching His disciples to pray. He tells them they were not to pray like the unbeliever with empty phrases and many words. They were to come knowing that God already knew their needs and the answer to their problem.

From this foundation, Jesus offers a sample prayer for his disciples to follow.

Jesus begins His prayer with the words, "Our Father." The word used here is πατήρ (patēr) which is a masculine word meaning father. He is the one from whom all human beings derive their origin. Those who call Him Father understand that they owe their lives to him.

Notice second that this Father is in heaven. He is not an earthly Father but

one who dwells in heaven, separated from the sin and corruption of this world.

Finally, the Lord teaches His disciples to hallow the name of the heavenly Father. The word hallow is ἁγιάζω (hagiázō) which means to set apart as holy.

The phrase "hallowed be your name" means may your name be treated and set apart as holy. The request is that people everywhere honour the name, person and work of God the Father and submit to Him.

This ought to be the cry of every believing heart. I remember many years ago speaking to an elderly gentleman who told me that his great fear was that he would act or communicate in any way that dishonoured the name of His Lord and Savior. Those words have always struck

me. His passion was to hallow the name of His heavenly Father.

Verse 10

The second request of Jesus' prayer is that the kingdom of the Father comes. The word Jesus uses here for the kingdom is βασιλεία (basileía). It comes from the word basileús meaning king. It is a dominion over which a king rules. The King of the kingdom is God the Father, as seen in verse 9, where the prayer is addressed to Him.

Listen to what Jesus tells us in John 18 about this kingdom:

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the

Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” – Jn 18:36

The kingdom to which Jesus refers here is not earthly. That is to say, it is not about land and political rule as the world's kingdoms are. To understand the kingdom of God, we must understand it differently.

When asked by the religious leaders of His day about when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied:

20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." – Lk 17:20-21

Jesus tells the Pharisees that the kingdom of God would not come in ways that could be observed. It would come invisible and unnoticed to the human eye. In other words, it was not a physical kingdom.

The domain over which God reigned was the hearts and souls of men and women. The subjects of this kingdom surrender to the Lord God as their King. They pledge their allegiance to Him alone and commit to His purpose and will. Their heart cries are that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven where there is no sin or rebellion, where every heart is devoted to the Father and committed to Him alone.

This request, then, is that the hearts and lives of men and women around the world would surrender to God the Father and His purpose through Jesus Christ.

Verse 11

The next request in the prayer of Jesus is that the Father would provide our daily bread. Let me make a few points here.

First, consider the word, give. What right do we have as human beings to ask God for anything? Yet the Lord Jesus calls us here to come to Him with our requests. God is willing to give. Jesus teaches us here about the grace of God to give to those who ask.

Second, it is easy to assume that we can provide for our own needs and do not need God. Jesus teaches an attitude of dependence here. We must recognize the Lord God as our provider. He provides the strength and resources required to care for our needs. We must learn to recognize Him as the source of all things.

Third, notice also that Jesus speaks here about a daily provision. How easy it is for us to be concerned for tomorrow. Jesus teaches a regular dependence day by day. There should not be a time when we are not living in dependence on God, recognizing our need for Him every moment of the day.

Finally, the word bread does not just refer to physical food but to whatever we need to sustain the body. The air we breathe, or the health required to live another day, is a gift from His hand. We should never take this for granted. It is by His grace alone that we live another day.

Verse 12

As believers, forgiveness is something we take for granted. We know that we have been forgiven in Jesus Christ, and

nothing will separate us from the love of God. Jesus teaches us, however, that we are to pray that God would forgive us just as we forgive others. This merits some consideration.

Consider first what the apostle Paul tells the Romans in Romans 8:1:

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. – Ro 8:1

The apostle makes it very clear that if we are in Christ Jesus, nothing will condemn us on that final day. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (see 1 John 1:7)

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. – 1Jn 1:7

The death of Jesus Christ and the pardon He brings gives us a right standing before God.

Having said this, listen to the words of Jesus here in Matthew 6:

15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. – Mt 6:15

How do we reconcile the pardon of Jesus Christ with the fact that He tells us that God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others?

Realize that the pardon of Jesus Christ on the cross does not mean we will never sin again. We who have been pardoned often sin.

Second, understand that our sins will not keep us from heaven. The pardon of Jesus assures that as sinners, our

debt to God is paid, and we will not be kept from the presence of God and the glory of heaven.

Third, our sin does hinder fellowship with God and our brother or sister. Jesus tells those who come to worship Him that if their brother or sister has something against them, they are to leave their offering at the altar and be reconciled with their brother or sister. In other words, their broken relationship with a brother or sister will hinder fellowship with God.

Fourth, God commands us to be reconciled with our brother and sister by seeking their forgiveness. This forgiveness restores our relationship with a brother or sister and with God.

Finally, Jesus tells us here that while our salvation is assured despite our sins, if we want to know forgiveness and full fellowship with God, we must

first offer that same forgiveness to others. We only have the right to ask for the same forgiveness we offer others.

It is possible to live with a barrier between ourselves and God because we have never forgiven a brother or sister in Christ. Forgiveness will bring renewed fellowship and intimacy.

Verse 13

The request of Jesus here in verse 13 is quite strange. He tells us to ask the Father not to lead us into temptation. Consider what the apostle James says about temptation:

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is

tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. – Jas 1:13-14

James tells us that God will never tempt anyone with evil. Why, then, does Jesus teach us to pray that God would not lead us into temptation?

The word Jesus uses for temptations is πειρασμός (peirasmós) which can either mean temptation or trial. This has led some to understand the request here is that the Lord would keep us from trials and suffering that we would not be able to endure.

Others see Jesus as saying, keep us from being drawn into temptations that would overcome us.

The words “deliver us from evil” imply that this request’s purpose is victory over evil trials and temptations. The petition is for God to keep us from and deliver us through any temptation and

trial that would come our way so that we can continue to walk in righteousness.

Verse 14

Notice how verse 14 begins with the word “for.” This connects it with the previous verses. Jesus tells us that we need to forgive others their debts to us and that God would give us victory over our temptations. How easy it is for us to hold a grudge. How easy it is, when we are offended, to be unwilling to forgive those who have hurt us.

Jesus tells us that we cannot expect forgiveness and true fellowship with God if we are unwilling to offer that same forgiveness to a brother or sister in Christ. We only have the right to ask God for the forgiveness we are willing to offer to others.

There is a connection between our relationship with God and our relationship with brothers and sisters. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:

40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' – Mt 25:40

How we treat others is how we treat God. Grace is extended to those who show grace. Forgiveness is given to those who forgive.

Verse 15

To know forgiveness from God, we must extend this forgiveness to others. Let me say two things about this.

The first relates to the character of Christ. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in our hearts, the nature of Christ will be revealed through that heart. In other words, while it is not natural for us to love and forgive, this will become a reality as the believer is in fellowship with God. The work of Christ in us is such that forgiveness and compassion are offered to those around us. This is a sign that we belong to Christ and have His heart in us. If we do not have this heart, we need to examine whether we have received the pardon of Jesus Christ and belong to Him.

Second, our fellowship with Christ depends on our connection with our brothers and sisters in Christ. When I refuse to forgive my brother and sister, I hinder my relationship with Christ. Essentially, I choose to break fellowship with Christ rather than be reconciled with my brother or sister. This is a sin for which we must be forgiven. Until we

make things right with our brother or sister, we cannot be restored to true fellowship with Christ.

Verse 16

Jesus moves on to speak about the practice of fasting. Notice how He begins the verse – “And when you fast.” The assumption here is that there would be times of fasting for His followers.

It is interesting to note, however, that the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day made fasting a regular occurrence, but this was not the case for the disciples of Jesus.

14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" – Mt 9:14

While fasting is a legitimate practice in the New Testament, Jesus was concerned about how it was practiced. Notice what Jesus tells His listeners about how it was practiced in His day.

16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.

Those who fasted looked gloomy and disfigured their faces. They did this with one desire, that is, so that people would see them and know they were fasting and “suffering” for the cause of God. They made their fast a very public matter. Notice what Jesus says about those who fasted in this way.

Jesus called these individuals hypocrites. They pretended to be doing something for God, but they did it all to be seen by people. They wanted everyone to see them and what they

were doing for God. They wanted all the attention for themselves.

Second, Jesus tells these individuals that they have received their reward. Whatever attention they had received from people was all they would get. There would be no heavenly reward for such hypocritical fasting. The blessing of the Lord would not be on such self-centredness. God would not bless the efforts of those who took the glory due to Him and kept it for themselves.

Verse 17

Jesus tells those who fasted how they were to do so. Instead of disfiguring their face and appearing to suffer for God, they were to anoint their head and wash their face. In other words, they were to put off all appearances of suffering. They were not to draw attention to themselves. They were to

dress and appear in public as any other person. No one was to suspect that they were fasting.

Verse 18

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Verse 19

Jesus speaks in this section of His sermon about worldly treasures. He tells His listeners that they were not to

lay up for themselves treasures on earth.

Notice first the words “lay-up” $\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\iota\zeta\omega$ (thēsaurízō) and “treasures” $\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ (thēsaurós). Both come from the same word. To lay up is to treasure. The idea is that we store up things we treasure.

Notice also that this storing up is for ourselves. In other words, we keep the things we treasure for ourselves and our enjoyment and do not share them with others.

Jesus is not condemning the enjoyment of good things. He speaks here about the accumulation of worldly goods beyond what we need and making them more important than the needs of our brothers and sisters around us.

Jesus shows us that the treasures of this world are temporary and fleeting.

Moths can eat away our fine clothing. Rust will destroy our precious metals. Thieves will break in and steal what is most precious to us. We cannot keep our treasures. They will ultimately be taken from us. Better to use what God has given than allow it to waste away or not be used for good.

Verse 20

Instead of focusing on the things of this world, Jesus encourages us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. What are heavenly treasures? Heavenly treasures can be many things. Some people see treasures in heaven as rewards for faithful service. God does indeed reward us for trustworthy service, but somehow, I think those rewards will not mean the same to us as they might to a worldly mind. Will we be focused on the fact that we have a bigger mansion or crown than our

neighbour? I suspect this attitude is rooted in pride and sin and will not be the attitude of heaven.

I think that the greatest treasure I could ever send up to heaven is the fruit of faithful labour that will bring honour to the Lord Jesus. What greater treasure could there be than knowing that my life lifted the name of my Savior? What greater joy could I have than understanding that my life brought Him glory? This, I think, will be my greatest treasure in heaven. No moths will eat this kind of treasure. No rust will tarnish this fruit, nor will any thief be able to take away what God has done through me.

Verse 21

The word Jesus uses here for treasure is θησαυρός (thēsaurós) which speaks of storing up something valuable. The

heart is the seat of our desires and passions. Jesus is telling us that we have a passion for what we value. To put it another way, the passion, focus and desire of our heart will be determined by what we choose to value in life.

If you value worldly wealth, then that will become the focus of your life and the passion of your heart. If you love what others think of you, this will determine how you live your life and what occupies your mind. If, on the other hand, the Lord is our treasure, other things will be put aside for Him and His purpose. The course of our life will be decided by what we determine to be of the greatest value. It is for this reason that we must carefully choose what is most important in our lives. All too many people have come to the end of their lives and realized that what they valued most in life was unworthy

of such attention, and what was of true worth escaped them.

Verse 22

Jesus explains what He means when He says in verse 21 that where our treasure is, so will be our heart. He explains this by using an illustration of the human eye.

Jesus tells us that the eye is the lamp of the body. Without the eye, the body would be enclosed in darkness. If the eye is healthy, however, we can see the beauty of what is around us.

The question we must ask here is this: What is a healthy spiritual eye? It is an eye that focuses on the light. Light in Scripture represents holiness and godliness. In other words, that eye that focuses on the things of God is healthy. This eye brings light and health to the

whole body. What we focus on in life will determine our spiritual health.

Consider the words of Paul to the Philippians when he wrote:

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. – Phl 4:8

Paul's advice here is that the believer learns to focus on those things that are true, honourable, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. If you want to be pure, set your eyes on what is pure. If you want your body to be filled with the light of Christ, then set your eyes on Him.

Verse 23

Continuing from verse 22, Jesus tells us that if our eye is bad, our whole body will be full of darkness. In other words, if we set our eyes on the deeds of darkness, this will affect the health of our whole body. If we focus on darkness, we will find our souls encased in darkness.

Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul quotes:

33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." – 1Co 15:33

The company we keep will influence how we live our lives. What we see around us in our everyday encounters with those who do not know the Lord can impact our thoughts and activities. Expressing this same thought to the Ephesians, Paul said:

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead

expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. – Ep 5:11-12

The apostle challenges the Ephesians to take no part in the works of darkness. He also reminds them that they were not to even speak of the things the ungodly do in secret. That is to say; they were not to fill their minds with the dark ungodliness of the unbeliever. What their eyes and ears took into their soul would influence the health of their soul. We cannot expect the light of Christ to shine brightly in us when we continue to let the darkness of the world and its ways fill our eyes and minds. The one who wants to know the fullness of Christ's light must not fill their life with the world's darkness. Believers must consciously determine to be disciplined in this matter. To do this, they must determine that what they treasure will be the light

of holiness, godliness and righteousness.

Verse 24

Jesus concludes this section with a reminder. "No one can serve two masters." He explains this by telling His listeners they could not "serve God and money."

Jesus began by telling us that where our treasure was, our hearts would also be. If our treasure is money, possessions and the things of this world, then it will take priority over God and His purpose in our life. You cannot make money and riches your top priority and serve God at the same time.

There can only be one true master. If God is our Master, then this world will take second place. When He is what we

treasure, we surrender all we have to Him. When He is what we focus our eyes upon, we no longer fix our eyes on deeds of darkness.

There is a decision we must make. If God is what we determine to treasure, then everything else must take second place.

Verse 25

Jesus moves on in His sermon to speak about anxiety. Notice how He focuses on two aspects of this anxiety.

The first focus of Jesus' reflection on anxiety is about our life. He defines this kind of anxiety as what we eat and drink. This relates to the very necessities of life. How will I get from today to tomorrow? He tells His listeners that they were not to be

concerned about this matter but to entrust their lives in God's hands.

The second type of anxiety Jesus discusses here is anxiety about the body. He defines this anxiety as concern about what clothes to put on. Anything can be used as clothing. Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves. The idea here seems to be not a lack of something to protect one's body but rather having something that would be pleasant to wear or something that one would be relatively proud to wear. While not a life-and-death issue, this type of anxiety is also very real for many people.

Jesus concludes the verse by stating that life is more than the food we eat and the type of clothes we wear.

Verse 26

Jesus speaks to those anxious about having food and proper clothes to wear. He points them to the birds of the air. Notice what Jesus says about these birds.

Birds do not sow seed nor reap a harvest they planted. That is to say, they don't plant gardens expecting to receive a crop at the end of the growing season. They eat what is available to them in nature with no planning ahead or concern for tomorrow.

Some animals gather seeds and food for the winter. This, however, is not the case for birds. They do not store a stock of food for the hard times when food is scarce. They eat whatever God provides and have no concern at all for tomorrow. Jesus reminds His listeners that these little birds continue to thrive because God provides for their every need.

He concludes this illustration with a simple question — “Are you not of more value than they?” If God cares so much for the birds of the field that He provides them with everything they need, will He not do so for His children, who are of even greater value to Him? This does not mean we can sit back and let God feed us and supply our every need and desire. The birds Jesus speaks about here busy themselves all day pursuing food. God expects us also to be engaged using strength and skills. He will, however, open doors of provision for all willing to trust Him and step out in hard-working faith.

Verse 27

Jesus shows us here the futility of anxiety.

*And which of you by being anxious
can add a single hour to his span of
life? – Mt 6:27*

A certain amount of anxiety is normal in our lives. The word Jesus uses for anxiety here is μεριμνάω (merimnáō). The word is defined as anxious care or giving thought to something. It is used to describe someone who cares for something or someone. This is something we need to do. The problem, however, is that we begin to believe that everything depends on us and forget that God is also involved in the matter. Instead of trusting God to care for our concerns, we take them on ourselves and find them to be more than we can handle, causing stress, trouble and a loss of peace.

Jesus tells us that all this anxiety will not add a single hour to our lifespan. When our anxiety gets to this point, it is not beneficial to us at all. It will only

distract us from knowing that God is in control and loves us more than the sparrows.

Some time ago, I felt overwhelmed with the requests for tens of thousands of dollars worth of free books. I sat down with a doctor friend and asked her how she dealt with the constant demand on her time. She told me how, on one occasion, she went to the Lord and told how she couldn't keep up with the demand. As she cried out to the Lord about this, He spoke to her heart and said that while she couldn't keep up with the demand, He still cared for those she couldn't see. Those words spoke to me. I realized that in my anxiety, I had lost sight of God's care for those I could not reach. He would look after those I could not. My anxiety accomplished nothing. It only blinded me to the work of God. Speaking to those who worried about their lives and what they were to eat, Jesus tells them

that if He provided for the birds of the air, He would certainly provide for them. Their anxiety and fretting only blinded them to God's loving care.

Verse 28

Jesus speaks next to those who were worried about what clothes they were to wear. He uses an illustration of the lilies of the field. He points out how beautiful those lilies were and how God clothed them with wonderful colours. These lilies were concerned about nothing. They received what God had to give them.

Verse 29

Jesus reminds those who were anxious about the clothes they were to wear that the lilies of the field were clothed with more beauty than Solomon with all his wealth. There is an awe-inspiring

beauty to how God clothes even the most insignificant plants that not even the most gifted clothing designer could ever imitate.

Verse 30

Jesus comes now to the application of His illustration of the lilies of the field. He tells listeners that God clothes the fields with grass and decorates them with lilies. Grass is here today and dead tomorrow. People walk on it, giving it no thought, yet it beautifies the naked earth.

The Lord then asks the question: "Will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Is the dirt of the ground more important than us? If God clothes the earth with grass and lilies, will He not also clothe us? Will he not take more interest in His children than the dust of the ground?

Verse 31

Verse 31 begins with the word, therefore, which links it to what Jesus taught in the previous verses. In these verses, He reminded us that His heavenly Father cares for the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field. He assures us that we are more valuable to God than these, and His Father will certainly care for us. For this reason, there is no cause for us to be anxious or troubled.

Verse 32

Jesus tells us that we should not become anxious about what we drink, eat or wear. He states two reasons for this here in this verse.

First, “the Gentiles sought after these things.” The Gentiles, in the mind of the Jewish nations, were those who were

separated from God and did not know Him. They were unbelievers. Jesus is telling His listeners that the unbeliever sought after the things of this world because they had no greater priority in life. This world was their treasure. The believer, on the other hand, had greater aspirations. The kingdom of God and His purpose were of far greater importance than this world. It was not in the heart of the true believer to become overly anxious about obtaining the things of this world.

The second reason why the believer was not to be anxious about food, drink and clothing was that they were in a relationship with the heavenly Father who knew all things. He was fully aware of their needs and would provide for them. They knew a relationship of love with God, and God had promised to care for them.

What is important to note here is that the focus of the believer is not on this world and its goods. Nor is it on their ability to meet their needs. The believer recognizes that all things come from God and considers Him the source of all things necessary and pleasant. This is not to say believers sit back and expect God to meet their every need. God is not their servant but their Lord. But He is a Lord who will care for His children. He will provide in many ways.

Sometimes that provision will come in the form of a job. At other times it will come as a gift. The believer recognizes God's provision, however, in every situation.

Jesus tells us that the heavenly Father knows our needs. Because we know Him as a compassionate and loving God, He will care for us in our times of trouble.

Verse 33

The challenge of Jesus to all believers is to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The kingdom of God is His rule in our hearts and lives. The believer is to submit to the reign of Christ in their heart. They must submit to the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of their lives.

Believers are also to seek "His righteousness." Notice here that while we are to submit the Lordship of Christ, it is not our righteousness that we are to pursue. The righteousness we must seek is the righteousness of God. In other words, our role is to surrender, and God works out the righteousness of God in us. He transforms the lives of those who submit to Him. His Holy Spirit works out the purpose of God in us. The righteousness of Jesus is applied to our lives, and we are restored to a right standing with God.

To seek God's kingdom and righteousness is to seek God and His transforming work. It is to submit and surrender to what He wants to do in and through us.

Notice also here that this is the first thing we seek. The word first can be seen in reference to time. In other words, it can be seen as what we do before everything else. The word can also be seen in terms of priority. That is to say that this is of the greatest importance in our lives and is at the top of our list of priorities. The kingdom of God and seeking the righteousness of God is to be the greatest priority in the life of the believer. This comes before food, drink and clothing and is our utmost passion and concern.

Jesus promises that if we are willing to make this matter of His kingdom and His righteousness our first priority, then

God will bless us with all we need. He will assure that those who love Him have all they need to live and serve Him to the honour and glory of His name. Our concern is to seek God, His kingdom and His righteousness. God's concern is to provide for us all we need to be faithful to that priority in our lives.

Verse 34

Jesus promises that the Father will care for those who seek His kingdom and righteousness. He challenges us, therefore, not to be anxious for tomorrow. The idea is for us to live in the present. Just as the manna in the wilderness came fresh each day, each day will bring its provision and blessing from God. We should wake in the morning excited to see the provision of the Lord for that day. We should be

grateful in the evening for the experience of His presence and care.

Jesus tells His listeners that tomorrow will be anxious for itself. The idea seems to be that this is not our concern today. We have no fears over tomorrow. We do not know what will come. It is fruitless to be anxious about tomorrow, for we can do nothing about it today. Our concern is for the moment and to enjoy the provision and blessing of the day. Tomorrow will bring new answers and conditions.

The Lord tells us here that one day's trouble is sufficient for us. We are to face each moment as it comes. We are to draw upon the grace of God for each minute. We address anxiety by living in the provision of the moment. Each breath is a gift. Each minute that passes brings its fresh supply of grace. This is our focus, the grace of God at the moment—the provision of God in

the hour of need. Tomorrow will bring
its fresh supply. The God who provides
for this day will not abandon me
tomorrow.

MATTHEW 7

Verse 1

Jesus begins a section here on judging others. He starts with a simple statement:

"Judge not, that you be not judged." – Mt 7:1

The word translated judge is κρίνω (krínō). It means to separate what is good from what is bad. It can also imply taking vengeance or taking it upon oneself to punish someone for harm they may have caused us. To understand what the Lord Jesus is saying here requires an understanding

of how the word κρίνω (krínō) is used in the New Testament.

Consider, for example, the words of Jesus in Luke 12:57-58:

57 "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. – Lk 12:57-58

In Luke 12, Jesus calls the people of His day to judge themselves as they go to court. In other words, before their case came to court, they were to settle their dispute with a brother or sister and reach a mutual agreement. This matter of judging or resolving disputes among believers was encouraged by Jesus.

In Acts 21:25, we read how the church sent a letter to the Gentile converts with a judgement or determination:

25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” – Ac 21:25

The church determined that these Gentiles were to abstain from food that had been sacrificed to idols, food that was strangled with its blood still in it, and also to abstain from sexual immorality. The word used here to refer to the judgement made by the church is the same word Jesus uses when He tells us not to judge. Jesus is not referring to a judgement or decision

made for the good of the church and the relationship between brothers or sisters in Christ.

Consider also the words of Paul in Romans 14:

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. – Ro 14:5

Notice how Paul tells us that one person esteems κρίνω (krínō) one day above another. The idea is that these individuals feel one day is more important and treat that day differently from all other days. The apostle encouraged respect for this type of judgement and called each individual to be convinced of their decision and to follow through with it. We must judge what is right and wrong for ourselves and our relationship with God.

There are times when we are called to make a judgment. What, then, does Jesus mean when He tells us that we are not to judge? The answer to this question is in the words, “that you be not judged.”

Jesus tells us that when we judge others, we place ourselves in the spotlight. We have no right to judge others if we are guilty of the same sin. This would be considered hypocrisy. What right do I have to determine that someone needs to be corrected for behaviour that I am guilty of practicing? Can I insist on the punishment of someone else and not include myself in that punishment?

Verse 2

The verse begins with the word “for,” indicating that it is connected to the

preceding verse. In verse 1, Jesus told His listeners that they were not to judge so they would not be judged. He explains this more fully here.

Our Lord teaches us that we will be judged on the same basis as we judge others. The same measure will be used to evaluate us. If we hold someone accountable for the words they use, we will be held liable to that same standard. We determine how others are to judge us by the standard we apply to them.

Verse 3

We often see an issue in someone else but fail to see that same issue in our own lives. Jesus illustrates this with an example of a man with a great log in his eye judging his brother, who has a speck in his.

What do you suppose the brother with the speck would say to the man judging him? Surely he would wonder why someone with such a large log in his eye would judge him with a speck. The man with the log forfeits all right to judge the man with the speck because his sin is even greater than the man he judges.

The call here is for us to examine ourselves and to be as critical of our sins as those of our brother.

Verse 4

Jesus takes this illustration of the log and the speck further here in verse 4. He speaks about the man with the log in his eye trying to help his brother to remove the speck from his eye.

Notice what the brother with the log in his eye says: "Let me take the speck

out of your eye.” Let me say a few things about this.

First, notice the man’s hypocrisy with the log in his eye. You can sense the judgemental spirit that requires his brother to remove the speck when he is unwilling to remove the log.

Second, how can I help a brother to have victory over a sin that I am not willing to deal with myself? How can a man who cannot swim teach another to swim?

Finally, Jesus is showing us that we must be more concerned about our sins than that of our brother or sister. We are accountable, first and foremost, for our failures and shortcomings. We must be more critical of ourselves than others.

Verse 5

Jesus speaks of the hypocrisy of he who demands that the speck be taken out of his brother's eye when he has a log in his.

Notice that Jesus tells this man with the log that he must first take the log out of his eye. That is to say, he must prioritize his sin and shortcomings. We cannot judge or help a brother or sister if we are overcome with sin.

Notice that Jesus speaks here of helping a brother take the speck out of his eye. He does not downplay the importance of helping each other but reminds us that we must not demand that a brother or sister do what we are unwilling to do ourselves.

We must understand that Jesus is not saying we must be perfect to help a brother or sister in their walk with God. If this were the case, we would never be able to help each other. Rather, he

condemns the hypocrisy of demanding one thing from a brother and another of ourselves. The apostle Paul spoke of this when he wrote:

21 you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? – Ro 2:21-22

What we demand of others, we must first demand of ourselves.

Verse 6

Jesus concludes this section with words that initially seem out of place for the context.

*6 "Do not give dogs what is holy,
and do not throw your pearls
before pigs" – Mt 7:6a*

Understand first that dogs were not kept as pets but roamed the streets eating garbage and whatever else they could find. The word "dog" came to represent a detestable person and was considered a great insult if someone called you a dog.

Pigs were, like dogs, unclean animals that loved to wallow in dirt. It was an animal that the Jews were forbidden to eat.

Jesus tells His listeners here that they were not to give what was holy to dogs. A dog would have no concept of what was holy or how to treat it. It is not in their nature to distinguish sacred from unholy.

There are people we will meet who are like this. They have no concept of holiness. Speaking to someone who does not have the mind of Christ about spiritual matters is, at times, a pointless exercise.

Jesus also speaks about throwing out pearls to pigs. Pigs would have no concept of the value of these pearls and trample them underfoot.

Jesus shows us that there are times when it is foolish to offer our gems of knowledge and insight to people who do not appreciate these things. When we do so, they trample these things underfoot or attack us. As Jesus shared the gospel's truth, many did that to Him. They did not appreciate the importance of His teaching and ultimately crucified Him on the cross. The disciples experienced the same thing.

What Jesus seems to be telling His listeners is that it is not always the right time to share the message of hope. The message will not impact those who are not ready to receive it. It will often make them angry to the point of attacking us. Only when the Lord prepares the heart can the message be appreciated and received joyfully.

There are times when it is best to keep our faith to ourselves, lest it turns people against us and hardens their hearts even more or causes them to blaspheme what we hold so dear.

Verse 7

This next section of Jesus' sermon teaches us about the will of the Father to listen to the prayers of his children to supply their needs. This context of father and child is seen in Christ's illustration in verses nine to eleven. The

context seems to imply that those asking have a loving relationship with God the Father.

The Lord uses three verbs in this verse—ask, seek and knock. Each of these verbs speaks of boldness, persistence and expectation.

Jesus tells us we are to ask the Father, and it will be given. It is often implied that we can ask for whatever we want, and God promises to provide for us. This, however, is not the intention of Jesus here. The focus is not on what we receive but on who we are to ask or where to go when in need. Jesus had already spoken about this when He taught about prayer. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus directed His disciples to pray:

11 Give us this day our daily bread – Mt 6:11

In other words, He encouraged His disciples to place their needs before God, seeking His provision. When we are in need, what do we do? We ask God. We turn to Him as the source of our supply and trust Him to meet our needs. The answer may not look like we expected, but we can be sure that He will give us what is best for us in that need.

Next, Jesus tells us to seek. To seek is to look for or to strive to find. There is here a sense of expectation. We don't pursue what we do not expect to find; that would be a waste of our time and effort. Those who ask seek to find that answer. They face the day looking for God's response to their asking. To seek implies having an open mind and heart. The answer may not be where we anticipate. It may not look like we expect. It may turn up in a surprising location. What is important in seeking is opening our eyes to see what is not

always obvious. We often miss the answer to our prayer because it didn't come from the usual source or through the normal channels. Seeking demands the faith to believe that God has heard our request and will answer. Jesus tells us that if we pursue this, God will open our eyes to see the answer.

Finally, Jesus tells us to knock, and the door will be opened. We are invited to walk right up to the door and knock. This knocking requires boldness and confidence. Jesus tells us that God will not ignore that knock. He will open up to us to hear our request. The fact is that there is more than enough blessing for each person who requests. The Lord has everything you need available upon request. He has assured you that you will have no need to be or accomplish all He has for you. He who has called you will also provide all you need. He has placed all this at your disposal. He

gives you permission to come and knock on His door.

I assure you that you will need to knock on heaven's door often. But that keeps us in touch with the Giver of all blessings. Every time we knock, we come face to face with the Giver. He wants to see you and hear of your need. He loves to give and supply what you require. He loves to fellowship and encourage you when He opens that door to hear from you. Knocking requires regular contact with the Lord, who answers that door. What is most amazing is that He never tires of hearing us knock.

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Verse 8

Jesus tells us that everyone who asks receives. If you seek the answer when you ask, He will ensure you find it. If you knock at His door, you can be assured that He will open up and hear your request.

Understand here that what we receive will be what we need. What we find may be unexpected. Be assured, however, that when the door is opened, God will lovingly hear our request.

Verse 9

Jesus has been telling His listeners that their heavenly Father will provide their needs as they ask, seek, and knock. To emphasize this point, he illustrates an earthly father and son. Speaking to the fathers and mothers in the crowd, he asks: "Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?"

These earthly parents knew that they would do what they could to care for their children and would look out for their best interests. If their son were hungry and came looking for bread, they would not give him a stone

instead. They would provide him with the nourishment needed.

The idea here is that God would certainly not show less concern for His children. He would give them what they needed.

Verse 10

Continuing his illustration from verse 9, Jesus uses an example of a son coming to a Father or mother to ask for some fish to eat. Would any Jewish parent give their child an unclean snake to eat instead? They would not defile their child by giving him unclean food. They would not give their child anything that would harm or risk their health or well-being.

Verse 11

Jesus explains that if sinful parents give good gifts to their children, how much more would God give good things to all who ask Him?

We can have confidence in the love of the Father for us as His children. Everything He does is for our good. He will hear our cries and knows exactly what we need. We can trust Him to answer our pleas for help. He is more concerned for us than those who love us most. His answers to our prayers may not be as expected, but they will always be for our good.

Verse 12

Self-love is one of the most powerful forms of love. We devote our lives to caring for our personal needs. We can become obsessed with our comfort. When we are hungry, we feed ourselves. When we are in pain, we will

do all we can to relieve that pain. That may be the reason why the Lord Jesus says that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbour as ourselves:

39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. – Mt 22:39

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus tells us that whatever we wish someone would do to us, we are to do to them. There are a few details we should consider here.

First, Jesus expresses this as an action. By using the word “do,” Jesus commands us. In other words, we are to actively pursue doing for others what we want them to do for us. We are to feed the hungry, care for the hurting, and comfort the weary and sorrowful.

Notice, secondly, the word “also.” The word kai (kaí) can mean, in addition to

or likewise. The idea is that, just as you love yourself, so love others. Just as you care for yourself, so care for your neighbour. This is important because it shows us that self-care or self-love is important. God expects us to care for ourselves. If you do not love yourself, what sense would Jesus' command to love your neighbour as yourself make to you?

It seems to me that the Lord Jesus is presenting a balanced approach to ministry. An empty vessel has nothing to give. We must be filled if we are to minister to others. We cannot provide out of emptiness, but we can give of our overflow. As we care for ourselves, we can give to others.

There is an imbalance when we care only for ourselves. Where there is no outlet to a pool of water, the water will become stagnant. Where there is no input into that pool, it will quickly drain.

Notice finally how Jesus tells us that doing for others as we would want them to do for us is what the Law and the Prophets spoke about. In other words, if we could love our neighbour as ourselves, we would fulfill the teaching of the Old Testament. The law of the Old Testament taught God's people how to care for and love their neighbour. The prophets revealed God's heart for their relationship with each other. These teachings are summarized by the words:

"Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them."

Verse 13

Jesus speaks here of a narrow and a wide gate. Notice what He tells us about these gates.

Jesus calls us to "enter by" the narrow gate. Jesus does not tell us specifically

what is on the other side of that gate. The second gate, unlike the first one, is wide. The path that leads to that wide gate is easy. We are told here what is behind this gate. It opens up to destruction. Jesus tells us that many people enter through that gate of destruction. There are a few points we need to make about these gates.

First, it is possible to discern what is behind the narrow gate from the context. Jesus tells us that the wide gate leads to destruction. The implication is that the narrow gate leads to victory and life. This is confirmed by Jesus telling us to enter this gate.

Second, note that the way to life and victory is narrow, but the path to destruction is wide. What are we to understand by the terms wide and narrow?

It is much easier to enter a wide gate. It is wide because many people enter through it. The wide gate is the popular choice. To enter it, you follow the crowd.

The narrow gate is not so popular. To enter, there are some sacrifices to make. You see, some things will not fit through that gate and have to be left behind.

The wide gate embraces many philosophies and religious ideologies. You can believe what you want. Everyone is welcome. On the other hand, the narrow gate requires that you confess one name only and that you trust in Him and His work alone. It involves the rejection of all other names, philosophies and religions. Not everyone is willing to make this commitment.

The gates, however, lead to two different destinations. One to life and victory in Jesus Christ. The other to destruction and eternal separation from Him.

Verse 14

While Jesus did not identify the narrow gate in verse 13, He is quite clear about it in verse 14. The narrow gate leads to life. By life, we need to understand eternal and spiritual life. This gate does not embrace the philosophies and religions of this world. Only those who confess Jesus Christ can enter this gate.

Notice that the way that leads to this gate is hard. There are sacrifices to make. There are crosses to bear. This world will not always accept us. There will be persecution and death to self. These sacrifices and difficulties are not

just to this gate. That is to say, we do not merit entrance into life because we suffer. Those who enter through that gate, however, will suffer persecution and mockery. The blessing of eternal life in the presence of Christ, however, is well worth the price.

Verse 15

In verses 15-20, Jesus warns His listeners about false prophets. He begins here by comparing them to wolves who come in sheep's clothing. The sheep is a mild and peaceful animal. Jesus spoke of Himself as a shepherd to His children, the sheep.

The wolf, on the other hand, is a wild animal that has never been domesticated. It intends to devour and eat the sheep. The wolf is a natural enemy of the sheep.

Jesus compares false prophets to “ravenous wolves” on the inside but gentle sheep on the outside. In other words, they are deceptive. They mix with the sheep, but they are not one of the sheep. Their teaching and practices will lead the sheep astray.

The word translated ravenous is ἀρπαξ (hárpax) which speaks of a plunderer, extortioner or robber. This kind of person cares nothing for their victim. They take what they want, like a wolf, without concern for the consequences.

Verse 16

Jesus tells His listeners they could recognize these false prophets by their fruit. He mentioned in verse 15 that they were “ravenous” or greedy plunderers. He gives us an example of a fruit-bearing tree to illustrate His point.

If you see grapes on a branch, you can be sure it is not a thornbush. If the plant produces figs, you can be sure it is not a thistle.

The idea here is that if an individual lives a godly life with holy intentions, we can generally assume they are from God. If, on the other hand, their lives and attitudes are ungodly, selfish, proud and unholy, we have reason to question whether they are from God.

Verse 17

A healthy tree will naturally bear good fruit. On the other hand, you can detect a diseased tree by the fruit it bears. There are some important implications to this teaching of Jesus. We often try to produce good fruit without dealing with the underlying condition. We offer courses on evangelizing or preaching a sermon but don't address the

underlying problem of a poor relationship with God or the sin that will always keep us from being effective. Jesus teaches that if we get our relationship with God right, the fruit will naturally follow.

Verse 18

If a tree is healthy, it will not produce bad fruit. It is the nature of a healthy tree to produce good fruit. In the same way, a diseased tree cannot produce good fruit. It may look good, but the fruit is bitter.

If you want to bear fruit for the Lord, don't concern yourself with the fruit but with the health of your relationship with the triune God. The fruit will be a natural result of your relationship with God. I have seen many people focus on producing fruit without first dealing

with their relationship with God. The result is bitter fruit.

Verse 19

Jesus tells us that if a tree does not bear good fruit, it is cut down and burned. Such a tree serves no purpose.

Understand that Jesus is telling us that if we are in a right relationship with Him, good fruit will be the natural result. God expects that we will bear fruit. A farmer, who plants a garden, hopes it will produce a crop. We who belong to the Lord Jesus are created to be lights in a dark world. If our lives do not shine in one way or another, we must ask ourselves why.

When Jesus tells us that any tree that does not bear fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire, the context refers to false prophets. These

individuals were not in a right relationship with God. They were deceitful and ravenous wolves intent on devouring the flock. Their lack of godly fruit exposed them as enemies to the sheep. Their bitter fruit revealed that they were unhealthy trees that needed removal because their disease could easily affect the remaining orchard.

Verse 20

Jesus concludes this section by reminding His listeners that they would recognize false prophets by the fruit they bore.

We need to be fruit examiners. The first fruit we need to examine is the fruit we bear personally. Does this fruit bring glory to the Lord God? Is it a reflection of His character? The fruit we speak about is not just success in ministry but

also the fruit of the Spirit. Do we demonstrate that the Spirit of God is at work in our lives?

Verse 21

Words do not make a follower of Jesus. It is relatively easy to call Jesus Lord, but not so easy to put that into practice, especially when it causes persecution and trials.

Jesus tells us that not everyone who calls him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. To enter the kingdom of heaven is to know and experience the salvation Jesus offers.

I have been in meetings where a seeker is told to pray a prayer and then is declared to be a Christian. Salvation is quite simple, but it is not a matter of what I say to God but rather a miracle that He works in me. You can say,

Lord, I accept you, but if God does not transform your heart, of what value are those words?

What is the real test of our salvation? It is in the change that takes place in our lives. It is the work of God's Spirit in us that moves us to walk in obedience to God and in tune with His purpose.

Jesus tells us that the one who will enter the kingdom of heaven is the one who does the will of the Father.

To do the will of the Father is not just a simple matter of going to church on Sunday. What Jesus is saying is much deeper than this. To do the will of the Father is to be in submission to Him and His purpose in every part of our life. It is the will of the Father that we accept the work of His Son on our behalf. It is the will of the Father that we submit to the work of His Spirit in our lives. The implication is that our hearts, minds, attitudes, actions and thoughts are all offered to Him. He is

not just Lord in word but in deed,
thought and attitude.

Verse 22

Jesus speaks here about a day when individuals stand before Him to be judged. Notice what Jesus tells us about that day of judgment.

First, Jesus tells us that “many” will say to Him, “Lord, Lord.” The word Lord indicates that they followed Jesus and served Him. This was their firm belief. The implication, however, is that while many came speaking these words, not all of them would enter the kingdom of heaven (see verse 21).

Second, notice their justification for speaking these words:

*Did we not prophesy in your name,
and cast out demons in your name,*

and do many mighty works in your name?

The individuals who stand before Jesus here did many good works. These works were religious and ministered to the needs of their neighbours. They prophesied, cast out demons and did miraculous works in the name of Jesus. Not only did these individuals practice these things, but the implication was that they experienced a measure of success.

Consider what is happening here. These people stand before the Lord God on the day of judgment. As they stand before Him seeking entrance into eternal life in His presence, they declare they should be granted access because of their mighty deeds in His name. They tell Jesus they are worthy of heaven because they did all these wonderful things.

We are left wondering where the work of Jesus comes into play. If entrance into the kingdom of heaven is based on how successful we have been in ministry and service of the Lord, what will be the fate of those who have not had such success? Jesus answers this question in the next verse.

Verse 23

Notice what the Lord Jesus tells those who stand before Him, declaring that they have prophesied, cast out demons and did miraculous works in His name.

First, He tells them that He never knew them. Jesus is not telling these individuals that He did not know who they were. Nor is He telling them that He did not see what they were doing. To know, in this sense, is to connect with these individuals. Jesus is telling them that they were not His children

and that though they ministered in His name, they did not belong to Him.

There is a serious warning to us all here in this verse. We can serve the Lord and not belong to Him. We can have a successful ministry in His name and not have a home in heaven. It is possible to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are Christians when we have never truly experienced the salvation He offers. You can join a church, be determined to live as a Christian and even serve the Lord and never experience the new birth. Not everyone who serves Jesus knows Him. Not everyone who declares Him to be Lord has experienced new life.

Jesus tells those who have served Him here to depart from Him because He did not know them. That is to say, they were not His children.

Notice also how He calls them “workers of lawlessness.” Lawlessness refers to those who do not submit to any law. These individuals do as they please without regard to regulations or societal standards. In this case, the people concerned, though they declared Jesus as Lord, did not submit to Him and His purpose. They did as they pleased but not what He required. He had not called them to cast out demons, prophesy and do miraculous deeds, but they did so anyway. As they stand before the Lord Jesus on the day of judgement, declaring that they did what He had not asked them to do, they seal their fate.

Verse 24

As Jesus concludes His sermon, He has a word of warning for all who listen. He compares those who hear his words to

a wise man who built his house on a rock.

The word Jesus uses here ἀκούω (akoúō) has the sense of listening with the ear but also paying attention. Jesus knew that many would listen to His words but not put them into practice. These individuals, according to Jesus, did not hear what He had to say. Hearing in the sense that Jesus uses it involves hearing the words but also applying them to one's life.

According to Jesus, the person who paid attention to what He said and applied it to their life was like a wise man who built his house on a solid foundation.

Verse 25

Jesus has been speaking about those who apply His teaching to their lives.

He told us in the last verse that those who did so built their lives on a solid foundation.

The reason it is important to build one's life on a solid foundation was that storms were inevitable. The rain will fall on our sunny days. The floods will rise, and the winds will blow and beat against our house. Notice that Jesus speaks about those who hear His teaching. He tells us even if we live as He instructed, we will still suffer in this world. In a sin-cursed world, pain, death and suffering are guaranteed. Not even the righteous can avoid these trials.

Jesus tells His listeners, however, that His instructions would help them through those storms of life. His words would give hope and comfort. They would show all who listened to them how to respond when life dealt its blows. Just as a house with a firm foundation will withstand the storm, so

it is with those who listen to Christ and walk in His purpose.

Verse 26

Next, our Lord compares those who did not listen to and apply His words to a man who built his house on the sand. Sand is unstable. When waters rise and flood over the sand, it moves, and whatever is built on it crumbles.

Many unbelievers do not concern themselves with the principles Jesus teaches in His sermon. They live in luxury and comfort. They end their lives basking in riches and human glory. They seem to have all the security they need in life. Their money and prosperity provide them with everything they need. Are these lives built on sand? Jesus assures us that they are. Their money and possessions will not buy them eternal life. Their influence will not spare them on the day of

judgment. They will stand before a holy God to account for their lives, and no one will defend them on that day. All their riches, glory, and influence will count for nothing when they stand before their celestial Judge.

Verse 27

The rains will fall on the unbeliever as well. The floods of affliction will rise, and the wind will blow against them. No one will be spared from pain in this life.

Jesus tells us that those who do not listen to His teaching and apply His instructions to their lives will ultimately fall. Consider the words of the Psalmist in this regard:

4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; 6 for the LORD knows

the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. – Ps 1:4-6

According to the psalmist, “the way of the wicked will perish.” They will be driven away like chaff in the wind. They will not stand in judgment.

The Words of Christ, the Scriptures, have been given for our instruction and guidance. The believer will choose to live their life following the teaching of these Scriptures.

If I am honest with myself, there are some things in Scripture that I do not understand. It is not that I do not understand the words, but rather that I do not know why God wants things to be done this way. In these situations, I have a choice to make. Will I choose to do what I think is right, or will I follow what I see written in the Scriptures? Will I try to reinterpret what seems clear to justify my thinking, or will I

accept what is before me at face value?
I choose to do what God says in
Scripture rather than what I prefer or
think. I choose to submit to Him and
His Word whether I agree with or
understand Him.

Jesus reminds us here that there is no
ultimate hope for us apart from the
truth of Scripture. God has a purpose
for our lives laid out in those Scriptures.
If we want to know the fullness of life
and security in Him, we will take those
Scriptures seriously. As we walk in
them, we experience His blessing. If we
wander from them, we distance
ourselves from Him and His purpose.

Verse 28

Notice the response of the people who
heard Jesus' sermon that day. They
were astonished. The word astonished
is ἐκπλήσσω (ekpléssō). It comes from

the word *pl?ss?*, meaning to strike. Imagine a boxer knocking out his opponent with a serious blow to the head. This is the sense of the word used here. It was as if they were knocked senseless by the word Jesus taught. Jesus' message had an impact.

Verse 29

Notice the reason people were astonished at the teaching of Jesus. He taught "as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." The word authority is *ἐξουσία* (*exousía*). The word is derived from *éxesti*, which refers to permission or right. The remainder of the term implies power or might. The idea is that Jesus had the absolute right and approval of God to speak words filled with power or words that demanded attention and a response. As Jesus preached, it was as

if God stood before the people and uttered His commands.

Notice that the people could not help but compare the words of Jesus here to those of their teachers. Their religious leaders did not speak with such authority. These scribes taught the Scriptures and the law of God, but there was no power in what they said. They often spoke the right words, but unlike Jesus, the presence of God did not seem to be in their teaching.

The right words are important, but the authority and power of God must also accompany those words if they are to have any impact or life-changing effect. The truth of the Word, delivered in the power of the Spirit, can be life-transforming for those who hear it.

MATTHEW 8

Verse 1

Having completed His sermon on the mountain, Jesus descended with the crowds following closely behind. In most churches of our day, when the sermon is over, we go home. This is not what is happening here. The crowd could not get enough of Jesus and His teaching. They followed after Him, hoping to hear more or experience his healing touch in their lives. We can only imagine how tiring this would have been for Jesus in those days.

Verse 2

As they descended the mountain, a leper approached and knelt before Jesus. There are three details we should see here.

First, notice the boldness of the leper in approaching Jesus. The law of Moses stated that such an individual was to wear tattered clothing, cover his mouth and declare he was unclean.

45 "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' – Lev 13:45

Despite these restrictions, the leper does not hesitate to reach out to Jesus.

Second, notice that the leper “knelt before Him saying, Lord.” By kneeling and calling Jesus Lord, the leper recognizes He is His superior.

Finally, observe the leper's faith in the words, "if you will, you can make me clean." The words "if you will" show us the man's humility. He does not demand a miracle but casts himself upon the mercy of the Lord.

Verse 3

The leper does not demand a miracle from Jesus. He leaves his request with him and trusts Jesus to respond and do what is right. Jesus responds by doing two things.

First, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. This would not be the response of anyone else in that place. The last thing they would want to do would be to touch a leper. Jesus did not have such a fear. While He did not need to do so to heal, Jesus touched this unclean leper. That touch healed and conveyed acceptance and love,

something this leper had not likely experienced in a long time.

Second, notice the words of Jesus, "I will, be clean." the words "I will" speak to the statement of the leper to Jesus when he said, "if you will, you can make me clean." Jesus conveys his desire to make this leper clean. These are the words of Jesus to all who will come to Him for cleansing. He desires to make us clean.

Verse 4

After healing the leper, Jesus gave him two commands.

First, he was not to tell anyone about this healing. It is uncertain where the crowd was at this time. Had they seen this miracle, the news would have quickly spread.

It may have been that the reason for this command was because of the

crowd. They had placed huge demands on Jesus and gave Him no quiet. Could it be that Jesus needed rest from the demands of the people? While there were many needs, Jesus would not let the crowd determine His ministry. He was accountable to the Father alone. It is too easy for people to tell us how we should minister. They present their needs, demand we minister to those needs, and we feel obligated to do whatever these needy people ask us to do. I confess I have often fallen into this trap.

Second, Jesus told the leper to bring an offering to the priest according to the law of Moses so that he could be declared clean. By following this law, the leper confirmed his healing, gave thanks to God and was legally permitted to return to normal life again.

Verse 5

In Capernaum, Jesus encountered a centurion. A centurion was a commander of 100 Roman soldiers. In these days, the Romans held Israel in submission. This Roman military commander was an important official but represented the enemy of Israel. It was this enemy soldier who came to Jesus that day. Notice that he came "appealing to Him." This indicates that while he was an enemy of the Jews, he had likely heard of the miracles of Jesus. He approached seeking one of those miracles from Him.

Verse 6

Notice the centurion's request here. He came pleading with Jesus to heal his servant, who was paralyzed.

The centurion calls Jesus Lord, indicating a certain level of respect for Him. He also asked Jesus for the

healing of his servant, suggesting that he understood that Jesus could perform miracles.

The fact that the centurion came seeking the healing of his servant shows us that either this centurion was a very compassionate man or this servant was very important to him.

The commander gives Jesus three details about his servant. First, he was "lying paralyzed." In other words, he could not move from his lying position. This would have rendered him useless to his master.

Second, the servant was at home. The centurion did not bring him to Jesus.

Third, he told Jesus that his servant was "suffering terribly." As a commander, he was aware of his pain and came to Jesus seeking relief.

Verse 7

Notice the response of Jesus to this centurion. "I will come and heal him." Jesus has compassion for this Roman commander. Remember that these Romans often treated the Israelites cruelly. They had invaded their territory and were holding the people of Israel subject to their laws and authority. Jesus, however, does not turn this soldier away. He is willing to go with him to his home to heal his paralyzed servant.

Jesus does see people here as Jews and Gentiles, rich or slave. He showed compassion even for the enemy of Israel. All who sincerely came to Him, He heard their request. He shows us what our response ought to be toward our enemies.

Verse 8

While Jesus was willing to go to the centurion's home to heal his servant, the centurion felt unworthy of this favour and replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."

This response suggests how the centurion felt toward Jesus. As important as his position was, this Roman commander saw Jesus as much more important than himself. He understood Jesus to be a holy man and may have felt his shortcomings and sin deeply.

Instead, the commander suggests that Jesus speak a word, and his servant would be healed. He understood something about the authority of Jesus over sickness and disease. He knew Jesus did not have to touch or see his servant to heal him. Jesus could push back the force of evil and sin through the word of His mouth.

Verse 9

The centurion understood the concept of authority. He was a man who had been given authority over one hundred soldiers. He could tell a soldier to go somewhere, and that soldier would be obliged to obey his command. If he commanded another to come to him, that soldier would come without question. Whatever the centurion commanded his soldiers to do, they would do it even if it cost them their lives.

This Roman commander saw Jesus in the same way. While the centurion had authority over men, the authority of Jesus extended to sin, sickness and disease. If Jesus commanded an illness to leave, that sickness was forced to leave.

The other aspect is that the centurion did not need to be present with his

men to issue a command. He could write and send that command, and his men would obey. Likewise, Jesus did not need to be present with his servant to heal him. He could issue that command for the paralysis to go, and it would be done. The authority and power of Jesus were over all sickness and disease.

Verse 10

Having heard the centurion's words, Matthew tells us that Jesus marvelled. The term, marvelled is θαυμάζω (thaumázō). It speaks of admiration or astonishment. The faith of the centurion was not common. It demonstrated a level of understanding that was above the ordinary. It gained the respect of Jesus, and He responded: "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."

This verse challenges our understanding of Jesus in a couple of ways. First, is it possible for us to gain the admiration of Jesus? Is it possible for Jesus to marvel at our faith and service? Matthew seems to tell us here that it is possible.

The second challenge here is that marvelling at anything demands an element of surprise. We do not marvel at what we expect. Is it possible that Jesus was surprised by the response of the centurion? To what extent does Jesus use all of His divine attributes? To answer this, let me quote the words of Jesus Himself.

19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows

him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.
– Jn 5:19-20

Jesus tells us that He could do nothing on His own. As a man, He completely depended on God and what He revealed to Him. He lived as He expects us to live. Jesus served as a man dependent on God. He needed the Father to show Him what He was doing. I suppose that when the Father did reveal these things to Jesus, Jesus marvelled at what the Father showed Him.

Verse 11

Notice how this incident with the centurion causes Jesus to speak about the international nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus tells us that many people will come from the east and the west

and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. The reference to the east and the west refers to people of other nations like this Roman centurion. Believing Jews and Gentiles would sit together as brothers and sisters in the kingdom of heaven.

This would have been quite radical for the Jews of the day to hear as they saw themselves as being the people of God and could not imagine sitting at a table with a pagan Gentile.

Verse 12

Jesus tells those who came to him that day that people from many nations would sit at a table in the kingdom of God, but “the sons of the kingdom” would not be among them. The Jews were sons of the kingdom. They had, however, rejected Jesus as

the Messiah and, according to Jesus, would end up in “outer darkness.”

Jesus tells us that this place of outer darkness would be a place of horrible suffering, described as “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The place to which Jesus refers is hell. What Jesus is telling those who listened to Him that day is that being a Jew was not sufficient to keep one from hell. Anyone who rejected Him and His offer of salvation would be eternally separated from God and under His judgment.

Verse 13

Getting back to the centurion, Jesus dismisses him telling him that his request would be granted just as he believed it would. His faith had moved Jesus to respond. Jesus did not go to the centurion’s home, but his servant

was healed when Jesus told him his request was granted.

The Roman soldier and enemy to the Jews would become an example of genuine faith. Jesus used his faith to declare that faith not nationality was the key to entering the kingdom of God.

Verse 14

Mathew tells us here that Jesus came to the home of Peter's mother-in-law. This means that Peter was a married man. We know nothing about his wife or whether he had any children. We can, however, imagine that Peter's time travelling with the Lord would not always have been easy on him and his wife.

Matthew tells us that Jesus found that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a

high fever. We are not told if this was why Jesus went to her home.

Verse 15

Seeing her ill, Jesus went over to her and touched her hand. That simple touch was sufficient to heal her sickness. In the case of the centurion's servant, Jesus did not go to the home where the servant lay sick. Here He takes the time to visit Peter's mother-in-law.

Notice her response to her healing. She rose and served Jesus. The word served is διακονέω (diakonéō) which means to serve or to wait upon. In this case, it could be as simple as preparing a meal for Jesus. She expressed her gratitude by serving Jesus and ministering to His physical needs.

Verse 16

Matthew tells us that after healing Peter's mother-in-law, the people of the community brought "many who were oppressed by demons" to Jesus. We see here that demons can oppress people. The word δαιμονίζομαι (daimonízomai) is derived from the word daímōn (demon). The idea here is to be under the power of a demon. That is to say, a demonic force controls some aspect of an individual's life. This may be physical, emotional or spiritual.

What is important to understand from this verse is that when those oppressed by demons were brought to Jesus, He cast them out. The phrase "cast out the demons" teaches us that these demons resided in the lives of the individuals they oppressed. Understand that, unlike God, who is everywhere present, demons can only be in one place at a time. By casting them out, Jesus

removed their presence and authority over that individual, releasing them from the oppression they caused.

Matthew tells us that Jesus released these individuals from demonic oppression with "a word." The idea here is that, with a word from the Lord Jesus, these demons were forced to leave the individual.

While demons oppose the Lord Jesus and the work of His kingdom, they have no right or authority over Him. With a simple word from the Lord, they are obliged to obey. They fear His presence and "respect" His authority.

During that evening, Jesus also healed those who were sick. Perhaps some of those present were sick due to the work of these demons. We should not, however, attribute all sickness to the work of evil spirits. There are many other causes of illness in this world.

Verse 17

Matthew tells us that the healing of the sick and the casting out of demons was a fulfillment of prophecy. He quotes from Isaiah 53:4:

*4 Surely he has borne our
griefs and carried our sorrows; yet
we esteemed him stricken, smitten
by God, and afflicted. – Isa 53:4*

Note what Matthew is telling us here. Jesus took our illnesses and bore our diseases.

There are two ways to understand what Matthew and Isaiah are saying here. First, Jesus experienced sickness and disease in His body while living on this earth as a man. While there is no indication in Scripture that Jesus was ever sick or contracted an illness of any kind, it is a possibility. He certainly felt

the pain of the nails in His hands for you and me.

Second, when Matthew and Isaiah tell us that Jesus took our sins and bore our diseases, they refer to what He did on the cross.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, this earth and all of humanity fell under the curse of sin. Genesis 3:16-19 describes the effect of this curse on humanity and the physical universe. Eve would experience pain in childbearing (Genesis 3:16). Her desire would be contrary to her husband (Genesis 3:16). The ground was cursed so that its ability to grow was hindered (Genesis 3:17). Adam would toil in pain to bring fruit from the soil (Genesis 3:19). Ultimately, Adam and Eve would die and return to the ground from which they were made (Genesis 3:19).

Pain and suffering were the results of sin on this earth. Isaiah prophesied that

the Messiah would experience this pain and suffering. Jesus experienced the consequences of sin even though He never sinned.

Beyond this, however, Jesus bore our sickness and disease on the cross. He died not only to pardon our sins but also to conquer the curse of sin in our lives and society. The power of the cross pushes back the forces of darkness. It sets the soul free from God's judgement and releases them to love and minister the love of Christ in this world. It also pushes back the oppression of demonic forces and can free us from the curse of sickness and disease. No matter where we fall doctrinally, we all have to admit that the Lord Jesus has power over every aspect of sin, whether spiritual, emotional or physical. The cross of Jesus Christ breaks every part of the curse of sin.

Verse 18

Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw a crowd gathering, he “gave orders to go to the other side.” Notice a couple of details here.

Jesus was not governed by what the crowds said. Nor did he allow needs to determine His course of action. The group gathered was filled with evil spirits, lost souls, and disease. People were hurting and dying. Jesus knew all about this but chose to walk away.

I suppose He could have waved His hand over the whole lot of them and healed them, but that was not the purpose of the Father. We miss out on the will of God if we allow the need to direct our lives. There will always be people who tell us what we should do. There will always be hurt, sickness and lack. We will soon find ourselves overwhelmed if we listen to every one

of these voices. There is one voice we need to hear above all these cries for help. The Lord God alone is to direct our path. When He tells us to walk away and go to the other side, we must do so. God knows what He wants to do and who He wants to heal. He will reveal this to us if we seek His purpose.

When Jesus speaks about going to the other side, He refers to crossing the lake (possibly the Sea of Galilee). While this would have removed Jesus from the crowds, it would present Him with other ministry opportunities.

Verse 19

Before Jesus could get into a boat to cross to the other side of the lake, a scribe asked to follow Him. The scribes spent their time copying, interpreting and teaching the law. They were

experts in this field and would be consulted when issues needed to be applied in specific cases. They could be described as religious lawyers.

The fact that this scribe asked to follow Jesus wherever He went shows that he had a particular interest in the teaching of Jesus. He was willing to give up his lifestyle to learn from Him.

Verse 20

Notice the response of Jesus to the scribe who told Him that he would follow Him wherever He went.

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." – Mt 8:20

The Lord reminds the scribe that the lifestyle he was considering was not an

easy one. Jesus had no home. He had no resources to stay in a hotel everywhere he went. How eager we are to accept everyone into our fellowship. We have no record of this scribe following through on this desire to follow Jesus everywhere He went. Jesus was not interested in having a large following. His goal was not to gather many disciples to follow Him wherever He went. He was content with what the Father gave Him and sought to mature them in their faith and walk. Could it be that in our great zeal to increase the size of our church, we are allowing people to join us that will only hinder the work God has called us to do?

Verse 21

Before Jesus crossed the sea, one of His disciples asked, "Lord, let me first

go and bury my father.” Let me say a few things about this.

Notice the words “another of His disciples.” The term disciple means a follower. We do not know the identity of this man. Nor can we assume that He was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

This disciple asks Jesus to let him bury his father. Our immediate assumption is that the man’s father had just died, and he needed a couple of days to prepare for the funeral. There are a couple of points we need to consider here.

First, while a burial was performed soon after a person died, there was a period of mourning that could last months.

Second, we have no indication that this man’s father had died. Had that been the case, he would not likely have been

with Jesus at this moment but home preparing the funeral. If this is the case, this disciple told Jesus that his father was near the end of his life and needed his attention. He would follow Jesus when his father had passed away and everything had been settled.

Verse 22

Jesus' response to His disciple may seem harsh: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." This needs some consideration.

Jesus' words are confusing. He told this disciple to let the dead bury their own dead. This is physically impossible. How can a dead person bury another dead person?

To understand this statement of Jesus, we need to see that there is more than one way to be dead. We know physical

death, but there is also a spiritual death. Those who are spiritually dead have never experienced new life in Christ. The Spirit of God does not indwell these individuals. They are insensitive to the things of God. What Jesus seems to be telling this disciple is that he was to let his unbelieving relatives bury his father. They would take care of the funeral and its arrangements. As for him, he was to make following Jesus his priority.

Notice again the phrase, "let the dead bury their own dead." This leads us to believe that the disciple's father was also an unbeliever. He is included with the spiritually dead by this phrase "their own dead." He belonged to those who were dead spiritually and identified with their unbelief.

There is a time for family. Jesus does not diminish the importance of this calling. There is also, however, a time when the call of God will take us from

our families. What is important is that we be sensitive to the leading of the Lord in this matter.

Verse 23

Leaving the crowd behind, Jesus got into a boat to cross the lake to the other side. There were still many needs on that side of the lake, but Jesus left the people in their condition and left for the other shore. We are not told what Jesus left the crowds. Notice, however, the response of the disciples – they followed Jesus.

This is the call of God on our lives as well. We are to follow Jesus. The crowd will have its idea of what we should do, but we are not called to follow the crowd. When Jesus left that crowd in its need, the disciples did likewise.

Verse 24

Following Jesus does not mean that everything will go smoothly for us. When the disciples got in the boat with Jesus, a storm arose on the sea. There will be many storms for those who choose obedience to the Master. In this case, the waves came up over the boat and threatened to sink it. I have experienced times similar to this when I felt overwhelmed and confused.

Notice what Matthew tells us about Jesus here – He was asleep. This shows us just how exhausted He was physically. His ministry and the demands of the crowd had taken much from Him.

Consider this, however, from the perspective of the disciples. They were in a crisis, but Jesus was asleep. They feared for their lives, but Jesus lay quietly in the boat, seemingly oblivious to what they were facing. Have you ever felt what those disciples felt,

wondering where the Lord was as you battled the waves alone?

Verse 25

The disciples got in the boat with Jesus, but as they crossed the lake, a great storm threatened to sink the ship. Jesus was asleep and, in their mind, didn't seem aware of their predicament. The disciples decided to wake Him from His sleep. Notice what they say to Him — "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." The disciple's words show us two things.

First, the disciples recognized that there was only one hope for them in this great storm. The Lord Jesus alone could save them from the danger that lurked in the waves that evening.

Second, the disciples were not afraid to call on the Lord at this time. Remember

that He was asleep and this would have inconvenienced Him.

One day parents brought their children to Jesus to have Him lay hands on them and pray. Listen to the encounter that took place that day as recorded by Matthew:

13 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, 14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." – Mt 19:13-14

When these parents brought their children, the disciples rebuked them. Jesus was a busy man, and there were great needs. Notice, however, that He still had time for these children.

In the verse we are considering, Jesus was tired from a busy day. His body

was so exhausted that even the storm did not wake Him out of His sleep. The disciples dared to wake Him.

I have met many people who do not want to bring their requests to Jesus. It is as if their requests are not important enough. Or as if there was a limited supply of grace that had to be carefully rationed out. The verse challenges us to come boldly to the Lord, even to disturb Him with our requests.

Verse 26

When the disciples woke the Lord Jesus from His sleep, He rebuked them for their fear and lack of faith.

Notice how fear and lack of faith are connected here. Their lack of faith brought on fear. Consider this for a moment. Jesus, the Son of God, was in the boat. He slept peacefully, confident of His father's care despite the storm.

The disciples, on the other hand, are terrified for their lives. These men had gotten in the boat with Jesus, but even with Him there, they feared. Shall we fear when Jesus walks with us? Shall we be overcome when the Lord is our Protector and Guide? Shouldn't His presence drive away all fear and doubt? Will He not provide for us, protect us and keep us in the hour of our need? Somehow the disciples lost this assurance.

As they contemplated those words, the Lord Jesus rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm again. Our victory is but a word away. Yet we doubt that Jesus will care for us. We forget who walks beside us in our moments of chaos.

Verse 27

Notice the response of the disciples when the Lord rebuked the wind and the sea. Matthew tells us that they marvelled. The word used here for marvelled is θαυμάζω (thaumázō) means that they were struck with awe, wonder and admiration. Notice what particularly amazed them – “even winds and sea obey him?” That miracle of Jesus gave the disciples a new respect for the Lord Jesus and the power of God in Him.

Verse 28

Jesus and His disciples crossed the lake to the country of the Gadarenes. Here in this region, they encountered two demon-possessed men. Notice what Matthew tells us about these men.

First, they came out to meet Jesus and His disciples. Being demon-possessed, we can assume that the intention of these men was not peaceful.

Second, these men were so fierce that “no one could pass that way.” The idea is that these men were violent and would likely attack anyone who passed through this territory.

The disciples of Jesus did not know what was ahead of them when they got in that boat with Jesus. That boat took them through a violent storm that seemed to threaten their lives. Now it brought them face to face with these fierce men. Following Jesus will not be easy. At times it will take us to the very front of the battle.

There is something else worth mentioning here. Jesus left the crowd on the other side of the lake with all their need to cross over to the country of the Gadarenes, where he would encounter these two men. This encounter was not a coincidence. It was the leading of the Father. These

men needed attention and healing. It was the will of God to bring that healing. God has a very specific purpose, and Jesus was following that purpose.

Verse 29

Notice several details here about the demons in these two men that came to meet Jesus and His disciples.

First, “they cried out.” The demons spoke. Likely using the voice of these men, the demons spoke directly to Jesus. This shows us that these demons had control of these men and could use their voices to communicate their evil words and intentions.

Second, note what these demons said to Jesus —“What have you to do with us.” This is as much a statement of fact as it is a question. These demons were

opposed to Christ and all he stood for. There is no partnership between darkness and light, nor is there any relationship between Christ and the demonic.

Understand, however, that there may also be, in this question, a serious inquiry by the demons about what Christ's intentions were in coming to meet them.

Third, these demons recognized who Jesus was in the words, "O Son of God." There is something very important in this declaration. It is one thing for the disciples, who were followers of Jesus, to confess Him as the Son of God, but quite another for the demonic forces of hell to make this same declaration. There is no question in the minds of these demons that Jesus was the Son of God. We can be sure of His identity when even His

greatest enemies declare Him to be the Son of God.

Finally, consider the words, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Notice particularly the reference to time. These demons recognized that the time was coming when they would be tormented. They knew that the Lord Jesus would conquer them, and they would suffer forever under His wrath. We often think of hell as where the devil and his angels rejoice in evil delight, but this is not the case. They will be tormented in the pit of hell forever.

Another detail we need to examine here is the phrase "before the time." Satan and his demonic allies have been allotted a certain amount of time. They have gone out into the world to deceive and oppress, but their time is limited. The day is coming when the Lord Jesus will step in and stop

their efforts. They will be cast forever into the pit of hell where their influence will no longer be felt.

Verse 30

Matthew tells us that there was a herd of pigs feeding in this region. The question we must ask here is why there was a herd of pigs in the area. The Jews were not permitted to eat this unclean animal. There are two possible answers to this question.

First, the region has a population of Gentiles. It could be that these Gentiles, who were not under the Law of Moses, were raising these pigs.

Second, it may be that the Jews, while they did not eat the flesh of pigs, did not hesitate to raise them to sell to Gentiles for profit.

Verse 31

The demons who possessed the two men understood that Jesus might cast them out. Notice how they begged Jesus to send them into the herd of pigs. Why would these demons want to be cast into the herd of pigs, and why did Jesus permit this?

To answer this question, consider that these pigs were the people's livelihood. By inhabiting them, the demons would have one last shot at the Gadara. If they could not terrify the people through these two men they possessed, they would have their will with their means of income. Matthew will describe how this final attack of the demons would cause the people to push Jesus out of their country (see verse 34).

If Jews were selling these pigs for profit, Jesus may have permitted the demons to possess them so He could

display the displeasure of the Father in what they were doing.

Verse 32

Jesus gave His permission for the demons to possess the pigs. Notice that these demons were subject to Christ. They could not possess these pigs without the consent of Jesus.

In obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus, the demons left these two men and went into the pigs. Notice the result. The whole herd rushed down a steep embankment and drowned in the water.

We are not told how many pigs were in that herd, but it represented a significant amount of money and a great loss to the owners. A large industry in that community was devastated. We can only imagine the

response of the people to this loss. This is likely what the demons intended.

Verse 33

Matthew tells us that there were “herdsmen” present when the pigs ran down the steep embankment and drowned. It is hard to imagine what the response of these herdsmen would have been. There would have been clear evidence of a demonic presence as they watched what they had never seen before – a herd of pigs plunging to their death.

Matthew tells us, however, that these herdsmen also saw the men who had been set free from these demons. When they went into the town, they told the townspeople what had happened, but Matthew tells us that they particularly mentioned the demon-

possessed men and how they had been set free from their possession.

There is a connection in the minds of the herders between the demons leaving the men and the destruction of their herd. This, of course, would not have endeared the men to the townsfolk. It would also raise the question of how these men were freed from their demons. Ultimately, it was discovered that Jesus was in the region and had healed them.

Verse 34

The result of this exorcism was that the whole city came out to meet Jesus. Notice how they begged Him to leave their region. There would be no ministry to any more people in that city. They didn't want to listen to Jesus or what He had to say. They saw Him as being responsible for the loss of their

income. While it may seem that the demons won that battle, remember that two men were freed from their oppression. It was for them that the Lord came. He accomplished everything the Father had asked him to complete. While He was asked to leave, His mission had been a complete success.

MATTHEW 9

Verse 1

When the Gadarenes begged Him to leave, Jesus boarded the boat again and crossed to "His own city." To what city is Matthew referring here? It is generally agreed that the words "His own city" refers to Capernaum. This is based on two principle verses.

The first is Matthew 4:12-13, which tells us that Jesus left Nazareth, where he was born, to live in Capernaum after the arrest of John the Baptist:

12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew

into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, – Mt 4:12-13

The second verse that shows that Jesus' city was Capernaum is Mark 2:1:

1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. – Mk 2:1

Notice here that when Jesus returned to Capernaum, it was reported that "He was at home." Leaving the region of the Gadarenes, Jesus returned to the city of Capernaum, where he lived when he was not travelling.

Verse 2

When the news of Jesus' presence in His hometown spread, people brought a paralytic to Him. Because he was paralyzed, His friends carried him on a bed. This shows us the extent of his paralysis. A bed was the only means of transportation possible for him.

Matthew tells us that Jesus saw their faith. The word "their" is plural, indicating that the faith was not only on the part of the paralytic but also his friends. They knew that Jesus could heal him, and they came with sincere and expectant hearts.

Seeing their faith, Jesus speaks to the paralytic: "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." There is a connection between this man's paralysis and sin.

While this is not always the case, this man's paralysis resulted from sin. God will sometimes allow sickness to teach us a lesson or correct us. The path to

healing, in this case, is to recognize our errors, repent of our sins, and learn the lesson God intends us to understand.

This man was likely aware of the sin that had brought upon this paralysis and was ready to get right with God. Jesus, therefore, offers His forgiveness.

Verse 3

The paralytic and his friends were not the only people to hear the words of Jesus that day. Among those present were some scribes. The scribes were students and teachers of the law whose task was to interpret and apply the law for the people of Israel.

The scribes' response was to say among themselves: "This man is blaspheming." The reason for this accusation appears to be that Jesus offered forgiveness to the man. These

scribes believed that only God could forgive sin. In their minds, Jesus was taking the authority of God upon Himself to declare this forgiveness and making Himself equal with God. This was blasphemy and, according to the law, was punishable by death.

Verse 4

Jesus knew what the scribes were thinking. In this case, He speaks directly to them by asking them why they thought evil in their hearts.

These words, of course, would have come as a surprise to the scribes. They were judging what the Lord Jesus said according to their understanding of the Law of Moses.

Jesus was, however, now judging their thoughts and hearts by the words: "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" Jesus saw what these scribes

would not have admitted publically. He saw a nature contrary to the purpose of God. He saw anger and murder disguised as the application of the law. These leaders wanted to get rid of Jesus. They wanted nothing to do with His teaching. They had come to find fault and not with a seeking heart.

Verse 5

Jesus asks the scribes whether it was easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or "Rise and walk"? Let's take a moment to consider this question.

Before Jesus was a man with paralysis. The paralysis resulted from sin in his life (see verse 2). Jesus could either tell this man that his sins were forgiven or that he was healed. Because the paralysis resulted from sin, both of these statements proclaimed the

forgiveness and release of God from the effects of his sin.

The difference between these two questions, however, was that it was relatively easy to say that someone was forgiven but to demonstrate that reality by telling him to rise and walk was not so easy. "Rise up and walk" required physical evidence.

Verse 6

To prove that He had the authority to forgive sin, Jesus spoke to the paralytic and told him to rise and walk.

Remember that the scribes had accused Jesus of blasphemy because he offered forgiveness to the paralytic. The healing of this man would prove that God had forgiven his sins and given Jesus this authority.

Verse 7

Matthew tells us that when Jesus told the paralyzed man to rise and walk, he did just that. The miracle that day demonstrated that Jesus had the authority to forgive sin. The man's paralysis was, according to verse 2, the result of sin. By healing the man, Jesus not only demonstrated that He had the power of God to forgive him but also to release him from its consequences as well

Verse 8

Matthew tells us that when Jesus told the paralyzed man to rise and walk, he did just that. The miracle that day demonstrated that Jesus had the authority to forgive sin. The man's paralysis was, according to verse 2, the result of sin. By healing the man, Jesus not only demonstrated that He had the power of God to forgive him but also to

release him from its consequences as well

Verse 9

After the healing of the paralytic, Jesus passed by a tax booth in Capernaum and noticed a man named Matthew who was minding it. It is generally believed that Matthew referred to here, is the author of this gospel. In essence, Matthew is sharing how he was called to be a disciple of Jesus.

Before becoming a disciple of Jesus, Matthew was a tax collector. In those days, Rome imposed a tax on the regions it conquered. Tax collectors gathered and submitted that tax to the Roman authorities. Rome did not particularly care how it was collected as long as they received the amount demanded. Tax collectors made their money by overtaxing the people and

keeping what was over the amount Rome required.

One of the ways taxes were collected was by setting up booths at various locations. This might be at a port or bridge where they would charge a toll. It was at one of those toll booths that Jesus found Matthew.

Seeing Matthew at that toll booth, Jesus said, "Follow me." Matthew does not explain what he felt when he heard those words, nor does he share the background story. He tells us that when he heard the call of Jesus, he "rose and followed Him." There was no Bible School training or screening of his worthiness to follow the Master. He left his dishonest trade and pursued the Lord Jesus.

Verse 10

Jesus called Matthew to join Him with other tax collectors and sinners at a meal. Unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus was not afraid to associate with people of questionable morals and lifestyles. He did not compromise His values in doing so. One of the great lessons the Lord has taught me is that ministry to those who have fallen into sin does not mean I support their ways. Jesus demonstrates this principle here. He cared for those whose lifestyle He did not approve.

Verse 11

Notice the response of the Pharisees to this meal with sinners and tax collectors. They questioned the disciples of Jesus about why he would eat with such people.

The Pharisees were devoted to the Law of Moses and would not associate with

sinner. They practiced a form of external holiness. That is to say, they believed that if they didn't associate with sinners, worshipped at the temple, prayed, and fasted, then they were holy. Jesus had a radically different concept of holiness. He taught that true holiness went beyond the external. Refraining from eating with sinners did not make the Pharisees holy. Their religion was only skin deep. They looked holy on the outside, but that is as far as it went. Despite their outward show, their hearts were just as sinful as those of the tax collectors and sinners.

Verse 12

The Pharisees accused Jesus of eating with sinners. Notice the response of the Lord. He tells them that it was not those who were well who needed a physician but those who were sick. To cure the sick, the doctor must reach

out to them. Of what use would a doctor be if they refused to associate with the sick and spent all their time with those who were in perfect health?

Jesus reminded the Pharisees that these tax collectors and sinners needed the Lord God. They were burdened with sin and needed a Saviour. That fact alone demanded that Jesus associate with them.

Verse 13

After sharing a practical illustration to show why He associated with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus moves on to a second defence of His actions – the Scriptures themselves. Quoting from Hosea 6:6, Jesus says: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.”

That day Jesus sat with a group of needy sinners destined for eternal

separation from God and His blessings. Mercy demanded He reach out to them. While the Pharisees busied themselves in tithing and temple worship, they had no place for sinners.

Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrated mercy not only by eating with sinners but also by laying His life down for them.

Verse 14

John the Baptist had a following. He pointed his disciples to Jesus as the Lamb of God, but like others, they had many questions about Him and His teaching. In verse 14, they come to Jesus with a question about fasting. As disciples of John, they fasted. They noticed that the Pharisees also followed this practice, but the disciples of Jesus did not. They questioned Jesus about this.

Understand here that Jesus did not teach against fasting, but it was not something the disciples practiced while they were with Him.

Verse 15

Jesus answers the question posed by the disciples of John by using an illustration. "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" He answered.

The days in which these disciples of Jesus lived were joyous and blessed. The Messiah lived with them. The kingdom of God was being expanded before their eyes. The stronghold of Satan was being broken. The sick were healed, and those possessed by demons were released. The wind and the waves obeyed the voice of their Master. These were not times to mourn

and fast; they were glorious days. Imagine the groom's friends coming to his wedding with sombre and sad faces. This was a time of rejoicing and blessing. These were days of celebration and feasting because Jesus, the Bridegroom, was in their midst, and this was His day.

Jesus tells the disciples of John, however, that the time was coming when His disciples would mourn and fast. One day the Bridegroom would be taken from them. He would hang on a cross and return to His Father. In those days of grief and mourning, there would be fasting. The days were coming when these disciples would confront the enemy, and the battle would be severe. Some of those present would lay down their lives. They would be persecuted for the name of the Lord. In those days, these disciples would fast and mourn. At that

time, they would cry out to the Lord for strength, wisdom and grace.

Verse 16

Jesus answered the question on fasting by using an illustration of a wedding celebration in the last verse. He gives another example here. This time He speaks about an old garment that has been patched with a new piece of unshrunk cloth.

When the patched garment is washed, the unshrunk cloth will shrink and tear the old material. The result will be that the tear is worse. The illustration is clear enough, but its application to the question asked needs some consideration.

Jesus seems to say that a fundamental incompatibility exists between an old garment and a new unshrunk

cloth. Consider the context of this illustration. Jesus has called Matthew, the tax collector, to follow Him. He sat down to eat with sinners. The Pharisees could not imagine why He would eat with such people. Now He has been questioned about why He was not fasting. Jesus seems to clash with the established religious practices of the day.

Like an unshrunk cloth, His ideas seemed to pull at the seams of their tradition and laws, creating confusion and division among the Jews. They tried to fit the teachings of Jesus into their way of thinking, but it wouldn't fit. Their faith had become all about outward appearance and legalism. This is not what God intended. Jesus was proposing, instead, a faith that was from the heart, full of mercy and grace. That kind of faith required a confession that the garments in which these religious leaders dressed were

incompatible with what Jesus was teaching.

Verse 17

The next example Christ uses here to answer why He and His disciples did not fast relates to wineskins. Wine was often put in animal hides. As these hides aged, they were prone to crack. The result was that the wine would leak out. It was especially important that new wine, which was expanding due to fermentation, be placed in new hides that were still flexible and would allow for expansion.

Jesus is telling the disciples of John the Baptist that if they were to understand His teaching, they would first have to put aside their old ideas. What He taught was like new wine that would destroy their religion of law. His teaching was not a religion of works.

He proposed a faith radically different from what they had been living. He was the answer to their fasting and mourning.

Verse 18

As Jesus was speaking to the disciples of John the Baptist, a ruler came and knelt before Him. He came with a very bold request.

"My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

While there was likely a certain amount of despair in this ruler, we can also see a deep faith in the Lord and His power over death. The faith of this man appears to be remarkable.

Verse 19

Jesus responded to the ruler's request and, taking His disciples with him, followed him to his daughter.

In Matthew 8:5-12 we have the record of a centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus did so without going to the ruler's home. While healing did not require that Jesus be physically present, in this case, He determined to follow this ruler to his home. The Lord Jesus is sensitive to the leading of the Father in each situation.

Verse 20

As they followed the ruler to his home, a woman who suffered from a discharge of blood came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment. This shows that many people were present as Jesus visited this ruler's home. This woman was among them. Her condition was a long-standing one. She does not dare to speak to Jesus

and ask for His healing. She quietly touches His garment in the hope that this will be sufficient to bring her the healing she needs.

Verse 21

Notice the faith of the woman here. She believed that if she could touch his garment, she would be healed. Her's is a quiet faith, kept to herself. She does not want to be noticed. As we will see, however, Jesus will respond to even this kind of faith.

Verse 22

Jesus was aware that the woman had touched Him. She may not have had the courage to speak to Him face to face, but she did reach out and touch the hem of his garment. Even that small faith got Jesus' attention, so He turned to speak to her. It does not take

much faith to touch the heart of Jesus. Even the small faith we have will move Him. Notice what Jesus says to this woman.

Jesus called her daughter. The term is a term of endearment. While she had little faith and confidence to speak to Him, He recognized her value and called her His daughter, a member of His own family. We can only imagine how this must have touched a woman who had been likely pushed aside because of her uncleanness for the past twelve years.

Second, Jesus tells her to “take heart.” This shows that He understood that she had lost hope in life. By healing her, Jesus also freed her from the despair she had felt of ever living a normal life. Jesus recognized her pain and gave her hope again.

Finally, Jesus declared: "Your faith has made you well." It was this declaration that brought her healing. There was nothing magical in Jesus' garment. The healing was very personal. It was from Jesus through His declaration to this woman. It came through the understanding heart of Jesus for her in particular.

The simple recognition of her pain and the declaration of Jesus were powerful. This woman knew the personal touch of the Saviour. He saw her among the crowd and took the time to speak to her. That moment with Jesus was as powerful as the healing itself.

Matthew tells us that the woman was instantly healed when Jesus made His declaration.

Verse 23

Jesus was on his way to a ruler's house whose daughter had died. Upon arrival, he saw flute players and a crowd "making a commotion."

The word translated "flute players" here in the English Standard Version is αὐλητής (aulētēs) is a pipe or flute player that played at a funeral. These instruments were used to assist with the grieving process. These professional players and mourners would likely be hired for those days of mourning.

The Jews of that time would also bring in women who would mourn and sing at these funerals. The crowd in a commotion may have included some of these women to add to the sombre mood of the occasion.

What is clear is that while the ruler was out seeking the Lord Jesus, the rest of the family proceeded with the funeral.

We can imagine there would have been a sense of urgency in the ruler's heart. Had Jesus not arrived in time, his daughter could have been buried.

Verse 24

Notice the response of Jesus to the flute players and the crowd making a commotion (possibly hired for the funeral). He told them to go away because the girl was not dead but only sleeping.

We need to understand what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is not saying that this girl had not physically died, but rather that her death was not permanent. She would be raised from the dead and live again.

The response of the crowd that day was to laugh at Jesus. The word "laugh" does not completely catch the crowd's attitude. The term used

is καταγελᾶω (katageláō) which means to laugh at, ridicule or deride. This crowd is not laughing at Jesus as if He told a joke. They are ridiculing Him and showing great contempt for what He said. They felt His comments were in poor taste and inappropriate in the context.

Verse 25

Notice how simply and gently the miracle took place. Jesus waited for the crowd to leave, approached the girl and took her by the hand. The dead girl responded to the life-giving touch of Jesus and arose.

Because the crowd had been put outside, likely only the family was present. They would have been able to rejoice together as a family. The girl would not have been overwhelmed by the large crowd and would have had a

quiet place to reflect on what had just happened.

The miracle demonstrated not only the sensitivity of Jesus to the family but the incredible power of life given to Him. There will be a day after we die when that hand again takes ours and issues us into eternal life in the presence of the Father.

Verse 26

While Jesus had asked the crowd to leave when he raised the girl from the dead, it was not long before they heard what had happened. The result was that news of the raising of this girl from the dead spread throughout the region. The miracle served to lift the name of Jesus and reveal His power. It demonstrated that the hand of God was upon Him and that He had power over

death. Who but the Son of God could have such ability?

Verse 27

After raising the ruler's daughter, two blind men followed after him, crying out aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." This is in contrast to the woman with the flow of blood who quietly only dared to touch the hem of his garment.

These blind men address Jesus as the "Son of David." Consider this phrase in the context of John 7:42, where the crowd began to question the identity of Jesus:

42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" – Jn 7:42

It was understood among the Jews that the Christ or Messiah would be a descendant of David from Bethlehem. These blind men understood this prophecy in Scripture and, in light of the miracles He had performed in their city, believed him to be Christ, the Son of David. They come to Him as the Christ pleading for mercy in their blindness.

Verse 28

Jesus continued His journey to “the house.” We are not told if this was the house where Jesus lived at this time or someone else’s home.

The blind men did not give up on their request. They followed Him to the house and came up to him.

Seeing their persistence, Jesus addressed them asking, “Do you

believe that I am able to do this?" Why does Jesus ask this question? There may be several answers to this question.

First, it may be that Jesus wanted to emphasize the importance of faith in Him as Christ. To come to Christ doubting and questioning His deity and ability does not bring Him honour. Those who come to Christ must believe in Him and who He is. Jesus calls on these blind men to confess Him as Lord.

Second, the question challenges the blind men to confess Him not only as Christ but as one filled with mercy and willing to minister to them in their need. Standing before the Lord now, the Lord calls them to search their heart and ask, "Is this Messiah a God of compassion and mercy? Can we expect Him to touch us and heal us now? Can we expect Him to show mercy as we

have requested?" Jesus asks them to confess His love and mercy for them.

We are not told if others were present that day at the house. It may be that Jesus asked these questions so that these blind men would have the opportunity to confess Him publically before the people gathered there that day.

That day before Jesus and all who had gathered at that house, the blind men confessed Him as the merciful Christ who could heal their blindness.

Verse 29

After confessing their faith in Jesus, the Lord touched the eyes of the blind men, saying, "According to your faith, be it done to you."

Some take this statement of Jesus to mean that these men were healed

according to how much faith they had. If they had a lot of faith, they would have complete healing, but if they had little faith, they might not be healed or only partially healed. The problem with this interpretation is that healing is based on how much faith we have and not on the mercy of Christ. The glory goes to the person who had much faith and not the Healer. It also means that those with little faith do not receive the blessing of God.

Remember here that the blind men cried out to Jesus for mercy. Mercy is dispensed to those who do not deserve it. I was forgiven, not because I deserved it but because of the mercy of God. I am blessed not because I have great faith but because God is a gracious God who extends His hand to me when I am unworthy of His blessings.

Let's consider the faith Jesus speaks about here. The blind men followed

persistently after Jesus through the city streets, crying to the "Son of David," the Messiah, to have mercy on them. Their faith was in a merciful Christ. Their faith was not in their faith but in the Christ of their faith and His mercy. There is a very subtle but vital difference here. These men were healed not because they had great faith but because of the Christ in whom they had faith.

Verse 30

The blind men were healed that day because of Christ in whom they had faith. Notice what Jesus told them after their healing.

*And Jesus sternly warned them,
"See that no one knows about it."*

The word translated as "sternly warned" is ἐμβριμάομαι

(embrimáomai). The word comes from brimáomai, which means to be enraged, roar, or express deep anger. It also carries the sense of threatening someone. Jesus issues a strong warning to these men.

Why did Jesus feel so strongly about this matter? While not told in the passage, we can understand how the crowd followed Him from place to place, seeking healing. For everyone who was healed, many more came seeking healing.

Beyond this, however, was the fact that as that crowd grew, so did the jealousy and anger of the religious leaders. It was like poking a bee hive with a stick. Sooner or later, these religious leaders would respond and seek to kill Jesus. This was not the time for Jesus to die. He had no intention of causing more problems with the religious leaders than was necessary.

Verse 31

While the men heard the warning of Jesus about not telling people about their healing, they “spread his fame through all that district.”

When is sharing what Jesus has done for us a sin? When He tells us not to do so. How often have we done something good when it was not God’s purpose that we do so? I can imagine that these men felt they were doing a good thing by spreading the fame of Jesus, but that was not what the Lord had called them to do. There are people in positions of authority in the church that God has not placed in that position. If there is one thing that Lord requires, it is obedience. There are many good things we can do, but if they are not what God intends for us, we sin by taking them on.

Verse 32

Jesus had just healed the blind men. The verse begins with the words, "As they were going away." It is not completely clear who was going away here. The verse may tell us that Jesus and His disciples left the house where the blind men came. It may be more likely, however, that this phrase refers to the blind men. That is to say, as the blind men went away, a demon-oppressed man was brought to the house where Jesus and His disciples were staying.

Matthew tells us that this man was mute. The context leads us to believe that the demons were causing this inability to speak. While we need to be careful about assuming that all illness results from an evil spirit, Scripture seems to indicate that these demonic forces have the power to afflict our physical bodies.

Verse 33

Matthew tells us that when Jesus cast out the demon, the man spoke. The demon had caused this muteness. We are not told anything more about this man. Matthew shows us the power of the demonic world to afflict our physical bodies. He also demonstrates the ability of Christ to overcome the oppression of these evil spirits.

A crowd was present that day when this man was freed from his oppression. They marvelled at what had taken place. They had seen the power of Christ over the demonic forces of hell. The kingdom of hell was being pushed back one person at a time.

Verse 34

When Jesus healed the blind men in this chapter, He sternly warned them

not to tell anyone what He had done for them. We see why He may have given this command in the response of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees could not deny the power of this miracle that had taken place that day. They attributed that power not to God, however, but to Satan, the "prince of demons." The Pharisees had their ideas about religion and what God expected of them. They were strict observers of the law and fought to keep that law. At least, that is what they told themselves. Deep down inside, however, they were hypocrites. The same sin lurked inside their heart as in the average person. Their religious front gave them a false assurance and blinded them to finding the real answer to their need. I have met people like this. They hide behind their doctrines and religious activities, but they are as lost as everyone else.

Verse 35

Matthew recounts how Jesus travelled extensively throughout Israel. Notice the nature of His ministry here.

First, Jesus visited the cities and villages of Israel. That is to say, he ministered in large centres with significant populations, but He also went out into the rural areas with much fewer people. His ministry was for everyone.

Second, Matthew tells us that Jesus taught in the synagogues—He went where the Jews worshipped. Visiting preachers and teachers were allowed to speak in these synagogues. Jesus took advantage of this opportunity.

Third, Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel is the good news. The good news Jesus proclaimed was that the kingdom of God had come.

What is the kingdom of God? It is the rule of God in the hearts and lives of those who believe. It is a kingdom that overcomes the forces of sin and hell.

How had that kingdom come? It came in the person of Jesus Christ, who would lay down His life for the sins of the world. It came in forgiveness and release from the bondage of sin. In proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus declared that heaven had come down and was setting the captives free. The power of sin and evil was to be broken, and the kingdom of God was established in the hearts and minds of those who would believe.

Finally, Jesus demonstrated the power and presence of the kingdom by releasing those who had been held captive free from sin, affliction and disease. The power and hold of Satan and His angels were being broken in

the name and person of Jesus Christ. That kingdom continues to break the back of Satan and his strongholds today.

Verse 36

Wherever Jesus went, the crowds seemed to follow him. On this particular occasion, He felt deep compassion for them. He saw them as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

The people in this crowd that followed Jesus were oppressed by demons, sick, and lost in sin. They did not know the freedom the kingdom of God brought. Nor did they have a shepherd to teach them or guide them into the truth of that kingdom.

Jesus’ heart was broken by what he saw that day. I am sure it continues to

feel this compassion today for the countless souls oppressed and devastated by sin and oppression.

Verse 37

After seeing the crowd and its condition, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples and told them that the harvest was plentiful, but the labourers were few.

There was much good fruit to harvest. There were many souls ready to turn to Christ and seek His kingdom. Now admittedly, not all fruit was ready. There was also some bad fruit that needed to be removed, but the time to harvest was now.

The great problem was that there were so few people to pick that ripe fruit. Those ready to receive the Lord and enter the kingdom of God needed

people to teach, strengthen and encourage them. Many of them did not know the way into the kingdom. Many had never heard the message of the gospel and the plan of God. Others were burdened with care and confusion. They needed someone to extend a hand or a word of compassion to help them find the way.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is expanding on this earth. The Spirit of God is ministering and preparing hearts. He invites us to participate by picking what the Spirit has ripened on the tree. It is the role of the Spirit to prepare that fruit for harvesting. It is our role to harvest what He has prepared.

Verse 38

The harvest was plentiful. The labourers were few. In light of this

situation, the Lord calls His disciples to pray earnestly. The word δέομαι (déomai) refers to someone in great need imploring another for support and assistance. Jesus is calling His disciples to plead with God the Father for help in harvesting the ripe fruit.

Notice that the disciples were not to turn to people in this need but to the Lord of the harvest. Notice also that He was the one who would send the labourers. We are not in control of the harvest. God needs specific people to bring in that harvest. We cannot pretend to know the mind of God in all things. Imagine what the harvest field would look like if we chose whomever we wanted to work in it. There would be clashes and conflicts. We would hire people based on what we felt needed to be done without clearly understanding God's purpose. God calls those He wants to be part of that harvest. By praying to the Lord of the

harvest, we recognize that His purpose is the best. We are submitting to His goal for the harvest.

MATTHEW 10

Verse 1

Jesus had twelve disciples who followed Him where He went. These men learned from Jesus and were trained to do the work when Jesus returned to the Father.

The word used here for disciple is μαθητής (mathētēs). The term refers to a learner or pupil but is more than this in the context of Jesus' disciples. These men were not only learners, but Jesus expected that the knowledge they gained from Him would impact their lives. The true disciple of Jesus did not have head knowledge about

doctrine only but one who lived this truth out in everyday life.

On this particular occasion, the Lord Jesus called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority over evil spirits, diseases and afflictions.

The word “authority” in the Greek language is ἐξουσία (exousía). The idea is that Jesus gave these twelve disciples the right and power over evil spirits, diseases and afflictions. They were given the authority and capacity to cast out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and affliction.

It is possible to have authority but not power. The police may have the authority to settle an unruly crowd but not the ability to do so. Jesus gave His disciples the right to cast out demons and heal the sick and the ability to do so in His name.

Verse 2

Matthew lists the names of the twelve disciples Jesus called. It was to these individuals that Jesus gave the authority and power to cast out demons and heal the sick and afflicted. Verse 2 names the first four disciples:

- 1) Simon (also known as Peter)
- 2) Andrew (Simon's brother)
- 3) James (Zebedee's son)
- 4) John (brother of James)

Verse 3

The names of six more disciples are revealed here in this verse:

- 5) Philip
- 6) Bartholomew
- 7) Thomas
- 8) Matthew, the tax collector
- 9) James (Alphaeus' son)

10) Thaddaeus

Notice how Matthew identifies himself as a tax collector. He never forgot his beginnings. He was despised by the community in which He lived but loved and chosen by Jesus Christ.

Verse 4

The final two disciples are named here:

11) Simon the Zealot

12) Judas Iscariot (who betrayed Jesus)

Simon, listed here, was a Zealot. This group, in the New Testament period, was a revolutionary anti-Roman band that was driven by spiritual and political motivations to seek freedom from Roman domination.

Judas is known as the one who betrayed Jesus.

This list shows that Jesus had two disciples named Simon (Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot). He also had two disciples named James (James, the son of Zebedee, and James, the son of Alphaeus).

Verse 5

Jesus sent His twelve disciples with authority to cast out demons and heal sickness and affliction. Notice that the only instruction He gave them was that they were not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans. We should not read too much into this command of the Lord. His purpose was that the gospel be first preached to the Jewish nation. The Gentiles and the Samaritans would have their opportunity to hear later.

This mission trip allowed the disciples to practice what the Lord had taught

them. With the authority of God upon them to cast out demons and heal sickness and afflictions, these disciples would be experiencing the power of God in their personal lives. This would have made the teaching of Christ very real to them.

We must understand the truth, but a truth that never moves from the head into real life is of little value. Truth applied is truth learned.

Verse 6

It was Jesus' purpose for this mission trip that His disciples reach people of their nationality and faith. Notice how Jesus describes these people as "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

While Israel was God's chosen nation, that did not mean they would all be in heaven. By describing Israel as the

“lost sheep,” Jesus tells us that they did not know the way of salvation and eternal life.

By sending His disciples to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” Jesus was giving Israel the first opportunity to hear that gospel and see demonstrations of the power of the kingdom of God.

Verse 7

Notice the message that Jesus told His disciples to preach. They were to proclaim that the “kingdom of God is at hand.”

The Jews longed for the kingdom of God. In their minds, it was a time when the Messiah would come and reign over them. This, of course, would be a time of blessing and prosperity. In the case of the Jews of Jesus day, they believed

it would also be a time of release from the bondage of foreign oppression.

The kingdom Jesus brought, however, was not political. It was the rule of Christ in the hearts and lives of those trapped in sin. Those who were part of this kingdom would be set free from the grip of sin and its power over them. They would submit to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

The disciples, as they went out on this mission trip, were to demonstrate the reality of the kingdom by revealing the power and authority Jesus had given them over the effects of sin in this world. Demonic strongholds would be broken. Sickness and affliction caused by sin and evil were equally pushed back.

The message we are called to preach is that message of the kingdom of God, breaking the stronghold of sin through

the work of Jesus Christ. It is a message of victory and submission to our one true Saviour and Lord.

Verse 8

Jesus commissioned His twelve disciples to "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons."

Our world is held in bondage to sin and its effects. All around us are sickness, death, disease and demonic oppression. These things are the result of the fall of humanity into sin and came to this earth when sin was introduced in the Garden of Eden. Sin affects not only our relationship with God but every part of our lives and society. The account of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in the book of Genesis reveals that sin even affected the physical earth and how it yielded its crops.

Jesus sent His disciples out to minister to the whole person. They were to preach and demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God to push back the curse of sin on this world and our physical bodies and souls.

Notice Jesus' instructions here. They were to do this without pay. They were to heal without considering how they would profit from their services. They were to care for the needy with no need for reward. The message of the Gospel was to go out freely on this mission trip.

Jesus speaks here about the motivation of the disciples on this trip. He sent them out, dependent upon God for everything. Later on, Jesus would tell the disciples to take a moneybag with them:

35 And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or

knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing."

36 He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. – Lk 22:35-36"

While the instructions Jesus gives here were particularly for this mission trip, there are principles we need to see for our ministries today.

First, Jesus calls us to minister to the whole person. The call of the gospel is to care for the sick and needy among us and in our communities.

Second, our motivation in ministry is not to be self-centred. It is easy for people to base their ministry on money. I have met pastors who made finances the means of deciding whether to accept a call to a church. There is a much higher calling than money. We

must learn to minister from our hearts selflessly. Our concern should not be about ourselves and our benefit but rather the love of Christ working through us in compassion and care for others.

Verse 9

To teach His disciples dependence on the Father, Jesus told His disciples to “acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts.”

The word translated belt (ESV) is ζώνη (zōnē). It is derived from the zōnnumi, which means to wrap around. The reference here is to a piece of cloth used to wrap around the waste. These wide belts had pockets to keep money or other small items.

Jesus is telling his disciples that as they went out on this mission trip, they were

not to procure money for those belts as they went. In other words, they were not to have a cash stash in their money belt. Instead, they were to trust the provision of the Lord.

Verse 10

As the disciples went out, they did not have a bag for their journey. They were not to have a spare tunic or sandals. Nor were they to carry a staff on their journey.

Jesus sent the disciples out with no money and just the clothes they were wearing. The staff was used for protection. They were not to have that protection with them. Instead, they were to trust the Lord to care for them.

Notice that Jesus concludes this verse with the phrase, "the laborer deserves

his food.” The sense here is that God would provide their need for food through the people to whom they would minister.

Verse 11

Jesus told His disciples that when they entered a town or village, they would find out who was worthy and stay with them. The word ἀξιος (áxios) comes from the word ἀγ?, meaning to weigh. The sense here is to weigh the character of the individuals in the community and stay with those whose reputation and character were respected. Jesus indeed ate with sinners, but in this case, the disciples were to be discerning about where they stayed. They were not to associate with those of questionable reputations and practices in the community. They were to remain with individuals of worthy stature throughout their stay in the

town. By staying with someone of exemplary character, they would cast no doubt on the message they preached.

Remember here that hospitality to visiting preachers and teachers was a common practice. With no money, these disciples were forced to depend upon this hospitality.

Verse 12

Jesus told the disciples that when they entered a house, they were to greet it. The common greeting of the day was to extend the peace of God to each other. This greeting was, in reality, a blessing upon the family.

Jesus tells the disciples to extend His blessing to any family that welcomed them and demonstrated hospitality.

Consider the words of Jesus in Mark 9:41 in this context:

41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward. – Mk 9:41

Consider also the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40 about those who ministered to His servants:

40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' – Mt 25:40

The blessing of Christ would fall on those who cared for His disciples. He asked them to declare that blessing upon all who offered hospitality to them.

Verse 13

Jesus told His disciples to greet or bless each home that welcomed them. If that home were worthy of that blessing, God would grant it through the disciples' words.

Notice, however, that not every home was "worthy." There may be many reasons for this unworthiness. Perhaps it resulted from an ungodly lifestyle or rejection of the gospel message. If the home was unworthy of the blessing of God, the blessing proclaimed upon entering the home would return to the disciple. In other words, it would not be granted to this unworthy house.

Verse 14

As He sent these disciples out on their mission trip, Jesus gave instructions about what to do if a house or town did

not receive them or listen to their words. Notice a couple of details here in this verse.

First, Jesus just told the disciples that if a house were unworthy of His blessing, it would be returned to them as they left. In this verse, He tells them that if a home or town did not receive them or listen to their words, they were to shake off the dust from their feet when they left. An unworthy house did not receive the servants of the Lord or listen to their words. In other words, it was a home that rejected Christ, His claims and the call of God on the life of His disciple to share the message of the Gospel.

Second, notice the phrase “shake off the dust from your feet.” The idea here is that even the dust from that city on their feet was defiled. It is the custom of my region to wipe one’s feet or take off your shoes when entering a home.

The idea is that we do not want to track the dirt from outside into the house. This is the same principle. The soil from the city that rejected the gospel was defiled, and the disciple did not want to track this impurity to any other land. To shake off the dust from one's feet was to renounce that city.

Finally, note that the Lord encouraged His disciples to leave when there was rejection and hardness to the gospel. Understand that unless the Lord prepares the hearts of those we minister to, there is no hope of change. The harvester can only harvest ripe fruit. If the Spirit of God were not working in the lives of these individuals, there would be no hope of harvest.

This is not to say that the Lord does not want us to press through difficulties and resistance. Many prophets of the Old Testament faced constant rejection in their ministry. What kept them in

that ministry, however, was the clear sense of God's calling to remain and continue sharing. Resistance to our message, while not always an indication that we ought to leave a ministry, should certainly cause us to seek the clear direction of the Lord.

Verse 15

Jesus tells His disciples that Sodom and Gomorrah would be better off than the towns that rejected them and the message they brought. Sodom and Gomorrah were two evil cities of Abraham's day that God destroyed:

24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. – Ge 19:24-25

Sodom and Gomorrah, as evil as they were, did not have the opportunity to hear the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The cities into which Christ's disciples would travel would have this opportunity. Those who listened to the message and rejected it were without excuse. Their condition was worse than those who had never heard. Consider what the apostle Peter has to say about this:

21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. – 2Pe 2:21

Jesus tells us that the judgement will be less severe for those who have not heard than those who have.

15 Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of

*judgment for the land of Sodom
and Gomorrah than for that
town.- Mt 10:15*

Jesus does not go into detail here.
Know, however, that He will judge with
righteousness and justice.

Verse 16

The Lord Jesus told the disciples He was sending out that they were going out like sheep among wolves. The wolf is a natural enemy of the sheep. It will attack, kill and eat the sheep. Jesus does not hesitate to send His sheep into the wolf pack.

We need to understand here that we are in a spiritual battle. Satan and his demonic spirits will not hesitate to attack and destroy all who proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and His salvation. We face a formidable foe as we go in

the name of Jesus. Notice the advice of Jesus to His disciples as they face these wolves.

First, His sheep were to be as wise as serpents. In Genesis 3, we read:

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made... – Ge 3:1

Genesis 3 describes the serpent as “more crafty” than any of the other beasts of the field. We see how Satan uses the serpent to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden. The apostle Paul refers to this in his letter to the Corinthians when he says:

3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. – 2Co 11:3

It was the understanding of the time that the serpent was wise and cunning.

The word Jesus uses here for wise is φρόνιμος (phrónimos). It speaks of prudence and sensibility in relationships with others. In other words, the disciples were to be careful about how they related to the wolves. There is an important lesson for us here. There are two temptations for those who minister as sheep to wolves.

As sheep, we can irritate the wolves. Remember that Jesus told the disciples that when a town or house rejected them, they would shake off the dust from their feet and leave.

I remember hearing a quote from an unknown source that said: "How often has the work of God been hindered by well-meaning servants of God to simply stayed too long?" Those whose hearts are hard to the gospel will only respond

in anger and bitterness. Until the Spirit of God softens the heart, it is unresponsive and likely to react unfavourably to the message.

It is possible to irritate the wolves to such a point that they become angry and persecute the sheep. We are not looking for trouble as we share with the wolves. We are not trying to provoke them to anger. Our task is to harvest the ripe fruit God has been preparing. We must be sensitive to where a person is spiritually as we share the gospel. Sometimes instead of winning them to the Lord, we only irritate them and provoke them to anger.

On the other hand, it is also possible to begin imitating the wolves. This has often been the problem of the church. Its members can sometimes become indistinguishable from the people of the world. We are sheep, not wolves. This distinction must always be maintained.

We cannot win the world to Christ if we are not walking with Christ.

We need, according to Jesus, to be as wise as serpents as we live among wolves. We must neither irritate nor imitate them. Instead, maintaining our walk with Christ, we must be sensitive to His leading and guidance as we minister.

Second, Jesus tells us that as His sheep, we are to be as innocent as doves. A dove is a peaceful and harmless bird. The word translated as innocent in the ESV is ἀκέραιος (akéraios) which means without deceit. Unlike the serpent, who uses cunning and deception to catch his prey, the dove is without such motivation.

Being without deceit implies a purity of heart and character. It speaks of freedom from hypocrisy. It means that

the sheep are genuine. They live what they preach.

If we are to live as sheep among wolves, we need the wisdom of God in our relationships with each other and with the wolves. We also need to walk with sincerity, free from hypocrisy. The sheep need to be genuine.

Verse 17

Jesus warned His disciples that ministering in His name would have its dangers. The wolves would attack. Some disciples would be delivered to courts and whipped in the synagogues because of the message they preached. They were not to be surprised at this response. Should soldiers be shocked that the enemy shoots at them? Will they abandon the battle because the enemy wants to harm them? Jesus prepares His disciples for the spiritual

warfare before them. As soldiers in the same battle, these words also speak to us. Are we prepared to face opposition?

Verse 18

Warning His disciples of what was to come, Jesus told them that they would be dragged before governors and kings because of their message. While some disciples were brought before inquiring kings and governors peacefully, this was not the case for all. Others were brought forcefully to be tried.

Notice what Jesus tells us here, however. These disciples would be brought before kings and governors “to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.” Whether they were being tried for their faith or simply responding to the inquiring mind of a king or governor, God was putting them in this position to bear witness by their words

and actions to the reality of Christ and His kingdom.

Notice that the Lord Jesus told His disciples they would bear witness before Gentiles. This would have been a difficult idea for the disciples to swallow. The idea that a Gentile could be on equal standing with a Jew regarding their relationship with God would take years to accept. Jesus hints at it here, however.

Verse 19

Notice the words, "When they deliver you over." There is certainty in these words. This is not a matter of whether but when. The disciples of Jesus Christ will face problems in this world. They will be delivered to officials to be examined and judged for the faith they confess and the message they preach.

Jesus tells these disciples not to be anxious about what they would say in those times. This is often interpreted to mean how they would defend themselves before the officials trying them. Verse 18, however, tells us that these disciples would be delivered over to governors and kings to bear witness to the name of Jesus. It may be better for us to understand that the words spoken here were testimony to Jesus and His work.

The disciples' anxiety was, to some extent, for their well-being but also about how they could bear witness to the person and work of Christ. Jesus told these disciples that there was no need to be anxious because they would be given what to speak before these officials. The Spirit of God would provide them with the message they were to share when the time was right.

The disciples would not have to face their accusers alone. Jesus promised His Spirit would be with them and guide them step by step.

Verse 20

In the last verse, Jesus promised that the words His disciples needed would be given to them when they needed them. He clarifies this here when he says:

20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

The Spirit of their Father would speak through these disciples when they bore witness to the name of Christ.

There is something quite wonderful about this truth. The very person of the Holy Spirit speaks through our lips and

pens. He gives us words to speak at the appropriate time. The older I get, the more I appreciate this truth, for I do not know what to say to comfort, encourage and strengthen the people of God. God promises, however, that He will give me words to bear witness to His name, and for this, I am grateful.

Verse 21

Being a Christian will not be easy. Jesus tells us that our families may turn against us because of our faith. Brother will deliver brother to death. The assumption is that this was because the brother delivered over to death was a believer. The same would be true for parents and children. A father would deliver his Christian child over to death. Children would have their parents killed because of their faith in Christ Jesus.

Jesus speaks of intense hatred for Christ and those who follow Him. This is happening now around the world. We can anticipate that as the end draws near, there will be an increasing hatred of Christ and those who love and walk in His truth.

Verse 22

As the end draws near, Jesus tells us that true believers will be hated by all for His name's sake. The phrase "hated by all" carries with it a sense that this would be the consensus in society. Christians would be seen as enemies. This attitude toward followers of Christ will make it difficult for believers. Even now, in many countries, job opportunities are limited for Christians. Persecution of those who believe in Jesus is becoming more common. Jesus tells us that this will require endurance on the part of His children. We will not

be spared trials and suffering in this world. Because we love and walk with Christ, we will be persecuted all the more in this sinful world.

Jesus tells us, however, that those who persevere to the end will be saved. The word used here is σωζω (sōzō) which means to be saved, delivered or rescued. We tend to apply the term to salvation, but it is more often used in the New Testament to refer to a release from sickness, disease, physical death, and bondage than salvation. Jesus tells His disciples that if they persevere, the Lord will release them from their trials. The enemy cannot keep them under his grip. Christians are to persevere with the knowledge that the Lord will not leave them. He will, in His time, come to their aid and set them free.

To see the word “saved” here in terms of the salvation of our souls could lead some to believe that salvation depends

upon our ability to persevere and not on the grace of Christ and His work on the cross.

Verse 23

Jesus tells His followers that if people in one town persecuted them, they were to flee to another. Believers have every right and obligation to seek peace and security. We are not to seek persecution and suffering.

Notice that Jesus told His disciples that they would not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man returned. Why were they going through these towns? The context tells us that they were fleeing persecution. Jesus warns His followers that persecution will not stop until He returns.

We should not be surprised that being a Christian invites persecution. To follow Christ is to follow a path contrary to the world. For this, we must be ready to pay the price.

Verse 24

Jesus moves on here to speak about the relationship between a disciple or servant and his master.

A disciple submits to his master's teaching and example. A servant follows his master's commands. It is by this means that order is created and lessons learned. Without respect for this principle, we can expect chaos and confusion.

This principle is vital in our relationship with Christ. He must be first. As disciples and servants of Christ, we must submit to Him. He must have

glory and honour. This will require sacrifice on our part. There will be times when we do not understand His will. At these times, we must recognize that He is the Master, and we are the disciple. I have seen too many believers do what they want without consideration of the purpose of God. We are not above our Master. He requires obedience and faithfulness.

Verse 25

Jesus tells us that “it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master.” This is our goal as believers –to be like Christ, not just in some things but in all things.

It is easy to want to be like Christ in some ways. Many of us want to be more loving and compassionate. Others want to know His power in ministry. Not

so many of us are willing to be like Him in suffering.

As Jesus walked on this earth, He suffered at the hands of those He preached to. Jesus reminds His disciples that they called Him Beelzebul.

Beelzebul means "lord of flies" or "lord of dung." The name was intended to insult Christ and downplay His ministry. It represented a total rejection of His role as Lord and Saviour.

Jesus tells us that the disciple who represents Him cannot expect better treatment. If they so disrespect the master of the house, they will also disrespect the servants of that household. As followers of Jesus, we must anticipate that we will suffer just as He did, for if they hated the Master, they will also hate those who follow after Him.

Verse 26

While the disciple and servant of Jesus Christ are to expect trouble in this life, there is no need to fear the troublemaker. Notice the reason for this. Jesus tells His disciples that “nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

What the Lord is telling His disciples is that He knows all about their trials at the hand of the enemy. Nothing is hidden from Him, and when lies are spread about His servants, He knows the truth. Those who hurt His children will one day stand before their Maker and have their deeds exposed. Justice will be served to those who have oppressed the disciples of Christ.

It is comforting to know that God stands with those who suffer in His name. He knows the truth and will lift

those who have been falsely accused and suffered injustice.

Verse 27

In the last verse, Jesus told His disciples not to fear their enemies and what they might do to them. He continues with this theme here. Instead of being fearful of the enemy, Jesus encouraged boldness. He told His disciples that they were to declare in the light what He revealed to them in the dark. Imagine the disciple at home in his bed at night. As he lay there, the Lord spoke and revealed His truth. That truth told to the disciple at night was now to be preached in the daytime.

When the Spirit of God revealed something by whispering it to His disciples, they were to speak that truth from the housetop for all to hear.

Jesus told His disciples in verse 19 that when they were brought before governors and kings, they were not to be anxious about what to say. He tells these same disciples here that God would give them the words to speak. When the Lord gave those words, they were to share them boldly. They were not to fear for their lives or reputation. They were to speak what God gave them to speak.

Verse 28

The worst thing the enemy could do was to kill the body. This is not something to fear, for our Lord has conquered death. There is hope beyond the grave for all who love Him. Death is not the end for the believer. How we treasure this earthly body. How we despair of losing it. Yet a new body is being prepared for all who know Christ. Our enemy may destroy this earthly

body, but we will receive a new and greater one free from the effects of sin and evil.

Jesus tells us that the enemy cannot kill our souls. That soul will continue living, even when our body is in the grave. Free from the suffering of this earthly frame, our soul will experience and know the presence of Christ and His blessings. There is no cause to fear the death of the physical body.

What we do need to fear, however, is God, who alone can destroy both body and soul in hell. These words of Jesus need to be understood in the context of the rest of the Scripture.

Jesus tells us God can destroy both body and soul in hell. There are a couple of details we need to see here. First, observe that both the physical body and soul are in hell. Hell is not just experienced in our souls but also in physical suffering.

Second, consider the phrase “destroy both soul and body in hell.” Some use this phrase to teach that the suffering of hell is not eternal and that God will kill the evil-doer so that their suffering is only temporary.

The problem with this understanding is that it does not seem to line up with the rest of Scripture. Listen to what the apostle John tells us in Revelation 14:11:

11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.” – Rev 14:11

Speaking about hell, Jesus said:

47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you

to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' – Mk 9:47-48

These verses tell us that hell is not a temporary reality but one in which its inhabitants never die but continue to suffer.

How are we to understand the words of Jesus here about God destroying soul and body in hell? If we take these words in the context of the rest of Scripture, we must see this death and destruction as an ongoing and constant death and destruction. That it so say, conscious eternal death and destruction in which those who die are conscious of this death and destruction throughout all eternity.

Verse 29

Being a disciple of Jesus would not be easy. Jesus told His disciples that they would face opposition to the message they preached. They were not to fear this opposition, for God knew what they would endure.

Jesus reminds His followers here that their heavenly Father knew every sparrow that fell to the ground. He reminds His disciples that two sparrows were sold for only one penny. They were not worth much in the world's eyes, but not one died without God taking note.

Verse 30

The God who saw every sparrow fall to the ground took a special interest in His children. He knew them better than they knew themselves. Jesus told His disciples here that God numbered the hairs of their heads.

We often interpret this verse to speak of God's all-knowing character, but it is more than this. The Greek word for numbered is ἀριθμέω (arithméō). The idea here is that God places a number value on each hair of our head. It is not just that God knows how many hairs are on our heads, but He also identifies each one. God knows all about us, but He also values every part of us.

Verse 31

In verse 29, Jesus told His disciples that God noticed every sparrow that fell to the ground. Here He tells them that they were worth more than many sparrows.

Jesus shows us that there is a special value to human life in the eyes of God. While God knows every sparrow that falls, He places much more weight on

human life. It is for humans that Jesus came to this earth. It is for humans that God is preparing a place in heaven. It is with humans that God has chosen to fellowship. There is a value to human life that cannot be found in any other life form. That value is in God's choice to treasure and fellowship with us.

Verse 32

We need to understand this verse in the context of opposition to the gospel. Jesus began this section by reminding His disciples that unbelievers would persecute and reject them just as they had their Master. He tells them not to fear this rejection but to acknowledge Him before men. The word acknowledge is ἀριθμέω (arithméō), which is derived from two other Greek words, homoú meaning together with, and légō meaning to say. The idea here

is to say the same thing as another. In this case, to acknowledge Jesus before men is to declare your belief in Him and what He declared publically. This declaration is made, despite the possibility of persecution and death.

Jesus told His disciples that anyone who confessed Him this way would be acknowledged before the Father. God would stand with and recognize that individual and their confession.

Verse 33

Not everyone would be willing to stand up for Christ and confess Him before the world. Fearing persecution and death, some would deny Him.

Jesus tells His disciples that those who denied Him before men, He would deny before His Father in heaven. Remember that Peter denied knowing the Lord

Jesus but repented and was restored. Jesus did not deny Peter before the Father. How, then, are we to understand what Jesus is teaching here?

The denial Jesus speaks of here is a lifestyle. It is a refusal to recognize Christ and to choose instead to seek the world and its attractions. Those who live such a lifestyle cannot claim to be His disciples. A disciple must follow the Master.

Verse 34

Jesus continues here on the theme of persecution and rejection for those who follow Him and confess Him before men. He tells his disciples here that he did not come to bring peace but a sword.

The Messiah, in the Jewish mind, would bring peace and political stability. That, however, was not the kind of peace Jesus would bring. He would certainly bring peace with God, but this is not what He is speaking about here.

The presence of Jesus on this earth would bring division. Jesus has just spoken about how families would be divided (see verse 21). His disciples would be hated for their stand for Jesus and His teaching. Ultimately, Jesus would be crucified on a cross for His message. The Gospel message continues to be controversial in our day. Many passionately reject it. There are countries where it is forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus or to share His name publically. Parents have rejected children because of their faith in the Saviour. The Bible teaches that as the days of Christ's return draw nearer, there will be even more widespread persecution of believers.

Verse 35

The Gospel of Jesus Christ sets a son against his father and a daughter against her mother. Families are broken up because of the conversion of one member to Christ. We do not have a guarantee that every member of our family will come to Christ. Children will choose their paths. Parents will reject Jesus as the Saviour. Husbands and wives will not agree on this matter. The battle for the kingdom of God is often messy and divisive.

Verse 36

Jesus tells us that sometimes our enemies will be in our own homes. There are places in the world where parents have denounced their children because they have become Christians. I have heard testimonies of parents who were willing to kill their children

because they had renounced their family religion to become Christian. Jesus tells us that we can expect this as we seek to advance His kingdom.

Verse 37

Jesus warns us that the gospel will bring division and that the members of our own family will sometimes be our worst enemies. He does not apologize for this but tells us that if we love our father or mother more than Him, we are not worthy of Him.

As important as family is, it must not stand between our Saviour and us. When Jesus called His disciples, they left their families and followed Him.

Notice how Jesus tells us that if we are not willing to leave father and mother for Him, we are not worthy of Him. The fact is that none of us are worthy of the

Lord and His grace. What Jesus is telling us here seems to be that those who are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary for Christ are unfit for service. If we want to follow Jesus, He must be first. Everything in life must be secondary to Him and His purpose.

Verse 38

Jesus tells us that if we want to follow Him, we must be willing to take up our cross. The cross is where criminals would die. It was a symbol of complete surrender to the Lord. Those who picked up their cross said, "I am willing to die and sacrifice all I have for the Lord."

Jesus tells us that if we are not willing to do this, we are unworthy of Him. That is to say, we are unfit to be His servants. Surrendering everything to

Christ is the minimum requirement for being His servant.

If you want to follow Jesus, this is the requirement. He must have everything. He must be Lord over every penny, every breath and every aspiration in life. Our lives, in their entirety, are for Him to use as He sees fit.

Verse 39

Jesus speaks about finding and losing one's life here. To lose one's life is to die to our ambitions and aspirations. It is to surrender everything to the Lord. To find one's life is the opposite of this. It is to pursue our worldly ambitions and passions. It is to satisfy our desires and live for ourselves.

Notice what Jesus promises here. If you live for yourself and your passions, you lose everything. If, on the other hand,

you lose your life for Christ, you gain everything.

We will stand before our God to give an account of our lives. With eternity before us, what we gave up in this life will appear insignificant compared to the blessings awaiting those who have truly lived for Christ.

Verse 40

There is a blessing for all who stand behind those God has called into service. When we receive one God has called, we receive Him and welcome His work in our midst.

Jesus tells us that He sends people to us so we can minister to them in His name. He also sends individuals and circumstances to direct and speak to us. We are not always in tune with this.

As His called ones, we must seek God's purpose in that calling. As those who

receive one who is called, we need to expect that God will use that individual to mature, correct and instruct us in His purpose. We must be open to what God wants to do.

Verse 41

God sends many different people to us for a purpose. Some of those people can challenge us. The prophets God sent among His people in the Old Testament often reprimanded God's people. Jesus tells us, however, that when we receive a prophet as from the Lord, we will receive a prophet's reward. When we receive a righteous person because he is righteous, we will receive a righteous person's reward. What is a "prophet's reward" or a righteous person's reward"? There are two opinions on this.

First, the prophet's reward is a blessing from the prophet. This may be through strengthening, encouraging or comforting words from the Lord. The righteous person's blessing may be the same. That is to say, a blessing from the words or life of a person truly living for God and walking in His purpose.

Second, the prophet's reward, or the righteous person's reward, may be a blessing from God for having received these individuals in our midst. By standing with them and receiving their ministry, we experience a blessing from God for supporting them and receiving them in His name.

What is clear is that God sends people to bless and strengthen His work. We must discern how to receive them and learn what God wants to teach us through them.

Verse 42

God calls us to stand with the work He is doing. He calls His servants to go in His name and on His behalf. Jesus tells us that when we give even a cup of cold water to any of these servants, we will not lose our reward.

We are the instruments of God for the encouragement and support of His servants. When we stand behind them, we stand behind the work God is doing through them. The blessing of God is on those who stand with Him and the work of His kingdom.

MATTHEW 11

Verse 1

In Matthew 10:1, the Lord commissioned His twelve disciples to go out in His name to preach and demonstrate that the kingdom of God had come. They did this by casting out demons and healing the sick.

In Matthew 10, Jesus instructed these disciples on ministering during this time.

Chapter 11 begins with, "When Jesus had finished instructing His twelve disciples." This is most likely a reference to His teaching in chapter 10.

Verse 1 tells us what Jesus did as His disciples went out to various parts of the country. He travelled from city to city preaching.

Verse 2

As Jesus preached from city to city, John the Baptist was imprisoned. Matthew 14:3-4 tells us about his imprisonment:

3 For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, 4 because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." – Mt 14:3-4

John was bold in his preaching, but this boldness riled people up, and in this case, he upset the wrong person and was imprisoned for it.

This imprisonment was likely a difficult time for John. In this darkness, John heard about the powerful and miraculous works of Jesus and reached out to Him. We are not told what the motivation of John was here, but could it be that he was wondering why Jesus, who performed such miraculous deeds, did not release him from his prison cell?

There is certainly a mystery here. The picture of sinners being released from sickness, evil spirits and afflictions while the one who introduced Jesus to the world languishes in prison is perplexing. God's ways, however, are not our ways. The call of God is to trust Him and be faithful in whatever circumstance He allows into our lives.

Verse 3

Notice the question John asks Jesus from his dark prison cell.

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

This question is often interpreted to mean that John questioned whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. While this may be the case, evidence in Scripture indicates that John did not doubt this. He preached that Jesus was the Christ. He saw the Spirit of God descend on Him at His baptism. He pointed his disciples to Jesus as the Messiah. It may be that John was trying to sort through his struggles. Verse 2 tells us that it was when John heard of the deeds of Jesus that he brought this question to Him. Was he struggling with the fact that others were experiencing the power of Jesus when he was languishing in his prison cell? Was he asking Jesus why he was not also experiencing this release in His

situation? God's ways are not always easy to understand. It is for us to surrender to His purpose, whether in deep valleys of struggle and pain or on mountaintops of blessing.

Verse 4

Jesus responds to John's question about whether He was the Messiah by pointing to the evidence. He tells John's disciples to return to John and tell him what they had seen and heard. This was a decision John had to make for himself based on the evidence before him. If we open our eyes as well, we will see this same evidence of changed lives around the world.

Verse 5

Notice the evidence Jesus points to as He replies to John's disciples.

1. The blind received sight

2. The lame walked again
 3. Lepers were cleansed
 4. The deaf were able to hear again
 5. The dead were raised
 6. The poor heard the good news
- When Jesus tells John's disciples that the poor had the good news preached to them, he uses the Greek word εὐαγγελίζω (euaggelízō), which speaks of proclaiming good news or preaching the gospel. That good news was the news of a Saviour who had come to deliver them from their sin and oppression.

The proof Jesus gave John's disciples was the power of Jesus to push back the oppressive forces of hell by the truth of salvation and forgiveness.

This was all John needed to reassure His heart. That same good news is proclaimed. Evidence of the truth of those claims can be seen worldwide as men and women are being released

from the bondage of sin and oppression and experiencing renewal and new life in the person of Jesus Christ. The proof is clear. The question is whether we will believe.

Verse 6

Jesus told John's disciples to return to John, telling him what they had seen and heard Christ do. This in itself was proof that He was the Messiah who was to come.

Notice that Jesus had another word for John as well:

"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

The word Jesus uses here is σκανδαλίζω skandalízō, which speaks of putting a stumbling block before

someone, offending or scandalizing them.

Both Paul and Peter, quoting from Isaiah 8:14, speak of Jesus as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to many;

33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." – Ro 9:33

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. – 1Pe 2:7-8

Many people, even in our day, are offended by the message of the gospel. In His day, the religious leaders were scandalized by His claim to be the Son of God. Ultimately, they crucified Him on the cross. Many continue to be offended in our day. Believers in His name are persecuted all around the world. Jesus tells us that as the day of His appearance approaches, we will experience more and more difficulties and rejection.

Notice what Jesus tells John here. Those who were not offended by Jesus and His name would be blessed. Yes, there would be persecution and struggle in this life, but the blessing of God would be upon all who walked faithfully in Christ's name.

Verse 7

When John's disciples left, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John and his

ministry. Notice the question He asked the people that day:

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? – Mt 11:7

There is some debate here about the imagery Jesus uses here. For some, a reed shaken in the wind represented instability and weakness. Unlike a tree, the reed would break in the wind. Others interpret the image to refer to something commonplace and ordinary. The reed was of little value and a common sighting in the wilderness.

Jesus seemed to be asking the people about their opinion of John. Did they see him as some unstable preacher who was out of his mind preaching about the Messiah? Did they see him as another prophet, like all the others, who preached a message of doom and gloom?

Verse 8

Jesus continues His questioning of the crowd about John the Baptist and how they saw him. When the people went out into the wilderness to see John, did they expect to see a man dressed in soft clothing like those worn by kings and their families?

The religious leaders of the day certainly liked to dress in fine clothing to be noticed by the people. Even today, some religious leaders want to make an impression through their dress. This was not John the Baptist. He dressed in coarse camel's hair garments and ate locusts and honey he found in the wilderness. He was not interested in the finer things of life but focused on preaching the kingdom of God. Those expecting to see a finely dressed preacher would have been disappointed in John.

Verse 9

Some people went to John in the wilderness to see a prophet. Jesus affirms John as a prophet here but declares him to be more than a prophet.

By affirming John as a prophet, Jesus affirms the message He spoke. He also affirms him as one God called and whose message was to be heard.

Verse 10

In Matthew 11:9, Jesus declared John to be more than a prophet. He goes on to explain this by quoting from Malachi 3:1, which says:

1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple;

*and the messenger of the covenant
in whom you delight, behold, he is
coming, says the LORD of hosts. –
Mal 3:1*

According to Jesus, Malachi prophesied of John's coming to prepare the way for the Messiah. Many prophets before John declared that Jesus would come, but John baptized and physically presented Him to the world. This was a privilege given to no one else.

Verse 11

Speaking of John the Baptist, Jesus declares that no one is greater than him. Remember that Jesus states this in the context of John sending his disciples to ask if He was the Messiah. John struggled at this point in his life. He had questions, but despite these questions, Jesus declared him to be the greatest of all born of women. Jesus

understands our questions. He knows our weaknesses and shortcomings but still uses us to accomplish His great purpose. The greatness of John was not in himself but in the role he fulfilled. He was given the immense and wonderful task of introducing the Saviour.

Notice that while Jesus declared John to be the greatest of all born of women, He also says that the least of the kingdom of heaven was greater than John.

John the Baptist would shortly be beheaded by Herod. He would not live long enough to see the crucifixion of Jesus and experience the result of Christ's death. Those who came after John would know the reality of the cross to defeat the power of sin in the heart. They would experience the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ, empowering them to live the

Christian life and walk in victory. These individuals would have a fuller understanding and experience of Christ than John. They would know the reality of what John preached. Their greatness was not in themselves but in the indwelling presence of Christ and His salvation.

This is a reality that we often do not experience in full. The challenge of this verse, however, is for us to live in this deep intimacy with Christ and awareness of His indwelling presence.

Verse 12

Jesus declared that there was a violent response against the kingdom of heaven from the day John the Baptist began to preach the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus said this, John was in prison for what he preached.

Jesus continued to preach this truth, and He also suffered for what He taught. Matthew 4 describes the great temptation of Jesus by Satan over an intense period of forty days.

In Matthew 9:3, the religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. These same religious leaders questioned his association with sinners and claimed that He cast out demons by the power of Satan (see Matthew 9:34). Even in these early days, violent people were being riled up against the kingdom of heaven. Both John and Jesus were threatened with death. These threats would only worsen as the Gospel continued to be preached.

Verse 13

Jesus tells His listeners here that the Law and the Prophets prophesied until John. The idea is that the Law and the

Prophets all pointed to the coming of the Messiah. John was the last prophet to speak of the coming of Christ Jesus. He introduced the world to the person of Christ. This is not to say that John was the last of the prophets. The New Testament continues to speak of the role of the prophet. These prophets, however, live after the arrival of the Messiah on this earth.

Verse 14

The prophet Malachi prophesied of a day when a messenger would come to prepare the way for the Lord:

1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is

*coming, says the LORD of hosts. –
Mal 3:1*

Malachi tells us that the Lord would send the prophet Elijah before the “great and awesome day of the Lord.”

5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” – Mal 4:5-6

Jesus interprets this prophecy for us here. He tells us that John the Baptist was the Elijah to come. Like Elijah, John the Baptist was a great prophet. Unlike Elijah, however, he introduced the physical presence of Christ to the world. John the Baptist was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Malachi.

Verse 15

Having interpreted the prophecy of Malachi in the last verse, Jesus adds, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Now while those present all heard what Jesus said with their physical ears, many did not see the significance of what the Lord said that day.

He told the people who had come to see Him that He fulfilled the prophecy. He was the Messiah who was to come. He would bring salvation to all who would turn to Him and trust His work on the cross.

Many in that assembly did not have the spiritual ears required to grasp the significance of this fulfilled prophecy. They saw Jesus as a great prophet with miraculous powers. He could heal their sickness and cast out their demons, but that is as far as it went for them. Their

hearts were not truly moved to worship. Their eyes did not perceive Him as God, the Messiah, the world's light and hope for all nations.

Jesus knew that many would not understand what He told them that day. He does not attempt to persuade them any further. He challenges those who had been given spiritual ears to hear, to take heed to what He said and let the impact of His words transform their heart and mind.

As we minister in the name of Jesus, we need to be aware that not everyone will have ears to hear what we say. God must work in the lives of those to whom we speak to give them ears to hear and understand. He must soften their heart to receive what we share. It is not our power to persuade that will bring people to the Lord. It is a miracle of God that opens their ears and hearts

to hear and receive what He gives us for them.

Verse 16

In this verse, the Lord Jesus compares the generation of His day to a group of children sitting in the marketplace.

Notice a couple of details in this illustration.

First, Jesus spoke of that generation as children. The children He talks about here have not matured into full adulthood. There were things they did not understand, nor were they at a place where they could take on the responsibilities of adulthood. This describes not only the common person but also the religious leaders of the day. They did not have ears to hear. They could not grasp the teaching of Christ and the kingdom of God.

Second, these children were sitting in the marketplaces, calling out to their playmates. The marketplace was a place of business. It was also a place of great celebrations, mourning and decisions that impacted the community. It was here that these immature children gathered. None of them were truly qualified to make the decisions necessary. None of them had the understanding or qualifications required for their roles.

Verse 17

Jesus describes the generation of that day as immature children in the marketplace. They were unqualified for their roles in the community and lacked an understanding of the great purpose of God for them. Notice something else here about these children. Jesus illustrates their immaturity with the words:

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

We have all heard children come to their parents complaining that their friends wouldn't play with them or do what they wanted. One child played the flute, but his friend wouldn't dance for him. Another sang a sad song, but his friend didn't cry. Jesus pictures these children complaining and fighting with their friends because they didn't do what they were supposed to do.

According to Jesus, this was a picture of the generation of that day. They played a role but did not have the maturity or understanding to make proper decisions or follow through. They were divided over childish things. They only thought of themselves but could not see the bigger picture. There are churches like this in our day.

Verse 18

Jesus explains this illustration more fully by sharing the response of these children to John the Baptist and Himself.

When these immature children saw John the Baptist, he lived a very simple lifestyle. He didn't drink, nor did he eat common food sold in the marketplace. Instead, he ate locusts and honey he found in the wilderness. What was the response of these immature children to John, his ministry and his unconventional lifestyle? They explained it by claiming that he had a demon."

Verse 19

The response of the children of Israel to John's abstinence from drink and typical food was to say that he had a

demon (see verse 18). Jesus, however, lived a very different life. He drank and ate what everyone else ate. How did the people of that day respond to Him? They called him a glutton, drunkard and friend of tax collectors and sinners. The people of that generation rejected John because he did not eat or drink. They rejected Jesus because He did.

Jesus concludes this illustration by saying: "Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." What is He saying here?

Note first that there is a difference in the words used in the original Greek manuscripts for the phrase "wisdom is justified by her deeds."

The word "deeds" comes from the Greek word ἐργον (érgon), which refers to work. In other words, the wisdom of a certain lifestyle or action is proven by the work it accomplishes or the deeds it produces.

Other Greek manuscripts contain the word τέκνον (téknōn), which is translated by child or children in the English language. The meaning is very similar. The wisdom of a certain lifestyle, word or action is proven by the offspring or children it bears. A good tree produces good fruit. True wisdom bears godly fruit.

What Jesus is telling us here is that we can't judge a person by their looks or lifestyle. God has not called us all to minister in the same way. We come with different perspectives. What is important is the fruit that ministry bears. John's ministry was different from Christ's. Both produced a godly fruit. The people of Israel, who played like immature children in the marketplace, did not have the discernment or understanding necessary to recognize the godly fruit.

Verse 20

God does things in our lives for a purpose. However, we often miss what God is doing and fail to learn the lessons he wants to teach us. What is true for our personal lives is also true for the life of our cities and countries. Matthew tells us that Jesus “began to denounce” the cities where He had done mighty works. Notice the reason for this rebuke –they did not repent.

His great miracles were intended to prove that the kingdom of God was among them. It was His heart that these cities saw He was the son of God, the Messiah to come, and put their trust in Him. Instead, they received the miracles but turned their back on the Miracle Giver.

Verse 21

Jesus speaks of two cities in the region of Galilee where He had ministered and performed many mighty works. He tells them that if the miracles performed in them had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes.

Tyre and Sidon were commercial cities of great significance. They were known for their wealth but also their sinful practices. Ezekiel prophesied destruction for Tyre and Sidon because of their evil (see Ezekiel 26-28). Jesus tells us that had they seen the miracles Chorazin and Bethsaida saw, they would have repented of their sin.

Understand here that this does not mean that Tyre and Sidon did not have their opportunity to repent. We have already seen that Ezekiel spoke to them in Ezekiel 26-28, warning them of the judgement to come if they persisted in their sin.

Verse 22

Jesus tells His listeners that it would be “more bearable” for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgement than Chorazin and Bethsaida. What is Jesus telling us here?

We do not know much about the nature of hell and its punishment. What Jesus seems to be saying here, however, is that those who have had a great opportunity to hear the gospel and know the Saviour but turn away will suffer more than those who had little opportunity.

Some commentators believe this additional suffering will result from remembering all the opportunities they had to repent but refused to do so. In this case, Chorazin and Bethsaida had the presence of Jesus walking in their streets, preaching the news of the kingdom of heaven and performing

miracles. Despite this privilege, they rejected Him and continued in their sin and rebellion. They would have more to answer for than Tyre and Sidon, who had less opportunity.

Verse 23

Jesus also speaks about the city of Capernaum, where He preached and performed many great and miraculous works. He warns the town that they would be brought down to Hades because they had rejected Him and His message. In other words, their judgment was sealed because they had turned their back on the warning.

Jesus reminds Capernaum that if Sodom, the city destroyed in Abraham's day, had heard and seen what Capernaum saw, it would have opened its heart and repented. It would have

remained a city and not suffered such terrible destruction.

We are accountable to God for the knowledge we have. Many people do not have ears to hear what God is saying to them. They do not learn from the trials God allows. God continues to speak through His Word and His Spirit. He uses people and circumstances to communicate His purpose. It is for us to listen to what He is saying and respond.

Verse 24

Once again, Jesus reminded the citizens of Capernaum that it would be more tolerable for Sodom than for them on the Day of Judgement. Sodom was severely judged because of their wickedness, but the Son of God did not walk their streets in the flesh, nor did

He preach to them and perform many great miracles in their presence. Capernaum would have more to answer for on the Day of Judgement because they had been given more opportunity to repent.

Verse 25

In verses 20-24, Jesus spoke about various cities of Israel which had rejected the miraculous works He had done in their midst. Matthew begins verse 25 by telling us that it was at that time Jesus prayed this prayer to the Father. This seems to connect the words of Jesus to the cities of Israel with His prayer to the Father. Consider here what Jesus prays.

First, Jesus recognized the Father as the "Lord of heaven and earth." As the Lord, the Father had the right to do as He pleased. All creation belonged to

Him. All creatures in heaven and earth were under His dominion and held in submission to His purpose and will. To rebel against His Lordship was a serious matter.

Second, Jesus thanks the Father for hiding “these things” from the wise and understanding. To understand what Jesus is saying here, we must consider the context. Matthew tells us that Jesus prayed this prayer when he prophesied against the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. He told us that he performed many miracles in those cities to demonstrate the kingdom of God and His identity as the Son of God. It is likely, then, that the phrase “these things” refers to the truth about the kingdom of God and the person of Jesus Christ.

Notice here that Jesus thanks the Father that He had hidden the truths of the kingdom from the wise and

understanding. Why would Jesus be thankful that the truth about His kingdom was hidden from the wise and understanding? To answer this question, consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:

2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. – Mt 18:2-4

To enter the kingdom of God, Jesus tells us that we need to humble ourselves. This was not easy for the wise and understanding. The religious leaders of the day considered themselves to be experts in the law. They looked down on others and treated them with contempt. They

pushed their way on the ordinary believer, and even when Jesus came into their midst, they rejected Him and His teaching. The kingdom of heaven had no place for the wise in their own eyes. It has no room for the proud and hypocritical who will not listen to the Word of God or submit to the purpose of God.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who recognize their sinfulness and unworthiness and come to Him in humility. Imagine what heaven would be like if it was filled with the proud and religiously wise who could not listen to anyone but themselves and could not see anything other than their way. These individuals do not belong in the kingdom of God.

We can become children again by humbling and dying to ourselves. If we want to be part of the kingdom of God, we must die to our understanding, and

walk in submission to God and His purpose. Only the humble and submissive, who cast off any confidence in themselves, and trust the work of Jesus alone, can know the reality of His kingdom.

It is a matter of great thanksgiving that this kingdom is comprised of those who have recognized Jesus as Lord, and have bowed in humble submission to Him alone.

Verse 26

Jesus recognized the will of the Father to hide the truth from the proud who were wise in their own eyes and to reveal it to humble children who walked in surrender to His will.

Note that Jesus calls this will of God gracious. That is to say; it is an unmerited favour from the Father. Jesus

reminds us that salvation is given to those who become like helpless children, relying fully on Christ and not on their ability to gain His favour through their wisdom. An understanding of the kingdom of God is given as a gracious act of God, independent of any knowledge, understanding or effort on their part.

Verse 27

Jesus has just told us that the Father had hidden the things of the kingdom from the proud and revealed them to humble children. It is in this context that He makes three statements about Himself.

First, Jesus tells us that the Father had handed over all things to Him. The “all things” referred to here relate to the kingdom of heaven. The Father has made Jesus Lord over this kingdom. It

is through His shed blood that this kingdom has been established. It is under His Lordship that it will advance. It is to Him that every knee will bow. Second, Jesus tells us that no one knows the Son except the Father. The disciples knew Him in His physical body, but He was so much more than these disciples could see with their physical eyes. Only the Father knew the glory of the Son in its fullness. Only the Father saw Him in that glory, for He shared it with His Son. At best, our knowledge of the Son Jesus is a shadow of the reality.

Notice here that Jesus tells us that no one can know the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. To know the Father, we must first know forgiveness and new birth. We must have our eyes opened by Christ. Only He can forgive and give us this new life. Apart from Him and His work, not one of us would

ever know the Father or be in a relationship with Him.

Jesus tells us that He chooses those to whom He will reveal the Father. As much as we would like to think that we chose God before that decision was made, Jesus first decided to pursue us and reveal Himself to us.

Verse 28

Having told us in verse 27 that only those to whom He chose to reveal the Father could know Him, Jesus then calls those who laboured and were weighted down with burdens to come to Him. It is precisely because Jesus is the only one who can reveal the Father that we must come to Him. He alone can give us the help needed. His work alone can renew our hearts and cleanse us from our sins. He alone can lead us to the Father in whom there is peace and rest.

Verse 29

Jesus calls those who laboured and were heavy-laden to take His yoke upon themselves. The idea of someone weighted down with cares and concerns of this world taking on another burden does not seem logical. The idea, however, is not to take on further burdens but rather to lay down the earthly weights and take on a submission to Christ and His purpose for our lives.

How often have we been overwhelmed with care and anxiety over things, not ours to be concerned about? Jesus tells us that as we lay down these earthly weights and submit to His purpose instead, we will find rest for our souls.

Notice, however, that it is not just for us to submit to Christ's yoke but also to learn from Him. The idea here is to seek to know Him and His purpose. Jesus tells those who seek to learn

from Him in their situations that they will find Him gentle and lowly in heart.

The word “gentle” comes from the Greek word πρᾶος (práos), meaning meek and mild. Jesus describes Himself also as “lowly of heart.” The word used here is ταπεινός (tapeinós), meaning humble. What Jesus appears to be saying is that He deals with us in gentleness and understanding. He has our interests at heart in His dealings with us. He allows us to pass through trials and circumstances for our good.

Jesus does not promise that things will be easy here. Nor does He tell us that our lives will be stress-free. He tells us that as we lay down our earthly ambitions and submit to Him and His purpose, He will care for us and give us rest and confidence in our souls. We can face each trial in life with the assurance that He is watching out for us and that we are in His will. His

strength and peace will be equal to each task.

We must see the connection between submitting to the yoke of Christ and learning of Him in this passage. In my life, I have often submitted to the yoke of Christ but lost sight of Him in that submission and failed to learn from Him.

Submitting to Christ is only half of what we are called to do here. The Lord challenges all who submit to Him to fix their eyes on Him and learn from Him in their submission. It is in fixing our eyes on Him and learning from Him in these trials that we experience true fellowship, joy and peace.

Verse 30

As we look at the history of Christianity over the years, we see that many have

died for the sake of the Lord Jesus. The apostles who faithfully served the Lord were beaten, mocked and persecuted for His name's sake. Many died cruel deaths for the gospel they preached. Notice, however, what the Lord Jesus tells us about His yoke and burden:

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” – Mt 11:30

The word Jesus uses for “easy” is the Greek word χρηστός (chrēstós) which means profitable, fit, good, kind, or good. Jesus seems to tell us that His yoke is kind, compassionate and suited for us. That is not to say that we will not struggle with His purpose in our lives, but God will always fit the burden to our needs and supply us with the grace necessary to pass each trial. Jesus also tells us that His burden is light. Understand that this does not mean we will not struggle with the burden He gives us. We are all called to

carry our cross. But whatever burden we are called to bear, Christ will stand with us. He will provide us with the grace to overcome. He will strengthen and equip us for the battle before us. We will lack nothing to face the foe. We will know His support no matter what trial we encounter, and His comfort and peace will support us in our greatest obstacles.

MATTHEW 12

Verse 1

On a Sabbath day, Jesus and His disciples went through a grainfield. The verse does not tell us where they were going. We are told, however, that the disciples were hungry and picked heads of grain to eat as they passed through the field. In the modern mind, it would be wrong to take this grain and eat it, but the law of Moses permitted this, so the disciples did nothing wrong here. Consider Deuteronomy 23:25:

25 If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall

*not put a sickle to your neighbor's
standing grain. – Dt 23:25*

The law of Moses permitted those passing through a grain field to taste the grain as they passed through. In this particular case, the disciples were hungry, so the grain served to strengthen them for the day.

Verse 2

We see here the response of the Pharisees to the disciples picking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath day. They reprimanded Jesus for allowing them to do “what it not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees were teachers of the law and the religious police of the day. They did what they could to ensure that the people of Israel observed the Law of

Moses. The problem was in their interpretation of that law.

To keep people from breaking the law, the Pharisees set boundaries that God had never intended. In this case, the law of Moses stated that the people of Israel were not to harvest their land on the Sabbath:

21 "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. – Ex 34:21

The Pharisees interpreted this to mean that the disciples, who picked ears of grain to eat when hungry on the Sabbath, were breaking the law. They made no distinction between a farmer harvesting his land and a hungry person picking grain to eat on his way through the field.

Verse 3

Jesus responds to the reprimand of the Pharisees here. In doing so, He points them to an incident in the life of David. The story is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. King Saul was seeking to kill David. Fleeing for his life, David came to Ahimelech, the priest in the city of Nob. David asked him for food that day. All that was available was the holy bread set out on the table of the Lord. The priest, however, gave David this bread and sent him off. While that holy bread was not to be eaten by the common person, in this case, Ahimilech saw a greater principle in play — the life of a servant of God.

Verse 4

Jesus reminds the Pharisees of how David ate “the bread of the Presence,” which was not lawful for him to eat.

Only the priests were permitted to eat this bread according to the Law of Moses (see Leviticus 24:5-9).

What is interesting here is that Jesus does not condemn David for eating this bread. It was God's way of providing for Him and his men to escape Saul. It strengthened them for their journey. The legalistic interpretation of the law would not permit David to eat this bread. There would be no compromise, even if it meant death. The Pharisees would have preferred to see a person die rather than bend one of the laws of Moses. Jesus, on the other hand, allowed a certain flexibility. For example, He permitted the healing of the sick on the Sabbath. He was willing to release a sheep that had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath. Jesus emphasized compassion and mercy over the strict observance of the law.

Verse 5

Jesus used a second example in response to the Pharisees who reprimanded Him for allowing His disciples to gather heads of grain on the Sabbath. He speaks about how the priests went into the temple to serve on the Sabbath. They offered sacrifices and performed their duties on that sacred day, breaking or profaning it.

Notice, however, that while these priests profaned the Sabbath by working, they were “guiltless.” Can someone break the law and be guiltless? Legalism tells us it is not possible, but Jesus tells us that it is. David broke the law by eating sacred bread but did not sin. The disciples picked heads of grain on the Sabbath but were innocent. The priests profaned the Sabbath law by working on the Sabbath but were guiltless.

The law was given to be our guide, but there are times when the legalistic application of that law can be worse than breaking it. I often use the illustration of a person speeding to the hospital with a dying friend in his car. He breaks the speed limit to save his friend's life. The Pharisees would have let this friend die to obey the law. Jesus chose compassion, mercy and the greater purpose of God.

Verse 6

Jesus has been speaking to the Pharisees about His disciples picking heads of grain on the Sabbath. He reminded them of how the priests profaned the Sabbath by going to the temple and working that day. Notice how Jesus moves from this illustration of the temple and the priests who served in it to the statement, "I

tell you, something greater than the temple is here.” What is Jesus saying?

For the Pharisees, there was nothing greater than the temple except the God worshipped there. This temple represented the religion of the day with all its rules, ceremonies and regulations. It represented the requirements of God for them as His people.

Consider, however, the words of the writer to the Hebrews:

3 For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken

later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. – Heb 3:3-6

Hebrews 3 tells us that Jesus Christ is worthy of more glory than that temple. He takes priority over the temple with all its regulations and ceremonies. This is often something we forget. Church, religious traditions and celebrations can easily become a god to us. We become guilty of idolatry when we place church over Christ.

Verse 7

Jesus quotes here from Hosea 6:6:

6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. – Ho 6:6

The Pharisees were very good at sacrifice and legalistic observance of

the Law of Moses. Jesus shows them, however, that God was more concerned about mercy rather than law and sacrifice. In other words, there is a time to break the law to show mercy and compassion.

Notice how Jesus applies this principle to the Pharisees. He tells them that if they understood this principle of mercy over law and sacrifice, they would not have condemned His disciples for picking heads of grain on the Sabbath day. Jesus defends His disciples here and calls them "guiltless." In other words, they were innocent before God, even if they did break the law of the Sabbath.

Verse 8

Jesus concludes His discussion with these Pharisees by telling them that

the “Son of Man” was “lord of the Sabbath.”

Notice the reference here to the “Son of Man.” John speaks of the Son of Man in Revelation 1:12-17. In this passage, he saw a vision of the “son of man” clothed in a long robe with a golden sash around his chest (Revelation 1:12), standing in the midst of the lampstands. Notice how the apostle describes Him:

*14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,
15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. – Revelation 1:14-16*

Observe the response of John upon seeing the glorified Son of Man:

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last." – Rev 1:12-17

The apostle John fell at the feet of the Son of Man and heard Him declare that He was the "first and the last," the eternal God. That he was the Son of Man indicates that he lived among us as a man. There is no doubt that this is a clear reference to the Lord Jesus alone.

Jesus declares that He is the Lord over the Sabbath. That is to say; He has the right to interpret, apply, or even abolish this law. His command and leading took precedence over the law. The law was never intended to have authority over

Christ Himself. It was and always will be subservient to Him.

Verse 9

We discover where Jesus and the disciples were going when they passed through the grain field. They were going to the synagogue to worship. This appears to be Jesus' custom. Many in that synagogue did not understand that He was the Messiah. Those who worshipped had not accepted Him as their Lord. This, however, does not keep Jesus from worshipping on that Sabbath day. No church is perfect. We often find ourselves worshipping beside people whose lives do not show they are believers. What is important here is that we guard our hearts. My worship of God does not need to be affected by those around me.

Verse 10

Matthew tells us that in that temple was a man with a withered hand. Also present were individuals who did not believe He was the Messiah and were intent on finding a way to accuse Him of being a lawbreaker. It may be that the individuals referred to here were the Pharisees who reprimanded Jesus' disciples for picking heads of grain on their way to worship.

These individuals came to Jesus and asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They presented this man with the withered hand to Jesus to accuse Him of being a lawbreaker.

Verse 11

Jesus gives an example of an act of mercy performed on the Sabbath day. Speaking to those who had questioned whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus asks:

“Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?

Out of compassion for a sheep that might lose its life if not removed from the pit, the owner would certainly reach down and take it out of the pit, even if it was the Sabbath. Jesus uses this illustration to show that mercy and compassion, even to animals, took priority over the Sabbath law.

Verse 12

Jesus applies the principle of rescuing a sheep from a pit to human life. If it was acceptable to remove a sheep from a pit, how much more valuable was the life of a suffering man or woman?

How easy it is for us to get our priorities wrong. That sheep represented money for the owner. He

could justify allowing another human being to suffer, but when it came to his property and the loss of financial gain, the owner would do everything possible to rescue that sheep.

Jesus shows us that mercy and compassion outweigh the letter of the law. He also shows us how twisted our priorities can be and how self-centred we are.

Jesus makes an important statement at the end of this verse: "So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." The Sabbath law was never intended to keep people from doing what was right. It was right and compassionate to release a sheep from a pit. It was right to care for the sick and needy. When the law of the Sabbath prevented an individual from doing what was right, it was to be broken. Obedience to God, mercy, and compassion were of greater importance than the law.

Verse 13

Jesus asked the man to stretch out his withered hand. Matthew tells us it was restored to a healthy state, just like the other. Notice a couple of details about this miracle.

First, we have no indication that the man with the withered hand was seeking healing. He seems to have been brought to Jesus by the leaders in the synagogue as a means of trapping Jesus into breaking their interpretation of the Sabbath law.

Those around Jesus did not demonstrate any faith in what Jesus could do. They were only seeking to accuse Him of being a lawbreaker.

Jesus does not seem to say anything or do anything here. He asked the man to stretch out his hand. He could hardly be accused of breaking the law of the

Sabbath by asking a man to stretch out his hand.

How this miracle took place left no doubt that it was from God. The man stretched out his hand, and it was healed. Jesus appears to say nothing, nor did he do anything that could prove him guilty of breaking the Sabbath. The religious leaders were given cause to reflect on what Jesus said that day. It was as if God were confirming the words of Christ through this miracle.

Verse 14

While the Pharisees had been given great cause to reflect on the words of Jesus regarding the Sabbath, they chose instead to conspire against Him and seek ways of destroying Him.

Remember that they had seen a powerful miracle in the synagogue that day. God had healed the hand of a

disabled man. He had done so in confirmation of the word of Jesus. These leaders, however, would not listen. Their religion and their law took precedence over God. They would deny God to keep their law. They would kill His son to keep their traditions.

Verse 15

The Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus, so he left that region. It was not that Jesus was afraid of these leaders and their plot to kill Him that He left. They had hardened their hearts to Him and His message. Instead of seeing the healing of the disabled man's hand as a sign from God, they chose to reject Him. Others would listen to Jesus and receive what He had to offer. He decided to go to them.

Notice that when He left, many followed. Jesus healed all who followed

Him. Why should the presence of Christ remain where hearts refuse to surrender to Him and His Word?

Verse 16

We have seen that the Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus and were looking for anything they could find to accuse him of wrongdoing. Jesus determined to leave their presence and go to those who were open to hear what He had to say. Crowds followed after Jesus, and He preached to them and healed their sick. Notice, however, that Jesus ordered them not to make Him known. In other words, they were not to publish what He had done for them.

The context indicates why Jesus ordered the people not to make Him known. There was a plot to kill Him. While Jesus would not stop doing the will of the Father, it was not His intent

to openly irritate the religious leaders. He would not tempt the Father in this regard. He chose to minister quietly and keep things peaceful.

It is too easy for us to push our way and demand our rights. Jesus moved out of view and continued His ministry in a way that did not irritate those seeking to stop Him. God knows our situation. He does want us to persevere in doing His will, but some openly shake their fist at those who oppose them. Jesus was not afraid to die, but He did not seek to speed up the time of His death by open opposition to the religious leaders of the day.

Verse 17

Jesus has been rejected by the religious leaders who want to kill him. He chose to withdraw from that region and preach the gospel elsewhere. He healed

the sick and announced the presence of the kingdom of God to those who were willing to listen.

Matthew tells us that this work of the Lord Jesus and His character was prophesied long before by the prophet Isaiah. For Matthew, this was proof of the person of Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Verse 18

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Isaiah. For Matthew, this was proof of the person of Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Verse 19

Matthew continues to quote Isaiah's prophecy about the Lord Jesus. Isaiah has two details to share with his readers here about the Messiah.

First, he would not quarrel or cry aloud. Jesus was meek and humble. He did not seek His own will over that of the Father but accepted what the Father gave Him without question. Admittedly, there were times when Jesus did become angry. He chased out the money changers from the temple one day. This was an expression of the anger of the Father. He did not, however, get angry when things became difficult or did not go His way. He quietly accepted the will of the

Father. In Matthew's setting, when confronted by the religious leaders, He quietly left the region and travelled to another city where people would listen to Him.

Second, Matthew tells us that Jesus did not cry aloud, nor did people hear His voice in the street. Jesus preached, and people listened to His voice in the streets where He sometimes taught. Isaiah's words, however, need to be taken in the context of the verse. Jesus did not engage in quarrelling, shouting, or making a scene. He lived a peaceful and quiet life. He ministered humbly and selflessly without desire for personal gain, unlike many who sought to draw attention to themselves.

Verse 20

Isaiah speaks of the gentleness of the Messiah in terms of a bruised reed and

a smouldering wick.

A reed is easily swayed by the wind and broken. A bruised reed is still more prone to breaking. Isaiah describes the tenderness of the Lord as such that he would not even break a bruised reed but act with such compassion that it would not be damaged any further.

A smouldering wick in an oil lamp is about to go out. The flame on that wick is not being fed oil and is at the end of its life. The slightest movement of air will put it out. Jesus, however, was so tender and compassionate that His presence would not put out the light that remained in that lamp.

What is striking about these illustrations is the fact that Isaiah tells us that the Lord would bring victory as a result of this tenderness and compassion. When we think of a great warrior seeking victory and justice, we imagine a great and terrible battle with great shouting,

anger and violence. This was not the case with the Lord Jesus. He won the battle in meekness, humility and tender compassion. The bruised reed was not broken until justice was achieved. The smouldering wick did not go out until victory was obtained for it. As Isaiah would say elsewhere:

15 For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." But you were unwilling, – Isa 30:15

Jesus ministered in this quietness and trust. He demonstrated that the kingdom of God is advanced not by human strength but by confident faith in the Father.

Verse 21

Isaiah concludes his prophecy about the Lord Jesus by telling us that the Gentiles would hope in His name. This was a radical statement by the prophet. For those who lived that day, salvation was only for the Jews. The Gentiles were pagan and unworthy of the salvation of God. Isaiah reminds us, however, that one of the great works of the Messiah was to open the door for the salvation of the Gentile world.

Verse 22

Matthew describes a demon-oppressed man brought to Jesus. Notice that the man was blind and mute. It is clear from verse 24 that Jesus cast out the demon. The result was that the man was able to see and speak.

There is a connection between the demon and the fact that the man could not see and speak. Likely this demon

was the cause of his blindness and muteness. We should not see demons as the source of all sickness and affliction, but it appears this was the case for this particular individual. We understand from this that demons can cause physical problems in those they oppress.

Verse 23

The people who were present when the blind mute was healed were amazed at what they saw that day. Notice that they began to wonder if Jesus could be the Son of David.

The phrase, Son of David, was used to describe the Messiah, who was to be a descendent of David, the king of Israel. The kingdom of God was announced by the preaching of the Gospel and the mighty and powerful miracles of Christ that drove back the forces of hell.

Verse 24

While many in the crowd who had seen the healing of the blind mute began to wonder if Jesus was the Messiah, some rejected what they saw that day. The Pharisees, who wanted to kill Jesus, refused to accept this miracle as being from God. Instead, they condemned this work as being from Beelzebul, the prince of demons. They declared that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul (Beelzebub, KJV).

The name Beelzebul is believed to come from the king Beelzebub in the Old Testament. Translated, the name means "lord of flies." Because flies seem to gather around dung, some believe that the inference is that he was the lord of the manure pile where flies gathered. What is clear is that the name caught on and became a derogatory term associated with Satan.

The Pharisees said that Jesus was from Satan and ministered in Satan's power. While they could not deny that the man had been healed, the Pharisees sought to influence the people to believe that the miracle was not from God but from Satan. In declaring this, they sought to diminish Christ before the people. To do so, they accused Him of being a minister of Satan and evil.

Verse 25

Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking and responded to their accusation that he cast out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus' defence is very simple:

"Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand." – Mt 12:25

Can a divided army defeat its enemy? Can a kingdom stand if its people will not work together? Can a family prosper if it cannot agree? Victory and prosperity depend on each member working together to accomplish their goals. To win a battle, all soldiers must fight as one unit. Any kingdom that is divided against itself will fall.

Verse 26

Jesus applies the illustration of verse 25 to the accusation of the Pharisees.

They claimed that He cast out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus told them, however, that this was not logical. If Satan cast out demons, how could his kingdom advance?

Imagine a military gaining access to a strategic territory and then pulling all their troops out so that their enemy can have access to it again. What have they gained by doing this? Why would Satan

hand over territory that is under his control? What chance does an army have if they do not hold on to what they have conquered? Such an army will surely be defeated. According to Jesus, it is not in the interest of Satan to surrender to Christ.

Verse 27

Jesus makes a second point in His defence against the accusations of the Pharisees. He reminds them that He was not the only one to cast out demons. There were religious leaders among them who engaged in this work as well—they, too, set individuals free from demonic oppression.

Jesus tells the Pharisees that those among them who engaged in casting out demons would be their judges. If they accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan, they

would have to charge their brothers with the same crime. He points out their inconsistency here. If the power of Satan cast out demons, then they would have to stop their brothers from casting out demons. If the power of God cast out demons, then they had no basis for accusing Jesus and ought to accept that casting out the demon from the blind mute had to be an act of God.

Verse 28

Jesus tells the Pharisees that if He cast out demons by the power of God, it was evident that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. The evidence of that kingdom was in how the darkness of hell was being pushed back, and people were being set free from the oppression of Satan. If the work of Jesus set people free from the darkness of Satanic forces, then it was obvious that He ministered in the power of the

Spirit of God and came to advance the purpose of God in this world. It was not in the interest of Satan to withdraw or to allow the Kingdom of God to grow and overcome his kingdom.

Verse 29

Jesus uses another argument against his adversaries who accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan. He illustrates this by using an example of a strong man.

If someone is going to rob a strong man's house, the first thing that person needs to do is to tie up the strong man. If they failed to do so, he would defend his property, and they would not have a chance against him, for he was stronger than them.

What Jesus is telling these individuals is that Satan is that strong man and was

stronger than any of them. If they were to cast out demons and rob Satan of his property, he would first need to be bound. Otherwise, he would rise against those who sought to take what he had claimed.

The implication here is that to cast out this demon, Jesus had to be able to bind Satan. Binding Satan required an act of God. Satan's house could only be plundered by those who acted on God's behalf.

Verse 30

When it comes to this matter of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, there is no middle ground.

These two kingdoms are at complete odds with each other. There is no room for compromise. You are either on one side or the other.

Jesus says this: "Whoever is not with me is against me." You either stand with Him, or you stand against Him. If you do not belong to Him, you belong to Satan. If you do not serve Him, you serve the enemy and His purposes. Or as Jesus says here: "Whoever does not gather with me scatters."

In the case of Jesus casting out the demon from the blind mute, there was only one way of seeing this. Satan does nothing for the kingdom of God. Nor does the kingdom of God stoop to the level of the kingdom of Satan. If this man was freed from the bondage of Satan, it was the work of God, for Satan would never willingly release one of his subjects for the kingdom of God.

Verse 31

This verse comes in the context of Jesus performing a miracle and

releasing the blind mute from an evil spirit. The Pharisees, seeing this miracle before their eyes and hearing the Lord Jesus defend it, chose to say it was from the devil.

Seeing their stance on this matter, Jesus tells those present that every sin and blasphemy would be forgiven except one. Anyone who blasphemed the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven.

The word “blaspheme” used by Jesus here is the Greek word βλασφημία (blasphēmía). It speaks of verbal abuse and slander. In the case of the Pharisees, they slandered the work of the Spirit through Jesus Christ by saying that He was acting on behalf of Satan and hell.

Why is the Spirit of God singled out here? To answer this, let me point to two passages of Scripture. The first is the conversation between Jesus and

Nicodemus in John 3:4-8. Here Jesus explained to Nicodemus that he needed to be born again to see the kingdom of God. When Nicodemus questioned how it was possible to be born again, Jesus answered:

5 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. – Jn 3:5-6

Notice what Jesus told Nicodemus that day. He said to him that to enter the kingdom of heaven, he needed to be "born of the Spirit." The phrase "born of the Spirit" is important. It shows us that this act of new birth is the work of the Spirit. While Jesus made this work possible by His death on the cross, the new birth itself is the work of God's Spirit.

Writing to Titus, the apostle Paul had this to say about our salvation:

5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, – Tit 3:5

Notice what Paul tells us here about salvation. It is the result of the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration speaks of a new birth or new life. In other words, new life and renewal are the work of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation is applied to our lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He gives us new life and renews us. There is no other way we can be saved but by the work of the Holy Spirit, made possible by the forgiveness and pardon of the cross.

Salvation is a miracle of new birth. This is not something we can do for ourselves. The Holy Spirit must take up residence in us and give us this life. What happens, however, if we attribute this regenerating work of the Spirit to Satan and, like the Pharisees, close our eyes and block our ears to it? There is no hope for such people. They have rejected and blasphemed their only hope of new life as children of God. They have sealed their fate and will forever be separated from God.

Verse 32

Notice how serious this matter of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is, according to Jesus. He tells us that it is possible to speak against the Son of Man and be forgiven. We have an example of this in the person of Paul.

Consider his testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26:

11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. – Ac 26:11

Before he came to Christ, Paul pursued Christians and pushed them to blaspheme the name of Jesus. He was guilty of this great sin before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. The day came, however, when he met Jesus and repented of his blasphemy. God forgave and made him a powerful witness to the gospel's good news.

Jesus reminds us again that speaking against and blaspheming the Spirit, however, is unforgivable in this world and the next. In other words, the one sin that will keep us from heaven is the

rejection of the work of God's spirit in our lives.

Consider this for a moment. Imagine that you had a disease from which you were dying. You lived without hope of victory over this illness, taking you to an early grave. Then one day, you discover a man with a cure for this sickness. You question whether this could be possible, for you have lived too long without hope. You are not sure if you can believe his claim. You even wonder if he is an imposter trying to make false claims. In the end, however, you decide to go to see him. He speaks with you and offers you the cure. He gives you the medicine he has created that is guaranteed to heal.

As you travel home, however, with the answer in your pocket, you begin to think this is foolish. This bottle cannot possibly contain the answer to my fatal illness. The more you think about it, the

more you question the medicine's potential. By the time you get home, you have decided that the medication could not possibly heal. You have come to believe it is powerless to do anything for you. It might even be harmful. Convinced of this, you toss it in the garbage and begin to speak against it. Ultimately you die from your illness because you rejected the only medication that could heal you. You may be forgiven for thinking that the creator of the medicine had ulterior motives, but your fate was sealed the moment you rejected the medication He offered.

Jesus made your salvation possible on the cross. Everything is ready for you to be healed of the dreadful disease of sin. He points you to the Spirit of God, who will apply that salvation to your life and make it a reality. You might question the work of Jesus that makes your healing possible, but there is no

forgiveness for rejecting the work of His Spirit that gives that new life to you. For to reject His work is to perish.

Verse 33

Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees. They have accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus tells them, however, that it is not like Satan to surrender his territory to the Lord God. To clarify this, Jesus uses an illustration of a tree.

Jesus tells the Pharisees that if a tree is good, then its fruit will be good as well. A good tree does not produce bad fruit. A bad tree does not produce good fruit. If you want to know that a tree is healthy, examine its fruit.

Many try to produce good fruit but do not take care of their walk with God. The sin in their lives, however, will

always ruin the taste of the fruit they produce. The only way to produce good fruit is to be in communion with the Lord Jesus. When we are right with God, good fruit will be the result.

Verse 34

Notice what Jesus has to say about the religious leaders who accused him of casting out demons in the power of Satan. He calls them a brood of vipers. The viper was an unclean animal. Though they were religious leaders of the day, these men were unclean before God. They served God but were not in a right relationship with Him.

The viper was not only unclean but often poisonous. It would bite those who disturbed it, and its venom would spread through the veins of those they bit. The people they served were

affected by their evil ways. They poisoned them with their sin and evil.

This poison came out of them through their words and actions. They could not speak well because they were sinful from the very core of their being. Just as the viper could not produce healthy and sweet honey, neither could these men speak holy and godly words. When they spoke from their heart, they spoke words of evil and ungodliness. These words revealed their true nature.

Verse 35

Just as a good tree produces good fruit, a good person produces good works. When our heart is not right, neither is our fruit.

The principle Jesus is teaching here is vital. Good fruit is not produced by education and experience. I am not

downplaying the importance of studying the Bible here. God often uses what He has taught me in my study of Scripture. Understand, however, that many are knowledgeable in Scripture who are not right with God. The Pharisees of Jesus' day prided themselves in their understanding of the Law and the prophets, but they were not in a right relationship with God. They had years of experience in the Word, but that experience did not make them holy.

If we want to be effective for the kingdom, there is one path, the path of holiness and communion with God. When our hearts are right with God, and we are in fellowship with Him, the fruit we produce will bring honour to His name.

Verse 36

The context here is a conversation with the religious leaders of the day. Jesus has been telling them that their words were evil because they were not right with God. He reminds them that they would be accountable to God for those words.

Notice that Jesus speaks here about “careless” words. The word He uses here is ἀργός (argós). The word is derived from two Greek words. The first is argó, meaning without. The second is érgon, meaning work. The King James Version translates this by the word idle. The sense here is that the words they used were unprofitable.

How easy it is to waste our words on unprofitable things. The words we speak, however, will impact those who hear them for good or evil. God will hold us responsible for the use of our words. Do they honour Him? Do those words produce good fruit? Do they

come from a heart that is in a right relationship with God?

Verse 37

Words are free, but that does not mean we can waste them on careless matters. What we say impacts people, either for good or for bad. Careless words spoken to children at an early age will affect how they live their lives or perceive themselves. An insult will produce anger and may result in a harmful response. A word spoken at the right time, however, can save a life or bring hope amid despair.

While words come easily to us, we must use them well. Jesus tells us that we will be justified or condemned based on our words. The terms justified and condemned are often used to speak of salvation, but we should not see them in this sense in this context.

Jesus tells us that we will one day be judged based on how we use our words. We will answer to God for the use of our tongues. We will either hear His approval, or we will know His disfavour. Words are cheap but we are nonetheless accountable for how we use them.

Verse 38

It is uncertain what the motivation behind this question was, but some scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign. Remember, however, that this question comes in the context of some, among them accusing Jesus of casting out demons in the power of Satan. Jesus responded to this accusation quite convincingly. Maybe needing further proof that He was from God, these scribes and Pharisees asked Him for a sign. If He was really from God,

he could demonstrate this by some miraculous deed.

Verse 39

Notice the response of Jesus to the request by the scribes and Pharisees for a sign. He answers them first by calling them “an evil and adulterous generation.” The idea here is that the request for a sign came from an evil and adulterous heart.

The heart of the scribes and Pharisees was evil in that it was filled with hatred for Jesus. They did not have godly intentions in asking for this sign. Their heart was adulterous because it was not faithful to God and His purpose. They turned their back on Him and His purpose, to pursue their lusts for honour, respect and reputation in their community.

Notice second that Jesus tells them that the only sign He would give them was the sign of the prophet Jonah. He explains this in verse 40.

Verse 40

Jesus compares what happened to Jonah to what would happen to Him in the coming days. Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. Jesus tells those who asked for a sign that He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He refers here to His death, burial and resurrection.

There could be no greater sign than this. Jesus would conquer death and rise victorious over it in three days. His victory over death would prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was from God and that the Father was well pleased with Him and His work.

Verse 41

When Jonah arrived in Nineveh and preached the word of God to them, they repented of their sin. Jesus tells the religious leaders who, in disbelief, asked for a sign that the men of Nineveh would rise in judgment against them and condemn them for not repenting.

Jonah was far from perfect. He preached with a bitter and rebellious heart, but still, Nineveh repented and turned to God. Jesus, the Son of God, stood before the scribes and Pharisees, but they would not repent. Instead, they sought to kill Him.

Jesus declared Himself to be greater than the prophet Jonah here. He was the Son of God, perfect in every way. He knew the work He had come to do. He understood the message He came to preach. It is not pride on Christ's

part to speak of being greater than Jonah. He speaks truth with great concern for those who would not receive Him and the work He came to do.

Verse 42

Jesus reminds those who asked Him for a sign of the encounter between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon. When she came to see Solomon in 1 Kings 10, she had heard of his fame and the riches of his land. When she came and saw for herself, however, she marvelled at how he lived and his wisdom.

Jesus came to this earth with the very wisdom of God. He preached that wisdom and demonstrated its power by casting out demons, healing the sick and raising the dead, but the religious leaders of that day refused to listen.

They rejected His divine wisdom and accused Him of being from Satan.

Jesus tells us that the queen of the south would rise to judge them for their foolish resistance to such wisdom and insight into the purpose of God.

The pagan Queen of Sheba and the people of the Gentile city of Nineveh were closer to God than the Jewish religious leaders of the day. They were more open to the things of God than the religious leaders.

We see how hard the human heart can become to the things of God. Sometimes the hardest is a religious heart. Religion does not guarantee a soft heart toward God. In some cases, it drives us away from Him.

Verse 43

Jesus has been speaking to the scribes and Pharisees after casting out a demon from a blind mute. They had accused Him of casting this demon out in the power of Satan. Jesus takes a moment here to speak about these demonic spirits. He tells us three things about them.

First, notice that Jesus tells us these unclean spirits can dwell in a person. We see this in His words, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person." This was the case with the blind mute. This evil spirit had been afflicting him, and when Jesus cast this demon out, the man's blindness and muteness were healed. From this, we gather that the role of these spirits is to afflict and oppress people by their presence in their lives.

Jesus tells us secondly that when a demon is cast out of an individual, it passes through waterless places.

Nothing grows in a desert. It is a barren wasteland, inhabitable and empty of all pleasure and joy. This describes a life that is empty of meaning. The demon has no purpose in life if it is not oppressing or afflicting. The picture here is one of an agitated demon wandering in an empty and meaningless space.

Notice finally that this demon is restless in this dry place. Its whole purpose is to oppress and afflict. It cannot rest until it is doing so. Here in this deserted place, it wanders restlessly, frustrated and angry with no release.

Verse 44

When the unclean spirit can no longer bear its restlessness, it will return to the person it came from, finding it empty, swept and put in order. Notice two important details here.

First, the demonic spirit returns to the person from whom it was cast out. There is nothing set in place to prevent this from happening. Many have been forgiven and healed only to return to their former sins. Unless we lock the doors of our house, what will prevent the thief from returning? Those who have been set free must set up a guard around their heart and mind, lest they fall again into sin.

Notice second that when the unclean spirit returns, it finds the house empty, swept and put in order. There was a clear change in the life of this individual who had been delivered from the demon. That change was not enough to prevent its return, however. Satan will attack those who live a good life and those who don't.

Finally, understand that this clean house, with everything in order, was an

invitation for this demonic spirit to come in and cause further confusion and disorder.

Verse 45

When the unclean spirit returns to the person from who it was cast out and finds their life clean and ordered, it brings with it seven other spirits to assist in its destructive work. Ultimately, the individual is worse off than before the spirit was cast out. What is Jesus teaching us here?

First, He shows us that a demonic spirit can return to an individual from whom it was cast out.

Second, Jesus teaches that a changed life is insufficient to keep this spirit from returning. Satan has attacked many good living people. We cannot let down

our guard, for the enemy will use every means possible to afflict and trip us up.

Third, Jesus shows us that multiple spirits can afflict a single person. We are not told why this unclean spirit brought seven other spirits to assist it in its evil work. What is clear is that the effort to oppress and afflict is increased many times.

Notice that all these evil spirits dwell in that person, so they are again overcome. The hold they have on the person is even greater. Satan does not give up easily. When one cord does not bind the hands of an individual, he will tie him with seven more.

Jesus ends His teaching here with the words: "So also will it be with this evil generation." He prophesied that things would get worse for that generation. Satan would not give up. He would push them until he broke them. That

very generation would grow in bitterness and hatred for Christ. Ultimately, they would call for His crucifixion on a cruel cross. Beyond this application, however, is that as we move closer to His return, the enemy will continue to intensify His efforts to counter the kingdom's work. Believers will be persecuted, and many will lose their lives. We are at war with Satan and his unclean spirits. We must not let down our guard. Our eyes must be set on Christ, our hope of victory. As the days of His return draw near, the intensity of the battle will increase.

Verse 46

According to Matthew 12:6, Jesus spoke to the religious leaders at the synagogue. Matthew 13:1, however, begins with the words:

1 That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. – Mt 13:1

When we read that Jesus' mother and brothers stood outside asking to speak to Him, it is uncertain if He was still at the synagogue or had moved to a home.

Notice that the verse tells us that both the mother of Jesus and His brothers stood outside. The Greek word for brothers used here is ἀδελφός (adelphós). It refers to those who have shared the same womb. It, however, came to have a more general meaning and speaks of those who are part of the same family, nation or fellowship. It may be that those who were with Mary were Jesus' brothers through Mary, but the word ἀδελφός (adelphós) would not exclude His disciples.

Verse 48

Likely, someone announced to Jesus that His mother and brothers wanted to speak to Him. Jesus uses the occasion to teach a spiritual lesson. To do so, He asked the question: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"

Verse 49

To answer the question, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Jesus points to His disciples. He declares them to be His true brothers.

Realize that these disciples were not perfect. They struggled to understand His purpose and teaching. They had, however, devoted their lives to Him. They would expand His kingdom at the cost of their lives when He returned to the Father. He called them brothers because they shared a common

heavenly Father and a common heart to honour Him and expand His kingdom.

Verse 50

Jesus declares that anyone who does the will of His Father in heaven is His brother, sister and mother.

Notice that Jesus refers here to His Father in Heaven. It is uncertain where Jesus' earthly father was at the time, but he does not seem present among the group asking to speak with Him that day. Jesus, however, relates to God in heaven as His Father. He submits to His authority and honours Him in all He does. His heartfelt desire was that all people do likewise.

While Jesus was God, He accepted those who love and honour the Father as brothers and sisters. He stoops down to our level and relates to us. He

took on flesh and identified with us. As
our Brother, He cares for us and
watches out for us. He shares with us a
passion for the Father and His purpose.

MATTHEW 13

Verse 1

Jesus had been speaking to the people when his mother and brothers asked to see him. We are not told what they had to say to him, but chapter 13 tells us that on that same day, Jesus left the house where He was and went to the sea and sat by the shore.

It is uncertain if He wanted time by Himself or if what his family had to say to him had anything to do with this time by the seashore.

Verse 2

As Jesus sat by the seashore, a great crowd gathered around Him. To better speak to them, Jesus got into a boat and sat down to teach. The multitude listened from the beach.

Verse 3

Matthew tells us that Jesus told the people many things in parables. These parables were simple stories that conveyed a deeper spiritual meaning. We have a record here of seven parables Jesus taught the people in chapter 13:

- 1) The Parable of the Sower (vs. 3-9)
- 2) The Parable of the Weeds (vs. 24-30)
- 3) The Parable of the Mustard Seed (vs. 31-33)
- 4) The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (vs. 44)

5) The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (vs. 45-46)

6) The Parable of the Fishing Net (vs. 47-50)

7) The Parable of New and Old Treasure (vs. 51-52)

He begins with the parable of a sower who went to sow his seed.

Verse 4

As the sower spread his seeds, they fell on different soil types. Some of what he spread that day fell on a pathway. The birds came by and ate those seeds.

Verse 5

The seeds also fell on rocky ground. These rocks were near the surface and did not allow the seeds much soil to establish their root systems. While the seed germinated and sprang up from

the ground but since there was no soil depth for their roots, they could not flourish.

Verse 6

When the sun rose and shone on the plants growing in rocky soil, they were scorched and withered away because their roots did not go deeply into the ground, hindered by the hard rock.

Verse 7

As the sower spread his seed, some of them fell among thorns. These seeds began to grow, but because of the thorns, they were choked out. The well-established thorns took up the nutrients from the soil and blocked the sun from shining on them, so they also died.

Verse 8

Other seeds fell on good ground. These seeds germinated and produced thirty, sixty or even one hundredfold. The conditions of the soil were perfect for these seeds. Notice that these plants did not all produce the same amount of crop. Some yielded more than others, but they all brought forth fruit.

Verse 9

Jesus does not seem to take the time here to explain the meaning of this parable to the people at this point. He ends it by saying: "He who has ears, let him hear." The idea here is that if they could understand what He was saying, they were to take it to heart and apply it to their lives.

Verse 10

Notice the response of the disciples to the Parable of the Sower. They were

not used to this kind of teaching. They were confused and likely could not understand what Jesus was saying. They approached Him to ask why He taught in parables with hidden truth. In their mind, it would have been better for Jesus to speak more clearly without hiding His meaning.

Verse 11

Jesus told His disciples that they had been given the ability to understand the secret of the kingdom of heaven, but the multitude that gathered that day did not have this ability.

Admittedly, there were many things the disciples did not yet understand, but Jesus had revealed many truths to them. They understood and believed Him to be the Messiah who the prophets had predicted. They had experienced the power of the kingdom

of God through the healing of the sick and the casting out of demons. The crowd that had gathered that day, however, had not yet been given this understanding. They had not grasped the concept of a spiritual kingdom over which Jesus would reign. Their eyes had not yet been opened to the salvation of Christ.

Verse 12

This verse is difficult to understand in this context. It is part of Jesus' response to His disciples about why He spoke in parables. He tells us here that the one who has more will be given so that he has in abundance.

The context indicates that the disciples could understand the secrets of the kingdom of God and that more would be given to them. They would experience the power of that kingdom

in their lives and ministries. They would grow in their relationship with Christ and their ability to minister in His name. God would perfect what He had given them and bring them deeper maturity.

On the other hand, the people who had gathered at the beach to hear Jesus had not been given this understanding. They were curious about His teaching, but their eyes had never been opened to Him as the Messiah. Their hearts had never been changed. They came to be healed and entertained by Jesus, but the word He spoke to them would not penetrate their hearts. Like the seed sown on the pathway or the thorny ground, what they had received from Him would be quickly taken away and not produce any fruit.

Verse 13

Jesus told His disciples that the reason He spoke to the people in parables was that they had never been given ears to hear or minds to understand.

Imagine a sower, casting all his seed on stony ground. We would consider him foolish because it would never grow in that soil. Jesus is saying something similar here. He was teaching a people whose heart was hardened to the message he preached. They could not understand what He taught because the Father had never opened their minds to its truth.

Anyone who has taught the Word of God or preached the gospel understands what Jesus is saying here. Some people don't get what we are trying so passionately to share. Unless the Lord God opens their hearts and minds, our words will be useless.

The people who gathered by the shore that day saw His miracles. They were healed and amused by them, but they had no lasting spiritual impact on their lives. These individuals heard what Jesus spoke, but their lives were not changed, nor did they grasp what He was telling them.

Such would be every one of us today were it not that God opened our eyes and gave us understanding.

Verse 14

Jesus tells His disciples that the prophet Isaiah spoke about these people when he prophesied:

"You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive."

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 here. Isaiah told of a people who would hear but never understand. They would see but never grasp the significance of what they saw. In other words, the truth would be hidden from them. This is not a deliberate act of God. These individuals naturally could not understand spiritual matters, and unless they were healed of this spiritual blindness, they would never grasp the truth.

Verse 15

Jesus continues to quote Isaiah, who prophesied of a people whose hearts had become dull. That is to say, those hearts were no longer receptive to the purpose of God. Their love for God had grown cold, and sin and hardness of heart had set in.

Their ears could barely hear the truth of God. Their eyes were closed to His ways. The world, sin and the devil stripped this ability from them lest they should see, hear and understand the truth of God and be healed. All too many people in our day find themselves in this same situation.

Verse 16

Speaking to His disciples, Jesus told them that their eyes and ears had been blessed to see and hear. This was an act of grace on the part of God the Father. He healed their eyes and ears. He opened them up to the truth of the kingdom of God. These men understood what made no sense to the natural mind. They saw what could not be seen with physical eyes.

If God has given you eyes to see the Lord, you have been particularly

blessed. If you have ears to hear Him and His word, you have received a gift of unspeakable privilege. It is the wonderful grace of God that has brought this sight and knowledge. Without this mercy, we would be forever lost in darkness and ignorance.

Verse 17

Speaking to His disciples, Jesus reminds them that many prophets and godly people longed to see the Messiah and hear what He said. From the Old Testament onward, the people of God longed for the coming of this Messiah.

Jesus lived among the disciples. He spoke to them and taught them about the kingdom of God. The Spirit of God opened their eyes to know Him and see Him for what He was. The truth of Jesus Christ, however, like the meaning

of the parables He taught, was hidden from many.

Verse 18

After reminding His disciples that they had been blessed to have the ability to understand the secrets of the kingdom, the Lord proceeds to explain the parable of the sower to them. Their blessing did not mean they understood everything. They still needed to have many things explained to grasp their significance. The truth of who God is and His purpose will be something we will continue to grow in throughout all eternity.

Verse 19

Jesus explains the parable of the sower by speaking about the seeds that fell on the path. He tells His disciples that when someone hears about the

kingdom of God and does not understand it, like the birds of the parable, Satan snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

Notice the intensity of Satan's bitterness toward the message of the gospel. What good is a truth if it is not understood? That truth can remain in the heart for years but have no impact. Satan, however, is not content to let that truth remain in the heart. He is compelled to do all he can to remove it lest it finally becomes clear. He will do everything he can to remove that truth from schools, governments, societies and even churches.

Verse 20

Jesus explains the meaning behind the rocky ground next. He tells his disciples that it was like an individual who received the word of the kingdom with

joy. There were many such people during the days Jesus walked on this earth. Crowds followed Him wherever He went. They rejoiced to see evidence of the kingdom as darkness was pushed back and people were healed of their diseases. They enjoyed listening to Jesus because he spoke plainly, unlike their religious leaders.

Verse 21

The problem with rocky soil is that the roots of the growing plants cannot penetrate deeply into the ground. The plants will mature quickly at first, but the root system will not be sufficient to sustain them in times of dryness or wind. The result is that they will die.

The great crowd that joyfully followed Jesus would quickly be turned from Him. They would cry out for His crucifixion. They enjoyed what He did

for them but were unwilling to suffer for the kingdom's cause. They did not persevere in the truth. Jesus touched these individuals, but their lives were not transformed by His Spirit.

Verse 22

Jesus touches next on the seed sown among thorns. He compares this to those who heard the word of the gospel, but because of the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, they turn their back and become "unfruitful." Notice that this unfruitfulness Jesus speaks of here is because of two reasons.

First, Jesus speaks about the cares of the world. These cares come in a variety of forms. This world is filled with sickness, anxieties and bills to pay. There is a concern for family and education. There is any number of

cares that take up our time and energy. There seems to be no time in the day to be concerned about spiritual matters. Sometimes years go by, and we have never thought about our walk with God. We have become so caught up with the cares of the world we just haven't taken this matter seriously.

Second, Jesus speaks about the deceitfulness of riches. This world also has its pleasures and privileges. It is all too easy to get caught up in this. Notice, however, that Jesus speaks of these riches as deceptions. King Solomon tested these great riches and pleasures but found they all passed away. All too many people, however, have lived their lives for the wealth and satisfaction of this world, only to stand naked before God with nothing to show for a life lived richly on this earth. Jesus reminds us that the cares of this world and its deceptive riches can both keep us from Him.

Verse 23

The final ground in Jesus' parable was the good ground. Jesus told His disciples that this ground represented those who heard the word of the kingdom and understood it. More than this, however, these individuals produced fruit in their lives for the kingdom's sake. Notice a few details here.

First, this is the only ground that produces fruit. The other soils had leaves and roots, but none yielded a harvest. Fruit can only grow if the right conditions are met. The farmer must prepare this soil to receive the seed, just as the Spirit of God must open our hearts for the seed of the Word. Unless He prepares this soil, no seed will penetrate and produce fruit.

Second, no seed produced the same amount of fruit. There is nothing wrong

with the soil; it is “good ground.” The reason for different yields may either be by design or a result of greater effort.

There is no doubt that the Lord uses some people in a way that goes far beyond the average servant. History recounts stories of such servants of God who were chosen for a particular time and place to accomplish great good for the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, I do not doubt that we will all stand before God and understand that there was so much more we could have done for the kingdom’s sake had we not wasted our time and efforts on other “priorities” in life.

What is important to note here is that all seeds that fell on soil prepared by the farmer produced fruit. Admittedly, some yielded more than others, but all produced something. The fact that this

seed lay in ideal conditions demanded that it produce something. That fruit proved that they were real seeds.

Finally, notice that life is in the seed. The soil does not produce anything unless the seed is planted. The seed contains life. This comes from the hand of the sower, just as it comes from God through the work of His Son and His Spirit. When God prepares the soil and implants the seed of life, the fruit will be the inevitable result.

Verse 24

Jesus moves on to a second parable. In this parable, He compares the kingdom of heaven to a man who sowed good seed in his field. Understand here that the reference to the kingdom of heaven is not heaven itself but the expanding kingdom of God on this earth. It is the spiritual rule of Jesus Christ in the

hearts and minds of all who believe in Him.

Notice here that the field was sown with good seed. This seed is good in terms of the purity of its message and the power of its potential.

Verse 25

While good seed was sown in the field, when the master's labourers were sleeping, the enemy sowed weeds among the wheat and snuck away unnoticed. The enemy is Satan, and the weeds he sows are ungodly philosophies, doctrines and lifestyles.

Notice that the enemy does this when the labourers are sleeping. They were not taking notice, nor were they on guard. Satan continues to do this in our day. He seeks to infiltrate the kingdom of heaven with ungodly ideas and

practices. He can penetrate where the people of God have let down their guard. False prophets and teachers penetrate our churches and Bible schools. Ungodly influences seep into our homes through the internet, television, radio, and literature. All these things weaken our faith and distract us from our priorities and believers.

The kingdom of heaven on this earth is not perfect. We are in the midst of a great battle. Our churches must be on guard. We must preserve our hearts and minds against the forces of evil all around us. Look at the kingdom of God in your own heart. Is your heart completely devoted to the Lord? Do you face the attacks of the enemy? Does he tempt you with evil thoughts, attitudes and actions? If we are honest with ourselves, we will see that our hearts are far from perfect. We wage an ongoing battle with evil. The field sown

with good seed and weeds is a picture of our churches and personal lives. I would dare say that even the image of the sleeping labourers reflects back to us. We must awaken from our sleep and be watchful, for the enemy does not cease his efforts to infiltrate our ranks.

Verse 26

Notice what happened when the seeds germinated. Both the good plants and the weeds appeared in the field. The picture of the kingdom of heaven on this earth is one of conflict. It is not yet perfect. The battle with sin is not over. There is evidence of the power of God at work, but there is also an indication of evil among us. There is a spiritual fruit, but there is also evidence of struggle with the weeds of sin. Who among us has not experienced this

reality in their personal life? What church is free from such a contrast?

Verse 27

In this parable of Jesus, when the servants saw the weeds in the fields, they came to the master to ask him how they had come to be in the field. The answer to this question is very simple. They were asleep, and the enemy came in and sowed weeds. What is most striking here is the fact that these servants had no idea of how the weeds came to grow in the field. They had nothing to blame but their unwatchfulness, yet they were still clueless about how this had happened.

God is not the author of the evil and sin in our hearts. It is the result of our unwatchfulness and sleep.

Verse 28

Notice the response of the servants when the master informed them that an enemy had sown weeds in the field: "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" – Mt 13:28

Their first response is to fix the problem by removing all the weeds from the field.

I have a low tolerance for confusion. I like things to be clear and defined. I have had to work on this over the years and learn how to function amid different opinions and ways of doing things.

Like these servants, we want to do our utmost to deal with anything, not from God. We want our churches to be pure and godly and do our utmost to remove whatever is not from Him or in line with His purpose. None of us want to deal with those who cause conflict and chaos.

Verse 29

Notice the response of the master to the servants who wanted to root out all the weeds in the field. He told them not to pull out the weeds, lest in doing so, they might pull out the wheat as well.

Consider this for a moment. What does a weed look like? The Pharisees, as the teachers of the law and spiritual leaders of the day, thought they knew the answer to this question. They clashed with Jesus and accused Him of eating with tax collectors and sinners. The apostle Paul was a persecutor of the church in his day. He would certainly have been pulled up as a weed needing to be destroyed. As for the Pharisees, certainly, with all their teaching of the law and disciplined lifestyle, they would be considered to be a good plant.

The fact is that grain is often mistaken for weeds and weeds for grain. While

pulling up the weeds, the tiny grain plants are also uprooted. What is the visible difference between an immature believer and an unbeliever? Are these distinctions easy to make in the flesh?

The master of the field knew how easy it would be to pull out good grains while weeding out the affected area. He chose instead to allow the two to grow together.

Understand here that this is not to say that we do not exercise church discipline when necessary. Nor is Jesus teaching that we should open the door to all kinds of people regardless of their beliefs or lifestyle. What Jesus seems to be telling us is that we need tremendous discernment in the work of the kingdom. Some plants are not easy to distinguish. Instead of being pulled up, they need to be nurtured. Even those who appear hopeless, if properly nurtured, may become the kingdom's greatest assets.

Verse 30

The master counsels his servants to let the weeds and the grain grow together until the harvest. At the harvest, the weeds would be gathered first, bound into bundles and burned in a fire. The wheat would then be collected and put into the master's barn.

There would be a distinction made between the wheat and the weeds. That distinction, however, would be made at the time of harvest. At that point, the fruit would be visible. No mistake would be made in the harvest. The plants would have had time to reveal their true character through the fruit they produced. Some plants take a long time to produce fruit. Others begin to develop, but that fruit never really ripens. The quality and type of plant will ultimately be revealed at harvest time. Let's not write off people too quickly. Let's wait, rather, to see the fruit.

What we need to see from this is that things are not always clear in our eyes. The battle before us is messy and confusing. Those who seem to be our friends turn out to be our enemies. Those we felt were enemies may become our greatest allies. In this time of battle and kingdom-building, we must be prepared for this confusion. It will all be sorted out in the end, but for now, weed and wheat grow side by side as the kingdom advances.

Verse 31

The third parable of Jesus in this chapter is a parable about a mustard seed. Once again, the parable is about the kingdom of heaven on this earth.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard sown in the field. That seed is the kingdom of heaven,

and the field is the earth on which it has been planted.

Verse 32

Notice what Jesus mentions about the mustard seed. It was a small seed, but it grew larger than the other plants in the garden. It became big enough for the birds to rest on them and make their nests in their branches. All of this came from a small seed.

That seed of the gospel may rest in the heart of an unbeliever for years. All the while, it is working and germinating in that life. The time comes when that shell is broken, and the roots emerge and penetrate the heart. From that point onward, the plant shoots up and produces fruit.

The power in that gospel seed is such that it can break the hardest heart.

Have you ever marvelled at the potential of that tiny seed? What is sown into the ground as a speck produces fruit many times its size with multiple seeds, each capable of producing likewise. Such is the power of the kingdom of God. Such is the potential of this kingdom in us.

Verse 33

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven mixed into flour. When yeast is mixed with flour, it makes the bread rise. What was flat and lifeless now is given life and rises to make something many times its size. The yeast gives life to the bread.

Just as yeast works in the flour to give it life, so the kingdom of God works in us to produce the life of God in us. The power that yeast to transform the flour into bread is an illustration of the inner

working power of the kingdom of God in the life of the believer.

The kingdom of God is not about kings, commanders, and government, as it is an inner transformation as the heart bows in surrender to God and the work of His Holy Spirit in transforming us.

Verse 34

Jesus has been speaking to the crowd from a boat (see Matthew 13:2). On that occasion, Matthew tells us that Jesus spoke only in parables. His disciples had asked Him why He did so. Matthew 13:11-13 tells us that it was because these individuals had not been given the ability to understand the deeper truths of the kingdom of God. Jesus speaks of simple, everyday situations that they could understand to illustrate the kingdom of God. It is likely that some in the crowd took these

illustrations home with them and reflected on them.

Verse 35

As Matthew reflects on the parables Jesus spoke that day he is reminded of the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 78:2, which he quotes here:

"I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

It was Matthew's understanding that the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Hidden in its pages were multiple references to Him. Just as these parables used simple illustrations to speak of powerful kingdom truths, the Old Testament pictured the coming king. Events and

circumstances were orchestrated to point directly to Him.

In this case, the words of Asaph in Psalm 78:2 are seen to predict how the Messiah would speak in parables. Matthew sees here a fulfillment of a prophetic word Asaph may not even have known he spoke.

Verse 36

When Jesus finished speaking with the crowd at the seashore, he returned to the house where He stayed with His disciples. These men were perplexed not only by how He taught the people that day but also because they did not understand the meaning of the parables. When they were alone, the disciples asked Jesus to explain to them the purpose of the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

Jesus had told them they could understand the meaning of these parables (see Matthew 13:11-13), but that did not mean they would always come to this understanding without struggle. In this case, they had to take the time with Jesus to grasp the meaning of His words.

I have met individuals who do not believe they need to study the word because the Spirit of God will give them understanding. I have met others who feel they do not need to prepare their messages for the church because God will give them the words they need without their effort. Here we have a case where the disciples needed to sit down with Jesus to grasp what He was telling them. Some truth requires wrestling long and hard with the Lord to learn. We must not fear to take this time or make this effort.

Verse 37

When the disciples asked the Lord to explain the parable's meaning, He did so without finding fault with them. He was only too happy to explain it to them.

Jesus begins by telling the disciples that the man who sowed the seed was the Son of Man. This, of course, is a reference to Jesus. It is His purpose to bring about a harvest. It is because of Him alone that there can be a harvest.

Verse 38

The field in which Jesus, the Son of Man, sowed the seed is the world. The harvest would take place on this sin-cursed earth. The earth would produce a spiritual fruit amid sin and rebellion.

The seeds Jesus sowed were the sons of the kingdom. That is to say, He planted believers on this earth to produce fruit for the kingdom of heaven. We have been placed here and gifted by God for a purpose.

The weeds planted in the field are the "sons of the evil one." That is to say, they are sons of Satan. These individuals do not belong to God, nor have they become His children. They belong to Satan and are under his authority. They also have been planted in this world but defy the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 39

The enemy who sowed weeds in the field, according to Jesus, is the devil. His intention is clear. He wants to hinder the work God is doing through His people on this earth.

Jesus tells His disciples that the harvest in the parable is the end of the age when the wheat and the weeds will be separated.

The reapers who came to separate the wheat from the weeds are the angels of heaven, sent to separate those who belong to God from those who belong to Satan. They will make no mistake in this separation. None will enter heaven who belongs to the enemy.

Verse 40

In Jesus' parable, the weeds are gathered and burned with fire. This will be the destiny of all who belong to Satan. Hell and eternal punishment are depicted here as a fire that consumes. According to Jesus, there is a great judgement coming at the end of the age. We do not know when that day

will be, but according to Him, it is a reality. On that day, the sheep shall be separated from the goats, the believer from the unbeliever. Those who do not belong to Christ will be “burned with fire.”

Verse 41

Jesus teaches His disciples that angels will play an important role in the judgement at the end of the age. Jesus will send these angels to gather all law-breakers and causes of sin “out of His kingdom.”

It is hard to imagine the kingdom of God needing to be cleansed of impurity. This, however, seems to be what the Lord is teaching His disciples here. The kingdom Jesus refers to here, of course, is His kingdom on this earth before His return. It comprises people like you and me still struggling with sin

and its effects on our lives and society. The kingdom of heaven is expanding in our day. It increases as men and women learn the truth of Jesus Christ and His work. It is growing as injustice is being broken in the name of Jesus Christ. The power of that kingdom penetrates our hearts as it destroys the power of reigning sin. This, however, is ongoing. Not all sin has been fully conquered in my heart. Evil attitudes still lurk in my mind. The church is far from perfect. Ungodliness still lingers in its hallways. Pride and selfish ambition rage yet among its leaders. Immorality, injustice, and prejudice have not yet been cleansed from its foundations. There is much to be done.

It is amazing that the kingdom still advances under these conditions. God is not limited, however, and the light of His gospel continues to penetrate the darkness. The day is coming, however, when every trace of evil will be

removed. The angels, on the command of Christ, will sweep through and remove every law-breaker and cause of sin. The wonderful glory of that kingdom will then be revealed as never before.

Verse 42

According to Jesus, the day is coming when all law-breakers and every cause of sin will be thrown into the fiery furnace. There are a couple of details we need to examine here.

First, Jesus taught that law-breakers and causes of sin are cast into these flames. The law-breaker is the person who chooses a life of sin and rebellion against God and His kingdom. While we have all been law-breakers, believers in Jesus have been pardoned, and their sin is no longer held against them. Jesus makes it clear that there will be

those whose sin continues to condemn them on the day when His angels harvest the earth. These will be separated from His children.

Second, Jesus teaches here that His angels will also remove all causes of sin. We are not told what those causes are, but what is clear is that the temptation will be no more. Those who remain will no longer be oppressed and afflicted by sin and evil. These causes of affliction will be defeated, and the children of God will be at peace in their walk with their Saviour.

Next, notice that these law-breakers and causes of sin will be cast into the fiery furnace. The question remains: Should we see this fiery furnace as a literal fire? What impact would a literal fire have on the "causes of sin" spoken of here? Would a literal fire consume pride and lust? However we see this fire, it is a judgement of God that

renders these law-breakers and causes of sin powerless and incapable of harm.

Jesus tells His disciples that the fire of His judgement will cause weeping and gnashing of teeth. The idea here is that there will be suffering and agony under this judgement of God.

Verse 43

When law-breakers and causes of sin are removed, the righteous will shine like the sun. Presently, the glory of our life in Christ is hidden by the effects of sin and evil surrounding us. The darkness of sin has dimmed the light of glory and grace in this world. But this will not always be the case. Sin will be removed. Every evil will be cast into the fiery furnace. All that remains will be the glory of God. It will burst into the light as the darkness of sin is stripped away.

We can only imagine what that day will be like. Who among us does not feel the effects of sin on our physical bodies? What sincere child of God does not grieve their battle with sin? How we long to see our Lord and speak to Him with ears that have not been dulled.

Matthew ends this verse with the words of Jesus: "He who has ears, let him hear." Understand that we have been planted here by the Sovereign Lord to bear fruit for His kingdom. Accept that, at this time, the kingdom of heaven wages a war against the forces of darkness. Do not be discouraged by this, for the day is coming when His angels will be sent out to remove all law-breakers and causes of sin. At that time, the glory of God will shine forth like the sun. What has been tarnished by sin will now shine bright and clear.

Verse 44

While Jesus was in the house with His disciples explaining the parable of the wheat and the weeds, He recounted other parables to them. In verse 44, He tells them the parable of the hidden treasure.

Jesus speaks of a man who found a hidden treasure in a field. Upon discovering it, he went home, sold everything and bought that field to obtain the treasure.

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to this treasure. Notice several details here.

First, the treasure is hidden. The kingdom of God is not visible in physical form at this time. It is the rule of Christ in the heart of those who know Him and surrender to His lordship.

Second, the kingdom of God can be found even though it is hidden from our physical eyes. The Spirit of God will open eyes to see evidence of Christ as King and Lord. He will give sight to see and grasp the reign of Christ and the forgiveness He offers through His death on the cross.

Third, notice how this man, upon discovering the treasure, covers it up. There are various reasons for covering something up. Sometimes we do so because we don't want it to be found by anyone else. At other times we cover something we treasure to protect it from harm. The covering up of this treasure has to do with the value the man placed upon it. He did not want to lose what he discovered, nor did he want any harm to come to this invaluable treasure he had found.

Fourth, notice the response of the man to the discovery of this treasure. He was filled with joy. His joy in the

treasure was such that he sold everything he had to obtain it. Nothing he owned was comparable to having this one treasure.

Jesus shows us the value of the kingdom of heaven compared to the things of this world. Those who understand and experience the kingdom of heaven find the things of this earth to be insignificant in comparison. When we see the kingdom of God and understand its priorities, the great worldly achievements we once longed for, for now, mean very little. To know God, to walk in His purpose and to bring glory to His name now fills our hearts.

Verse 45

The next parable the Lord tells His disciples concerns a merchant searching for fine pearls. The pearls

represent something of great value. Notice that they are not just ordinary pearls but “fine pearls.” The merchant is in search of the very best pearls he can find.

Verse 46

When the pearl merchant finds a pearl of great value, he sells all he has to buy it. Why would the merchant sell all he had to have this pearl? Is this pearl all about the profit he will receive from its sale? Is the pearl a means to an end, or is it the end itself?

It would appear that the merchant, whose passion was to find fine pearls, discovers in this rare treasure something worth more than everything he has. To own it, touch it, and have it in his hands is an experience like none other. His interest is not to sell it but to treasure it for himself.

Those who experience the kingdom of God have no interest in using it for earthly gain. The kingdom of God satisfies every longing in their heart. Nothing could be of more value to them than this precious kingdom.

Verse 47

The next parable Jesus recounts is about a fishing net. This net was cast out into the sea, and when it was gathered, it had fish of every kind.

This diversity is not always easy for us to accept. Not all who are in that net see things the same way. They have different traditions, preferences, personalities, understandings, gifts, languages and cultures. It is not always easy to get along.

Verse 48

When the net was drawn to shore, the fishermen sat down to sort out the fish. Some of the fish were discarded because they could not be eaten. The good fish, on the other hand, were put into containers for sale.

What is striking about this is that in a parable about the kingdom of heaven, there would be fish in the net that were no good. Remember, this parable is about the kingdom of God as it is on this earth. It is not perfect at this point. The citizens of this kingdom still struggle with the flesh. There are people in the church who do not know the Lord. False teachers work among us. Not all who declare themselves to be followers of Christ live in harmony with His purpose. We should expect that there will be some confusion in the battle. The enemy will infiltrate our camp and cause division. Until we are in the presence of Christ, we must expect that this battle will rage.

The day is coming, however, when the Lord will sort through this mess and clarify matters. There will be a judgment coming. The righteous will be separated from the unrighteous.

Verse 49

Jesus tells His disciples just as the fishermen separated the good fish from the bad, so it will be in the end times. He will send out His angels to separate the evil from the righteous. The disciples, who were themselves, fishermen, would have been able to identify with these words of Jesus.

Until the Lord returns, we must continue our battle against the forces of evil. We must be on our guard, for these forces will circulate among us unannounced.

Verse 50

The angels of God will be sent out in the end times to sort and remove the sinner and the sources of evil from the earthly kingdom of God. Sin will be cast into a fiery furnace where it will be burned.

This fiery furnace is described as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The phrase indicates great suffering.

What is clear from this is that righteousness will triumph in the end. Until then, we will continue to wage war against Satan and sin.

Verse 51

As Jesus concludes this series of parables, He asked His disciples if they understood what He was telling them. Remember here that the disciples had

not understood the parable of the wheat and the weeds. His explanation of the parable and other parables made sense to them.

Verse 52

As Jesus concludes this intensive time of teaching with His disciples in the house where He was staying, he ends with the following statement:

"Therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

What is Jesus telling His disciples here?

Notice first that Jesus begins with the word "therefore." This indicates that the statement is connected to what Jesus taught the disciples in this chapter.

Jesus was explaining the parable of the wheat and the weeds to His disciples and teaching them about the kingdom of heaven on this earth through His parables. This teaching on the kingdom of heaven was new to the disciples, as was Jesus' method of teaching in parables.

Jesus speaks here about a scribe. The scribe was a teacher and interpreter of law. They were experts in this matter. Notice, however, that the scribes Jesus speaks about here have been trained for the kingdom of heaven. That is to say, they understood the truths Jesus taught.

The Lord compares such men, skilled to teach the truths of His kingdom, to a master of a house. The house here is filled with treasure. Some of the treasure in the house is old and dates back to the Old Testament and what it teaches about God, His purpose and

His plan for His people. Other truths are new, revealed to us through the Lord Jesus in His time on this earth. These truths reveal the fulfillment of the prophecies in the person of Jesus and God's plan for the world through the cross. Both of these truths agree.

The scribe trained in the kingdom of heaven can teach the old and the new. He can show how the new fulfills the old and how they work together to accomplish the purpose of God. He can show how Jesus came to fulfill the law and that the Old Testament is completed in Him.

Verse 53

When Jesus finished teaching His disciples in the house where He was staying, He left that region and went to His hometown. Many believe this to be the city of Nazareth, although Jesus

had left there and settled in Capernaum.

13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali – Mt 4:13

Verse 54

When Jesus arrived in Nazareth, He went to the synagogue where He taught. Understand that there was more freedom for visiting preachers to teach in the synagogue than in many of our churches today.

His time in this town had an impact. People were surprised to see the wisdom with which He preached. He demonstrated a knowledge of the purpose of God and His ways that they had not seen in their teachers.

Beyond this, however, Jesus also demonstrated authority over the forces of darkness. He performed mighty works among them. These works revealed that God empowered him for the advancement of His kingdom.

Jesus' ministry was characterized by both powerful and wise preaching of the truth and demonstrations of the power of God in His actions and works.

Verse 55

While the inhabitants of Nazareth were amazed at the power of Jesus' words and deeds, they could not get past the fact that He was the son of a carpenter who grew up in their midst. They knew His mother, Mary, and his brothers, Joseph, Simon and Judas.

The people of Nazareth could not accept Jesus as the Son of God, for

they knew His family. This was a great stumbling block for them. How could Jesus be the Son of God if He was the son of the carpenter down the street?

Verse 56

The inhabitants of Nazareth saw the deeds of Jesus and heard Him preach in their synagog, but they could not accept Him as the Messiah. In the last verse, they declared they knew his father, mother and brothers. Here we learn that Jesus also had sisters who lived in Nazareth. We are not told their names.

The citizens of Jesus' hometown were confused. They could not understand where Jesus had obtained His wisdom and power. Evidence of the anointing of God was upon Jesus, but the Nazareans chose to be logical about the matter. It simply did not make sense to them that

Jesus could be the Messiah, even though all the evidence was before them.

Logic and reason will only take us so far. There comes the point where we need to trust the Lord by faith. This was a step the citizens of Jesus' hometown were unwilling to make.

Verse 57

Ultimately, the people of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth "took offence at Him." They chose to see Him as an imposter. They rejected Him because it did not make sense to them that He could be the Son of God.

Jesus told them that a prophet is generally honoured except in his hometown and among his people. Those who grew up with him would resent him taking a higher position than

them. They would not be accepting of Him telling them that they were not right with God.

Verse 58

Because they would not believe Him, Jesus did not perform many miracles. Some interpret this to mean that Jesus can only do mighty works where there is faith. Certainly, faith is a necessary ingredient in our walk with God and the advancement of His kingdom. Consider also, however, that the people of this town resented Jesus and his ministry among them. When the Pharisees had a similar response, Jesus left the region and told people not to speak of what He had done for them. The idea is that He did not intend to rouse the people to anger.

Jesus' power is not limited to our faith. But, where there is faith and delight in

His work, He delights to reveal Himself.

MATTHEW 14

Verse 1

Matthew tells us that at this time, Herod was a tetrarch. The Greek word used here τετράρχης (tetrárchēs) is derived from tétra, meaning four and árchō meaning rule. A tetrarch was technically a ruler or governor of one of four districts in a region. The title tetrarch, in Roman times, however, would refer to governors of any district, whether it was divided into four separate regions or not.

Matthew tells us that Herod, the tetrarch, heard about Jesus and his fame. Word about Jesus, His teaching and miracles had been spreading

throughout the region. Jesus did not seek this fame, but it resulted from His efforts for the kingdom.

Verse 2

Notice the response of Herod to the news of Jesus and His works. He believed that Jesus was John the Baptist who had risen from the dead. Herod had been responsible for the death of John and may have been feeling guilty about killing Him. Herod attributes Jesus' miracles to John the Baptist.

The religious leaders of the Jews attributed the miracles of Jesus to Satan (see Matthew 12:24). Herod does not attribute Jesus' works to Satan but believes Him to be the spirit of John.

John's life had touched Herod, but he had not understood the central

message of John, who pointed everyone to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

Verse 3

Matthew explains a bit of the background to the death of John the Baptist. It appears John had reprimanded Herod concerning his brother's wife, Herodias. Herod had acted inappropriately toward her, and John spoke to the tetrarch about this. This was a bold move on the part of John and ultimately led to his imprisonment.

This shows us something of the personality of John the Baptist. He stood firmly for the truth and godly living. He did not hold back from speaking out about ungodliness and would speak even to leaders about their need to repent.

Verse 4

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Verse 5

John's confrontation angered Herod. He wanted to put him to death, but because John had a significant following of people, he feared killing him. He likely believed that putting John to death would cause a stir that he could not afford to create. Rome expected him to maintain peace and order in his region and would hold him accountable for any riots or revolts. Keeping John alive was in his political interest.

Verse 6

The day of Herod's birthday arrived. On that occasion, many distinguished guests gathered to celebrate with the tetrarch. To commemorate His birthday, Herodias' daughter danced for Herod and those gathered. Her dance genuinely touched him.

Verse 7

The dance of Herodias' daughter so touched Herod that he promised to give her whatever she might ask. It appears that this oath was made public before those present that day. It was a foolish oath, for Herod did not know what she might require him to do.

Verse 8

Herodias encouraged her daughter to take advantage of this situation to request the death of John the Baptist. She told her daughter to ask for his head on a platter. There are three details I would like to point out here.

First, notice the bitterness of Herodias toward John the Baptist, who dared to question her infidelity toward her first husband, Herod's brother. She was angry with John about this, and that lingered in her heart. She could have

no peace in this until she had seen his death.

Second, consider the example Herodias gives to her daughter. What was she teaching her about dealing with those who conflicted with them? Herodias' daughter could have had something she wanted from Herod, but Herodias took advantage of her daughter to get what she wanted instead.

Finally, consider the disrespect Herodias was showing to Herod. Herod did not want to kill John the Baptist because of the people. His reputation and position as a leader depended on keeping the peace. Herodias took advantage of the fact that Herod had made this public promise to her daughter. She knew he would not want to go back on that promise, so she put him in a situation where he was forced to give her what she wanted or be embarrassed before the people before who he had made

this promise. This tells us something about Herodias as a woman.

Verse 9

Notice the response of Herod to the request from Herodius' daughter. The verse tells us that he was sorry. The word used here is λυπέω (lupéō). It can be translated as sorrow or grief, or even offended. This request deeply grieved Herod. He was likely even sorry that he had given such liberty of choice to Herodius' daughter.

Herod backed himself into a corner. He made a promise witnessed by the guests present at his party. He could not go back on his word. The order for John's beheading was therefore given.

Verse 10

Herod was forced to submit to the request of Herodias' daughter. To save face and keep his word, he sent men to John to have him beheaded in prison.

It may be that by beheading John the Baptist in prison, Herod was hoping to keep this matter as quiet as possible. He likely did not want news of this to travel lest there be a riot among his followers.

Verse 11

As promised, John's head was brought to Herodias' daughter, who gave it to her mother. We can only imagine how gruesome this was for Herodias' daughter. This was her reward for pleasing Herod.

We can only imagine why Herodias wanted John's head on a platter. She killed John and humiliated him by

putting his head on this platter. Historically, an enemy's head would be presented to the victors and paraded around as a sign of victory. It may be that Herodias had John's head presented to those who had gathered for Herod's birthday.

Verse 12

Matthew tells us that John's disciples came and took their master's body and buried it. Generally speaking, it was forbidden to mourn the death of a person executed by the government. These individuals were seen as unworthy of such attention. The disciples of John the Baptist were permitted, however, to recuperate his body and bury it properly. This may have been a concession by Herod to ease the tension and maintain some peace.

After obtaining John's body and properly burying it, his disciples told Jesus what had happened. They were aware of the special relationship that existed between these two men. Jesus would likely have grieved for John, but this news would probably also remind him that He would follow John in violent death as well.

Verse 13

Notice the response of Jesus to the news of John's death. Matthew tells us that He withdrew from that region and went to a desolate place by Himself. Jesus likely grieved for John. It may also be that John's death was a reminder of what was ahead for Him. In any case, the nature of the spiritual battle was very clear. John perished because he stood firmly for truth and godly life. He confronted those who lived in ungodliness and was killed as a

result. Many of these things were possibly on Christ's mind and prayers in those days.

It is amazing to see how Christ feels about the death of John. I have the impression that He feels our pain as well. It grieves His heart to see His children mistreated and suffering for His name.

Jesus' time alone was limited, for it wasn't long before the crowd discovered where he was and came to find him. They followed Him on foot wherever He went from town to town. The news of John's death certainly grieved the Lord Jesus. He took time to seek the Father but persevered in His ministry, knowing He would follow in John's footsteps as the enemy lashed out at Him.

Verse 14

Jesus had been travelling by boat. When he reached the shore, he saw a great crowd. This crowd had likely been waiting for Him. Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion on them and went among them, healing their sick.

Jesus was not only concerned for the souls of those to whom He ministered but also their physical wellbeing. Many of those to whom He ministered in those days would never accept Him as the Son of God, nor would they experience the salvation He came to offer. Jesus still healed their physical body. The compassion Jesus felt here was for their soul but also their physical suffering and ailments. If we follow His example, we will minister to both body and soul as His disciples.

Verse 15

Jesus ministered to the crowd gathered by the shore to greet Him. When the evening came, His disciples were likely tired and hungry. They suggested that Jesus send the crowd away to the nearby village to find something to eat. This would also give Jesus and His disciples some much-needed rest after an exhausting day of ministry.

Verse 16

While the day had been long, and the disciples were likely tired and hungry, the compassion of Jesus (see verse 14) did not end when the day was done. He knew that the people in that crowd were as hungry as He and His disciples. He suggests that the disciples offer the multitude something to eat before they leave.

Jesus did indeed find time away from the crowds to rest. He was not

governed by a time clock, however. He ministered when there were needs and rested when He had the opportunity. He did leave ministry behind to rest but not always. Here is a case when the evening had set in, and it was time for most people to stop working, but Jesus felt compelled to continue ministering to the crowd. He was not governed by the time clock but by His compassion and the leading of the Spirit.

The suggestion that the disciples give this crowd something to eat would have been met by shock on their part, for they did not have the physical resources to make this a reality.

Verse 17

When Jesus suggested that the disciples feed the crowd, they immediately looked at themselves and their physical resources. They had only

five loaves of bread and two fish. It was impossible to feed the crowd that day with so little food.

I suspect that we have the same tendency. When called by God to serve in the kingdom, we, too, look to ourselves, our abilities and our physical resources. Jesus was asking these disciples to do, however, what was not possible in the flesh. He reminded them that kingdom work requires more than physical strength, finances and wisdom. It requires the miraculous intervention of God.

Verse 18

The disciples did not have sufficient to feed the crowd. Their physical resources were insufficient for the need before them. When they came to this realization, Jesus invited them to give what they had to Him.

In our hands, our meagre resources will amount to very little. In the hands of the Almighty, however, the little we have can accomplish the miraculous.

Verse 19

When the disciples surrendered what they had to Jesus, the miraculous began to happen. Jesus told the people to sit on the grass. He took what the disciples had offered Him and blessed it. Breaking the loaves, He gave some to each of his disciples and told them to give it to the crowd.

We do not know the details of what took place that day. What we can understand, however, is that for the disciples, handing out this bread would have been an act of faith. Intellectually, they knew that such a small amount of food would not feed the people sitting on the grass. They chose to be

obedient to the Lord's command, however, and began to hand out the loaves to those gathered that day. They took one step at a time and went from one person to another.

Verse 20

Notice what occurred when the disciples surrendered what they had to the Lord and obeyed. Matthew tells us that the people ate and were satisfied. Beyond this, the disciples gathered twelve baskets full of broken pieces left over.

We are not told what happened with those twelve baskets of food. They were beyond what was necessary for the feeding of the people but served to remind us that we cannot exhaust the supply of God. The little we have, when placed in His hands, is more than

enough to accomplish what He has called us to do.

Verse 21

To show us the significance of this miracle that day, Matthew tells us that the number of men in the crowd who ate that day was about five thousand. This did not include the women and children who were not counted. If there were an equal number of women and children, this would bring the number of people present to about fifteen thousand. We can only imagine what it would have been like to hand out food to this number of people. We also see from this just how famous Jesus was in those days.

Verse 22

Matthew begins verse 22 with the word “immediately.” The implication was that

after the disciples had gathered up the twelve baskets of leftovers, Jesus sent them to the other side of the lake.

Jesus did not go with the disciples when they crossed the lake. He would meet up with them later. He remained behind and “dismissed the crowd.”

The English Standard Version of the Bible tells us that Jesus “made” His disciples go to the other side of the lake. The word used here is ἀναγκάζω (anagkázō) and means to force or compel by an authoritative command. The implication seems to be that they resisted this command, and He had to demand that they obey. They likely did not want to leave Jesus behind. Had they remained, they would probably have helped him dismiss the crowd. This, however, was not His will. There are times when the Lord will call us to do what we do not want or are not comfortable doing. We can be sure,

however, that He will always stand with us in these times.

Verse 23

Jesus commanded His disciples to go to the other side of the lake without Him. When He had dismissed the crowd, He went up onto the mountain to pray. He was alone there on that mountain until the evening came.

Jesus' life was busy with many people around Him. The miracles of that day proved that He was in communion with the Father in everything He did. It seems, however, that He needed this time alone with the Father to speak to Him and rest in His presence. He took advantage of opportunities such as this to restore His fellowship and renew His strength.

Verse 24

Matthew does not tell us how long Jesus was on the mountain. He does tell us, however, that the disciple's boat was a long way off the shore and being beaten by waves in a storm.

Clearly, after a busy day of ministry, this was not how the disciples wanted to spend their evening. It may be for this reason that the disciples resisted getting into the boat to go to the other side (see notes on verse 22).

When the storm struck, these disciples were in the middle of the lake. As experienced fishermen, we can imagine they wondered why Jesus had sent them out into the lake when this storm was coming. There may have been some confusion in their hearts and minds as they battled those waves.

Walking in the purpose of God does not mean that there will not be some confusion and difficulties. Jesus sent

them right into those waves. We can be sure that when this is our situation, He will not abandon us.

Verse 25

Matthew tells us that it was at the fourth watch that Jesus came to the disciples, walking on water. The fourth watch was between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Remember here that it was before the sunset that the Lord went up into the mountain. Verse 23 tells us that He was on the mountain when evening came. The disciples had likely gotten in the boat before this to cross to the other side. This meant that they had been on the lake for many hours before Jesus came to them.

It is worth noting that Jesus came directly to them. He did so by walking on that water amid a storm. He could

have determined it was too stormy to cross the lake. He had been praying late into the night after a busy day and was likely tired. He could have decided to find a place to sleep until the storm was over. Jesus did not do this, however. He walked on water in the middle of a storm without having a good night's sleep to get to those disciples in trouble on the sea. There is a word of comfort for us in this picture. Nothing will stop Him from coming to us in our time of need.

Verse 26

As they battled the waves on the sea, the disciples noticed a figure approaching them on the water. They were not expecting the Lord to meet them in this time of need. They had left Him on the other side of the lake. They believed that what they saw was a ghost. Notice how they were afraid.

The disciples feared the deliverance of the Lord. They did not recognize Him or His work because it was not within the power of reason, nor were they expecting the Lord to be with them in their ordeal.

Verse 27

Notice that when Jesus saw His disciples' fear, he immediately spoke to them. It was not His purpose to cause them alarm. He told them to "take heart" and not fear, for it was Him.

The voice of the Lord would have made all the difference for the disciples. The moment they heard His voice, the picture of a ghost vanished from their mind. This was Jesus. While amazed at how He walked on water, they no longer feared. Their fear changed to joy and happiness to see Him in their time of need.

It was the voice of Jesus that transformed fear into joy and confusion into faith. That familiar voice reassured the disciples and gave them confidence and peace. When I recognize the presence of the Lord Jesus in what I am going through, my trial no longer terrifies me. When I hear His voice, I am reassured and find great strength to face the storm.

Verse 28

Notice the response of Peter to the voice of the Lord.

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

Peter is credited with great faith in this act. The reality is that the request comes from a heart of doubt. Notice the words "if it is You." In other words,

Peter wanted further proof that it was the Lord and not a ghost walking on water.

Verse 29

Jesus calls Peter to come to Him on the water. We are not told how long it took Peter to leave the boat. Ultimately, however, he did believe that if it were Jesus, He would not let him drown, so he stepped out of the vessel and began to walk on water toward Jesus.

Peter put himself in a situation where he had to live up to his words. He demanded a sign from the Lord. That sign required a bold step on his part. "If it is you, command that I come to you on the water," he said. When Jesus said, "Come," Peter had to obey, for it was the command of the Lord.

Verse 30

While Peter did leave the boat and walk on the water, he also saw the wind, and that brought fear into his heart. He began to sink into the water and was fearful of drowning. The man who so boldly demanded a sign was now left crying out, "Lord, save me."

This incident was not something about which Peter would boast in years to come. He knew that it was from a doubting heart that he had made this request. He also knows his weak faith was incapable of keeping him afloat. He was humbled that day. He saw how, were it not for Jesus, he would have drowned.

How easy it is for us to make bold requests and step out boldly for the Lord. Sometimes we believe too much in our ability to trust the Lord and do great things for Him. Like Peter, however, the Lord allows us to be humbled. Our bold requests to do great things for God are transformed into

humble obedience to God, resulting in even greater fruit. Peter would not be the same after this incident. I am convinced that his failure that day would have moulded His character and helped him to walk in greater humility.

Verse 31

The Lord Jesus did not let Peter sink into the water and drown. He reached out His hand and “took hold of him.” Notice what Jesus told Peter that day:

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Jesus reprimands Peter for his lack of faith. Peter questioned whether it was Jesus walking on water. He also allowed the wind to bring fear into his heart, distracting Him from the Lord and His protection.

Peter would return to his fellow disciples a humbled man. His great step out of the boat ended up with him sinking into the water and a reprimand from the Lord for his lack of faith. Despite his boldness, he had failed and was put in his place. This, I am sure, would be a lesson he would never forget. How careful we need to be lest in our boldness, we, too, discover that our faith is incapable of the requests we make.

Verse 32

Jesus took hold of Peter when he sank and brought him to the boat with the other disciples. Matthew tells us that when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Peter was humbled and learned a lesson he would not soon forget. The other disciples, struggling for hours

with the wind, were comforted by the storm ceasing. They saw the compassion of the Lord toward them. They saw what it was like without His support and presence. They understood how the wind and the waves were subject to Him. Sometimes the greatest lessons come through the deepest struggles.

Verse 33

The circumstances these disciples went through that day were physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting. As Jesus brought Peter safely into the boat and the storm ceased, the disciples could do nothing but worship, saying to Jesus, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Yes, the day had been very difficult. They were tired and weary. The storm had rocked their boat, and they had experienced genuine fear. These

disciples had passed through a great trial. They could have become upset by this. They could have demanded why Jesus had commanded them to cross the lake when a storm was coming. That is not how they responded, however. They had seen a clear demonstration of the power of Christ. They had been delivered from their trial. They sat calmly now in the boat with the harsh winds subsiding and the waves no longer crashing over the side. They looked up at Jesus and recognized they were in the very presence of the Son of God. They could only worship and confess Him as their Lord and Saviour.

Verse 34

When Jesus got in the boat with the disciples, the storm was calmed. They crossed over to the other side at a region called Gennesaret on the

western shore of the area of Galilee. Historically this was a very fertile country known for its fruits.

Verse 35

Gennesaret was located in the vicinity of Capernaum, where Jesus had lived. When the men of the region saw that Jesus had arrived, they informed the inhabitants of His arrival. The result was that people came from all over, bringing their sick. The name of Jesus was well known in Gennesaret. People saw Him as a great healer.

Verse 36

Notice the response of the people of Gennesaret to Jesus. They “implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment.” These individuals believed that Jesus did not have to say or do anything. All that was

necessary was that they touch the clothes He wore. They begged His permission to touch just the fringe of His garment. Matthew tells us that everyone who did so was made well.

There was very little personal interaction between Jesus and these individuals. God works in strange ways at times. In this case, the garment Jesus wore became an instrument God used to heal the sick. This is not vastly different from Him using us as instruments in His hands. No glory goes to the garment. All glory goes to the Saviour who empowers.

MATTHEW 15

Verse 1

Matthew begins the chapter by telling us that the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem. The Pharisees and scribes were key religious leaders of the day. Both groups were strict observers and interpreters of the law of Moses. Matthew tells us that these leaders came from Jerusalem to see Jesus. These leaders had issues with Jesus, and they likely saw themselves as defenders of the faith. They came in particular to confront Jesus, whom they saw as spreading false teaching.

Verse 2

Notice the particular issue the Pharisees and scribes had with Jesus and His disciples here. They accused them of breaking tradition by not washing their hands when they ate.

We need to note here that these men accuse Jesus of breaking the tradition of the elders. In other words, their concern was a tradition passed on to them by their ancestors. While this tradition of washing hands when they ate was good, Scripture did not require it, nor was there a direct command in the Law of Moses to do so.

These religious leaders put the traditions of men on a level with Scripture and required that Jews practice both the commands of God and the traditions of man.

Verse 3

Hearing the objection of the scribes and Pharisees to the disciples breaking tradition, Jesus responded with His question: "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Jesus does not deny that His disciples did not always wash their hands when they ate. His accusation of the Pharisees and scribes, however, spoke to how they elevated the traditions of their ancestors to the level of the commands of God.

This elevation of traditions continues to be a problem today in the church. Some people cannot distinguish between what is a command of God and what is a tradition of man. We dare not elevate our traditions, however good they may be, over the clear teaching of Scripture.

Notice here that Jesus accuses the Pharisees and scribes of breaking the commandment of God to keep their traditions. They not only elevated tradition to the level of Scripture but even above it. They would disregard the teaching of Scripture to maintain their traditions.

In this case of the traditional washing of hands, the Pharisees and scribes saw anyone who did not do so as guilty before God, even though God never commanded this practice.

Verse 4

Jesus accused the Pharisees and scribes of breaking the command of God for the sake of their traditions. He gives an example of this here in verse 4.

Jesus reminds these leaders that the Lord God commanded that children

honour their father or mother. Disobedience to this command demanded the harshest punishment in the Old Testament –the death penalty. The Law of Moses was very clear and precise on this matter of respect for parents.

Verse 5

The scribes and Pharisees accepted the practice of dedicating objects to the Lord. Once an object was dedicated, it could not be used for any other purpose.

Imagine a man dedicating a piece of property and its crop to the Lord. This meant that the priests of the temple benefitted from the harvest. Suppose this man's parents became sick and needed support. Going to the temple, he asks the priests to set him free from his commitment so he can use this

property to care for his parents. The religious leaders, however, refuse to release him from this obligation because he dedicated the property to the Lord.

Imagine a son who had a problem with his parents and did not want to have anything to do with them. In their old age, these parents come to their son asking for support. Instead of offering assistance, the son dedicates his land and resources to the temple and tells his parents that he has nothing to give them. He has given an offering to God, but in doing so, he has neglected to honour his parents.

Verse 6

The Pharisees and scribes believed that if a man dedicated his resources to the Lord, "he need not honour his father." This was certainly not the command of God. It, however, became a tradition for

these religious leaders. Their strict legalistic interpretation of this practice was so unbending that they would not even show mercy or compassion to aging parents in need.

Jesus accused them of voiding the Word of God for their traditions and interpretations. How easy it is to explain away our obligations. God commanded that they honour their parents, but these scribes and Pharisees provided a loophole to avoid that responsibility.

Verse 7

Jesus calls the Pharisees and scribes hypocrites. They accused Jesus' disciples of not washing their hands when they ate. They washed their hands but were willing to find a way around caring for their aging parents.

Verse 8

Jesus applied the prophecy of Isaiah to the scribes and Pharisees. In this prophecy, the Lord God, speaking about the people of Isaiah's day, says:

8 "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

They looked good on the outside, but their hearts were not right with God. These leaders spoke of God's Law. They taught others how to live, but they were evil people who opposed God and His purpose. Their hearts were not in tune with God. They established traditions that opposed the very law they taught.

Verse 9

Jesus, still quoting Isaiah, tells the Pharisees and scribes that their worship of God was in vain. These leaders believed they were worshipping God, but the Father would not accept their acts of devotion. They spoke the name of God and declared themselves to be His followers, but Jesus tells us that their teaching was based on the commandments of men and not God.

These leaders added many things to the law of God. Their interpretations and traditions were not from God but their invention. How important it is that we distinguish the traditions and commandments of men from the truth of God's Word. Is our faith based on the truth of God's Word, or is it based on the traditions and interpretations of the human mind?

Verse 10

The Pharisees and scribes accused Jesus of breaking the traditions of their ancestors by not washing their hands when they ate. Jesus rebuked them for their hypocrisy and then called the people to listen to what He had to say about this. Likely these people had heard the discussion between Jesus and their religious leaders. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them a valuable lesson.

Verse 11

Jesus told the crowd that day that it was not what went into the mouth that defiled a person but rather what came out of it. Consider what the Lord is saying here.

The Old Testament law taught that some food items were unclean and could not be eaten lest they defile the eater. When Jesus told the people that

what they ate would not defile them, He was making an important statement. He told the crowd that what they ate would not get them closer to God, nor would it distance them from Him. Their relationship with God did not depend on their diet.

What would defile them was the evil pouring out of their heart and mind through their mouth. Their words and thoughts came from an evil heart.

Remember here that Jesus has just been speaking to the Pharisees and scribes whose intention was to trap Him and find a cause to kill Him. These individuals were very careful about what they ate and how they ate. They washed their hands before they ate and only ate what was permitted by the law of Moses. While they were very careful about this matter of eating, the words they spoke that day revealed that their hearts were evil and filled with sinful intent. Their diet did not cleanse their

heart. Their comments reflected a defiled heart that was not right with God.

Verse 12

The words Jesus spoke that day were offensive to the Pharisees. This may be for two reasons.

First, what Jesus taught the crowd seemed to go against the Old Testament dietary laws. The law of Moses was very particular about what a Jewish person could or could not eat. The Pharisees were very careful to follow that law and believed that they kept themselves in a right relationship with God. They likely thought that Jesus was a false teacher and were angered.

Second, when Jesus told the crowd that it was what came out of the mouth that

defiled a person because it was a reflection of the heart, these Pharisees were likely convicted of their sin. They had come to trick Jesus into saying something they could use to accuse him of heresy. They might have been offended because Jesus uncovered the evil of their hearts and revealed it to the crowd.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees publicly because they taught publicly. He was not afraid of confronting the error and hypocrisy of their lives. Jesus was not seeking a following. He taught the truth whether people were offended or not.

Verse 13

The disciples had just asked Jesus if He knew that the Pharisees had been offended by what He taught. They may have been concerned that these leaders

would be more driven now to find a way to kill Jesus.

Notice Jesus' response to their question. "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up." What is Jesus saying here?

First, Jesus told His disciples that the Pharisees were plants the Father had not planted. In other words, God had not called them, nor were they His servants.

Second, because the Pharisees were not from God, they were weeds in the garden, taking the nutrients from the true plants and hindering their growth. Third, these weeds needed to be uprooted for the good of the genuine plants. They needed to be exposed for what they were. The day was coming when they would be uprooted and judged for their falsehood, hypocrisy and evil intentions.

Verse 14

Speaking about the Pharisees offended by what He had said, Jesus told His disciples, "Let them alone." The idea here seems to be that they were not to concern themselves with the fact that they had been offended.

Jesus compares these religious leaders to blind guides. They were blind to the things of God and taught others about a God they did not know themselves.

Notice also that these Pharisees were leading people directly to their doom. In the end, both the Pharisees and those who they deceived would perish and fall under the judgement of God. They and their deception needed to be exposed lest they mislead even more people.

Verse 15

During His discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus turned to the crowd and told them that it was not what went into the mouth that defiled an individual but rather what came out of their mouth (see verse 11). It is easy to assume that everyone understood what Jesus was saying that day but notice here that Peter asked Jesus to explain the parable to Him.

The disciples, at this point in their lives, were still trying to understand what Jesus was teaching. They struggled to grasp the concept of the kingdom of God and the principles by which they were to live.

Verse 16

Notice how Jesus responds to Peter's request to explain His words: "Are you also still without understanding?"

The word “also” is significant here. It implies that Peter and the disciples were not the only ones without understanding. The Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was telling them. They had walked away, offended by His teaching. The crowd also may have been confused about what Jesus was teaching. Jesus, however, had a different expectation of His followers. They walked day by day with Him. We who have the Word of God are without excuse.

Verse 17

Jesus takes a moment to explain to Peter and the disciples what He meant when He told them in verse 11 that it was not what went into the mouth that defiled an individual but what came out of it.

He explains that when food is taken into the mouth, it is digested and the waste expelled. This is a very natural process.

Verse 18

Food taken into the body is digested, and the waste is expelled. This natural process does not defile an individual or make us unclean.

Jesus then compares this natural digestive process to what comes out of the heart of an individual. While the waste produced by our digestive system is very natural, the waste from the unregenerate heart is ungodly.

Verse 19

Jesus explains to Peter and His disciples what comes from the human heart. Evil thoughts, murder, sexual immorality,

theft, false witness and slander all originate in the sinful nature. Even as believers in Jesus Christ, we know the evil that lurks in the fleshly heart. Who among us has not struggled with ungodly attitudes and thoughts that arise from this heart of flesh?

Verse 20

It is the sins of the human heart that defile a person more than what they choose to eat or whether they wash their hands before they eat or not. Notice that Jesus clearly shows that eating with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. This directly contradicted the teaching of the Pharisees, who saw this tradition as essential if one wanted to be right with God. Jesus is not saying that the practice of the Pharisees was not right. He told His disciples that it was not essential, nor

did it give anyone a better status with God.

This principle applies to many situations. God is more concerned with the heart than the outward act. Two people may bring their offering to God. The offering of the first is a pleasing aroma to God, but the second is a stench in His nostrils. The reason has to do with the heart. One person gives with a pure and loving heart. The other gives grudgingly. Consider the words of the prophet Samuel in this regard:

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." – 1Sa 16:7

Verse 21

Matthew recounts an incident that took place in the district of Tyre and Sidon. This region was generally considered pagan, although Jews were living there. Jesus' ministry in this region would be toward a Canaanite woman, who would have normally not been deemed worthy of attention by the Jews of that day.

Verse 22

When Jesus was in the district of Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman came out and began to cry out to Him. Note several details here.

First, the woman was a Canaanite. The Canaanites were the inhabitants of the land of Canaan before their land was taken over by Joshua and driven out. Some of these Canaanites remained in the region now occupied by the Jews.

Second, notice how this Canaanite woman addressed Jesus as Lord and Son of David. She understood He was an important Jewish figure and came to Him for assistance.

Third, observe that the Canaanite woman came to Jesus pleading for her daughter, who was “severely oppressed by a demon.” She understood that Jesus had the power to cast out this demon and came to Him on behalf of her daughter.

We can only imagine the grief of this mother whose child was oppressed by demonic forces. It is the cry of many parents in our day that Jesus would heal and restore children caught up in the world and demonic forces.

Verse 23

Observe the response of Jesus to this Canaanite woman. "He did not answer her a word." We should not understand this to mean that Jesus did not care about her and her need. It appears that He wanted to demonstrate the truth to His disciples.

Notice also the response of the disciples. They came to Jesus and "begged Him" to send her away. The woman was very persistent and refused to stop crying out to Jesus. This seems to aggravate the disciples, who wanted some peace. There may also have been prejudice in their hearts because this woman was not Jewish.

Verse 24

After not responding to the woman for some time, Jesus finally breaks the silence. He told her that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of

Israel. Jesus is saying that He was sent only to the Jewish nation. Let's take a moment to consider these words of Jesus.

Note that Jesus told that Canaanite woman that He was sent "only" to the Jews. We know His ministry was not exclusively for the Jewish nation, for we, too, have benefited from His death and pardon. What Jesus is telling the woman here is that His earthly ministry was primarily among the Jews.

The apostle Paul expresses this in Romans 15, where he says:

8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you

among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” – Ro 15:8-9

The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was a servant to the “circumcised” (the Jewish nation). He told the Romans, however, that the reason Jesus came to the Jews was so that the Gentiles might also glorify God. The call upon the life of Jesus was to minister to and in the Jewish nation. They, in turn, would go with the good news of His death, resurrection and forgiveness to the nations.

Verse 25

Not deterred by Jesus’ statement that He had been called to the house of Israel, the Canaanite woman came and knelt before Him and pleaded with Him to help her.

The disciples may have been watching what was taking place that day and

been surprised that Jesus would take the time to listen to the woman. Though Jesus delayed in responding, she did not give up asking.

Verse 26

Hearing the Canaanite woman's persistent request, Jesus responds: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Jesus refers to this woman as a "dog." This was a general term used by the Jews to refer to Gentile unbelievers. The woman would have understood this.

Jesus is telling her again that He had been called to minister to the Jewish nation. His time and miracles were to convince them that He was the Messiah and to point them to the salvation He had come to offer.

Verse 27

Notice the response of the Canaanite woman to Jesus' statement about not feeding the children's bread to dogs. She told Him that even dogs ate the crumbs that fell from the table when the children ate.

The woman does not question her unworthiness. Nor does she pretend to be equal to the Jewish nation. But even as a "dog" in the presence of the Master, she knew she could benefit from whatever scraps were left over. She believed that even the crumbs under the table would bring healing to her daughter. This shows us her humility and faith in Jesus and His ability.

The disciples of Jesus needed to see the faith of this Canaanite woman that day. The day would come when they, as Jewish disciples of Jesus, would go

to Gentiles like this woman with the message of the gospel Jesus taught them.

Verse 28

Jesus saw the faith of this Canaanite woman and granted her desire. "Be it done for you as you desire," he told her. That very moment, her daughter was healed. There is no record of Jesus touching her daughter or even going to see her. He declared her to be well, and the demon left. The Canaanite woman experienced the mercy of Jesus that day. While it was not time for Christ to be revealed to the world, she would become one of many who would experience that touch in the coming years. That day, Jesus showed His disciples that He had a heart for all people and not just the Jewish nation.

Verse 29

Matthew tells us that after the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, Jesus went from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. We are not told what Jesus did as he walked by the sea. Possibly this was a time of rest and prayer or time alone with His disciples. After this time by the sea, Matthew tells us that Jesus went up on the mountain and sat there.

The reference to Jesus sitting down is not likely for rest but for teaching. The teacher would often sit down to teach in that culture and time.

Verse 30

Matthew tells us that "great crowds" came to Jesus on the mountain. Among them were the lame, blind, crippled, mute and others. They came obviously to be healed of their afflictions.

Notice the phrase, "They put them at his feet." The idea seems to be that people brought their loved ones to Jesus to be healed. It appears that they lined up and, one by one, placed them at His feet as he sat there on the mountain. Matthew tells us that Jesus healed them as they came to Him.

This was a very powerful time. Jesus demonstrated the power of God in what He did. The people present that day could not leave without understanding that the presence of God was with Jesus.

Verse 31

Notice the response of the crowd to the work of Jesus on the mountain that day. Matthew tells us that they responded in two ways.

First, they wondered. The word wonder, in our day, implies a measure of doubt or uncertainty. For example, we might say, "I wonder if so, and so is going to the meeting tonight." The idea is that we are uncertain of whether the individual will be there or not. This is not the sense of the word wonder here.

The Greek word θαυμάζω (thaumázō) means to be struck with admiration or astonishment. This crowd was amazed by what they saw that day. Second, the crowd, upon seeing the miracles of Jesus, glorified the God of Israel. This wonder led them to worship. Notice that they worshipped the God of Israel. They knew that the power they saw that day was from God. Jesus is the channel through which people's eyes were lifted to God in praise.

Verse 32

At a certain point in His ministry to the crowd on the mountain, Jesus called His disciples to Himself and told them that He had compassion for the people because they had been with Him for three days and had nothing to eat. We gather from this that Jesus had been ministering for three days to the crowd on the mountain. We can only imagine how tired and hungry He was at this point. We can also see the devotion of the people who would remain on that mountain with him for these days without eating.

Jesus told His disciples that He was unwilling to send this crowd away without feeding them lest they pass out from hunger on their way home.

Verse 33

In Matthew 14:16, Jesus expressed a similar desire to feed a different crowd before they left His presence. At that point, the disciples told Him that they only had two fish and five loaves, but Jesus told them to bring these items to Him, and with that small lunch, He fed over five thousand men plus women and children.

Notice the response of the disciples here:

"Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?"

The disciples seem to take this on themselves and come up short. There were no stores in the region to buy bread. They did not have the money necessary to purchase the supplies required to feed this crowd. Though they had seen Jesus feed the masses in Matthew 14, Just one chapter later,

they still think the same. They had watched Jesus heal the people in that crowd for three days but failed to understand how they could feed them.

I have to admit that I can identify with what Matthew is saying here. All too often, I fail to learn the lessons required. I think rationally and wonder how I can accomplish in the flesh what can only be done in the Spirit.

Verse 34

As He did in Matthew 14, Jesus took what was available to them and used it to feed the multitude. In this case, the disciples found seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. This is all that was required for Jesus to do His miracle.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 17:6:

6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. – Lk 17:6

The little we have when surrendered to the Lord Jesus, becomes a powerful tool in His hands. It is not what we have that matters so much as what the Lord does with it. Surrender what you have, and like the crowd on the mountain, you, too, will wonder and worship God for what He does.

Verse 35

With a few small fish and seven loaves of bread, the Lord directed the crowd to sit on the ground. In doing so, Jesus is creating some order. Seated, they would not be moving all around, and it would be easier to serve them food. In

having them sit, Jesus is also committing Himself to feed them. He is confident in what He is doing, and there is no doubt about what will happen. Would we have this kind of faith?

Verse 36

When the crowd was seated on the ground, Jesus took the loaves and fish, blessed, broke and gave them to His disciples to give to the masses.

I have often wondered how this happened. When did the miracle take place? Was it when the Lord gave the disciples the bread and fish or when the disciples distributed it to the crowd? I like to think that what the Lord gave His disciples multiplied as they were obedient in its distribution.

It seems to me that we can only truly experience the extraordinary power of God as we faithfully step out in obedience to His command. Day by day, person by person, and task by task, the strength and provision of God are multiplied. We may end the day with nothing left, but in the morning, there is a fresh supply of manna for the day.

Verse 37

That day the crowd ate and was satisfied. The disciples experienced the miraculous provision of the Lord as they went from person to person delivering food. The Lord saw that every obedient disciple had all he needed to accomplish His purpose for the people.

Notice, however, that when everyone had sufficient, the disciples had seven baskets full of broken pieces left over.

We are not told what happened with those baskets of food. What is clear, however, is that there was more than enough to feed the crowd. God's provision is greater than our need. The more we use what God gives, the more He multiplies it in our lives. We can never exhaust His supply if we are walking in obedience.

Verse 38

Matthew tells us that the number of people present that day was four thousand men as well as women and children. If there was an equal number of women and children, there could have been over twelve thousand people present that day. They were all fed from seven loaves and a few small fish. If Jesus can do this with a few loaves and fish, what can He do with what you offer Him?

Verse 39

After feeding the crowd, Jesus sent them away. We are left to wonder if they would have stayed longer had Jesus not sent them away. What is certain is that Jesus had accomplished what He intended to do for them. They would leave that day, having experienced the power of God. The question would be what they would do with that experience. Would they surrender to Him and accept Him as their Lord, or continue as they always had?

From that mountain, Jesus would travel to the region of Magadan. Magadan was also known as Magdala (see King James Version) and is believed to be the home of Mary Magdalene.

MATTHEW 16

Verse 1

The religious leaders of the day wanted to get rid of Jesus. They clashed with Him often and were constantly trying to find a way to accuse Him and have him killed. Matthew begins the chapter with an account of how the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus by asking Him for a sign from heaven.

There is some question here about the sign these leaders were looking for that day. The word "heaven" can either refer to the sky or to the place where God lives. We are uncertain whether they were looking for Jesus to show some

sign in the sky or asking for an unmistakable sign from God the Father to prove that He was the Son of God. Their suggestion here is designed to test Jesus. They wanted Him to prove He was indeed who He claimed to be.

Verse 2

Jesus answers the Pharisees and Sadducees by reminding them about the natural signs in the heavens. It was common knowledge that when the sky was red in the evening, a fine day was to follow. God has designed the sky to show us what the weather will be like. Those who understand these natural signs can predict the weather forecast.

Verse 3

Another sign in the sky, according to Jesus, is that when the sky is red in the morning, a storm is approaching.

Jesus reminds the Pharisees and Sadducees that while they understood these natural signs to predict the weather, they could not interpret the signs of the times.

Jesus had performed many mighty miracles among them. He taught in their midst. These religious leaders, however, could not see Him as a perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Verse 4

For Jesus, it was an evil and adulterous generation that sought a sign. Notice a couple of details in this statement.

First, Jesus appears to refer to a particular “generation.” That is to say, He seems to speak about the generation that was alive at that time. The Pharisees and Sadducees were part of that generation seeking a sign. Jesus, the Son of God, came and lived

among them, but they could not accept Him. Despite His many miracles and convincing words, they could not believe Him. Of course, they were not the only generation to respond this way to the Lord Jesus.

Second, Jesus speaks of that generation as an evil and adulterous one. That is to say, they were unfaithful to God and His purpose and chose to walk in the ungodly ways of this world. Because the generation was evil and adulterous, they would not believe the signs given to them.

Jesus told the Pharisees and Sadducees that the only sign that would be given to them and this adulterous generation was the sign of Jonah.

What was the sign of Jonah? Jesus had already used this illustration. Matthew records another interaction where Jesus said:

40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. – Mt 12:40

Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish before it released Him onto the shore. Jesus would be three days and three nights dead in the belly of the earth, but like Jonah, He would be released and rise from the dead.

Jesus tells those who reject Him that His death and resurrection were a clear sign from heaven that He was God's Son. The Father accepted His offering on our behalf and took Him to Himself. He now sits at the Father's right hand in heaven as our exalted Lord.

Verse 5

After telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that the only sign they would get from Him was the sign of Jonah, Jesus and His disciples likely got into a boat and crossed the lake. According to verse 13, they came to the district of Caesarea Philippi:

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" – Mt 16:13

Matthew tells us that when they reached "the other side" of the lake, the disciples realized they had forgotten to bring bread.

Verse 6

Jesus used the fact that the disciples had forgotten to bring bread to teach them a lesson. These men had likely

heard Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees and Sadducees, who demanded a sign. Somewhat angered by these religious leaders, the Lord tells His disciples to watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Notice two words here.

First, Jesus tells His disciples to watch the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The word ὁράω (horáō) means to look at, take note of or perceive. The idea here is that the disciples were to be aware of the teaching of the religious leaders of the day. As believers, we must understand the errors of our day to give a godly and informed response to those who have been caught up in this error. The second word Jesus uses here is the word προσέχω (proséchō), translated as beware. Proséchō carries the sense of staying on course. Imagine a ship sailing past a rocky coast with rocks jutting above the water's surface. The

ship's captain must carefully hold his course lest the ship crash against those rocks and sink.

Jesus is telling His disciples that they were not only to be aware of the falsehood in their midst but, as a cautious ship captain, to be careful to steer around these dangerous rocks that could sink their ship. They were to set their course toward the truth of God's Word, be aware of the dangers on the path and steer clear of those dangers. In this case, the threat was the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Verse 7

Upon hearing the Lord speak to them about the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees," the disciples interpreted this to have something to do with the fact that they had brought no bread.

At this point in their spiritual walk, the disciples were not completely in tune with the Lord. They still struggled to understand the truth He taught. These men did not fully understand the Lord and His ministry. They were still young in the faith. Yet, they were the ones Jesus chose to be His disciples. While they may have been immature in their faith, they did have the call of God upon their lives. The Lord Jesus would teach them as they were obedient to His call.

Verse 8

Notice how Jesus responds to the misunderstanding of the disciples:

"O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?"

Jesus accused the disciples of having "little faith." The disciples were concerned about their failure to bring bread on this journey. This was a failure on their part now, and they would have to go hungry until they could find a place to get something to eat. This worried them.

Jesus met them where they were. He understood what they were thinking and how they had misinterpreted what He was saying about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Despite this, He addresses their concerns by challenging their faith. This lack of faith was because they failed to trust the Lord Jesus when they had nothing to eat.

Consider this for a moment. The current situation was due to a failure on the part of the disciples to plan for food. Can you trust the Lord to provide when you have failed? Jesus challenged

His disciples' lack of faith. He reminds them that even when they fail, He is still able and willing to provide.

Verse 9

In light of their concerns about not having anything to eat, Jesus reminds His disciples how He fed five thousand men with the few loaves He had been given. There were even baskets left over. The idea here is that their concern about not having bread to eat was not legitimate. Jesus was fully able to provide for all their need.

It is often true that we are slow to learn lessons of faith. We see the Lord providing for us in marvellous ways but still find ourselves anxious when another need comes our way.

Verse 10

Jesus gives His disciples a second example of how He fed over four thousand people with seven loaves of bread. In this case, there were baskets of leftovers remaining. His intention here is to remind them of His power and limitless blessing. He shows them clearly how the cause of their anxiety over not bringing bread was their lack of faith in Him and His provision.

Verse 11

Having reminded His disciples that He could provide the bread needed to satisfy their hunger, Jesus now gets back to what He told them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He clarifies that when he spoke of leaven, he was not talking about bread to eat. He does not seem to take the time here to explain this but leaves them to reflect on the matter themselves to discover the truth He

was trying to convey. This was one of His teaching techniques.

Verse 12

As the disciples reflected on what Jesus had just told them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they understood what He was telling them. They realized that He was not speaking about bread but about the teaching of these leaders. By not telling them plainly, Jesus taught the disciples to think about these things themselves. He was training them to understand spiritual matters through this reflection. All too often, our faith consists of what other people tell us. However, we cannot give a reason why we believe. Jesus trained His disciples to think and reflect on their faith.

Verse 13

Jesus and His disciples arrived in the region of Caesarea Philippi. It was here that Jesus asked His disciples the question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Jesus does not ask this question from ignorance of the answer. He knew what people were saying about Him. His intention seems to be to engage His disciples in a discussion about His identity and purpose on earth.

The term "Son of Man" is often used in Scripture to speak of human beings. For example, consider the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 8:4, where he prays:

4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? – Ps 8:4

God often refers to the prophet Ezekiel as the "Son of man" in the book of Ezekiel:

1 And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." – Eze 2:1

It is not until we get to the book of Daniel that we find another meaning of the term "Son of Man." Listen to the words of Daniel 7, where he prophesied:

13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Da 7:13-14

Daniel saw in his vision one like a son of man. In other words, the person Daniel said was like a human being. Notice, however, what Daniel tells us about this one who looked like a human being. He came in the clouds and was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. All people would serve Him, and His kingdom would have no end. It is not without reason, therefore, that the Lord Jesus, when He began His ministry, He said:

20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." – Mt 8:20

Notice that Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. In other words, He was the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. He came to establish a kingdom with no end.

Ultimately, the question Jesus asked His disciples that day was, what do people think of me? Do they see me as the Son of Man Daniel prophesied would come to set up a kingdom?

Verse 14

The disciples shared with Jesus what they had heard the people of that day say about Jesus. They tell Jesus that people were divided over this matter.

Some people believed that Jesus was John the Baptist who returned from the dead. This was the opinion of Herod in Matthew 14:1-2. Others claimed that Jesus was the Elijah prophesied by Malachi in Malachi 4:5. Still others believed Jesus to be Jeremiah or another prophet.

Note that the disciples make no mention of the opinion of the Pharisees

and the Sadducees, who saw Him to be an imposter and blasphemer. Mostly, those who followed Jesus believed him to be a prophet of God.

Verse 15

When the disciples answered His question about who the crowd claimed Him to be, Jesus made the question more personal — “But who do you say that I am?” The question forces them to take a stand. The answer to this question was not just an intellection one but a declaration of commitment and allegiance. Remember that these disciples were still immature in their faith and trying to understand Jesus and His purpose. He is challenging these men now to consider what they had seen and heard from Him over the past months. In light of what they had experienced, what was their

understanding of Him as the Son of Man?

Verse 16

Simon Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Peter was convinced that Jesus was the Christ. The title "Christ" refers to an anointed one. This anointing was from God for a special purpose. When speaking about "the Christ" or the anointed one, most Jews were referring to the Messiah who was to come to set His people free from their bondage and affliction. Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament prophets, who came to deliver His people from their distress.

Second, Peter declared Jesus to be the Son of the living God. In saying Jesus was the Son of God, Peter is telling Him

that He was equal with God and the inheritor and master of all things. As the Son of God, He was worthy of all worship, honour and obedience.

In Peter's mind, Jesus was the promised Messiah to come. More than this, however, He was not just an ordinary human being but the very Son of God, who took on flesh to live among us.

Verse 17

Jesus declares Peter blessed for his declaration that He was Christ, the Son of the living God. Notice a couple of details here in this verse.

First, Jesus calls Peter Bar-Jonah. The term "bar" means the son of and gives us the name of Peter's father. Peter's father, according to Jesus, was a man by the name of Jonah.

Second, Jesus declared Peter blessed because his declaration had not come from flesh and blood. In other words, Peter's understanding of the person of Jesus was not the result of careful, rational observation of His life and words but a God-given revelation.

An intellectual understanding of Christ is insufficient. Many believe in the historical Jesus Christ. They appreciate and seek to live according to His teaching. While this is a good thing, it does not mean they know Christ or that God has revealed Him personally to them. Many people in Peter's day saw and spoke to Jesus. They knew Him to be a powerful man of God who preached an important message. Peter knew Jesus differently. He was the Christ in whom He placed all his confidence. He was the Son of the living God whom he worshipped and served. This knowledge came from

God, who opened his heart and transformed Peter's life through this understanding. Peter would never be the same again.

Ultimately, historical knowledge is not sufficient. We need to know Christ in a profound, personal and life-changing way. We can learn facts about Jesus, but only the Father in Heaven can make Jesus real.

Verse 18

Having expressed His approval of Peter's declaration that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus tells him that it was on this rock that he would build His church. We need to take a moment to consider these words of Jesus.

First, we must see here that there is a play on words. Notice the words of

Jesus about Peter – “You are Peter,” Jesus said. The name Peter is Πέτρος (Pétros), and it means a stone. It is something someone might pick up and throw.

However, Jesus says, “On this rock, I will build my church.” The word rock is πέτρα pétra which refers to a large rock upon which a person might build a house. While the words sound similar, they are very different words. Peter was a small stone, but God would build His church upon a large rock.

What is clear from this statement is that Jesus distinguishes the stone from the large rock. This is important because it implies that the church would not be built on Peter but on something greater than him.

Second, this leaves us with the matter of determining what this rock is upon which the church would be built. Jesus gives us a hint here in the verse by

declaring that even the gates of hell would not be able to prevail against this rock. The rock to which Jesus referred was more powerful than hell itself. This could hardly describe Peter. Consider the words of Jesus to him in Luke 22:31-32:

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." – Lk 22:31-32

Satan desired to destroy Peter. He would have done so were it not for the intervention of Jesus, who prayed for him. Peter was helpless before Satan but for the grace and prayers of Jesus on His behalf. Jesus stood between the apostle and Satan and protected him. Jesus alone can conquer the power of

hell. He has demonstrated this through His life, death and resurrection.

Peter declared that this Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. This was the truth that would render hell powerless. Hell had no power over the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the rock upon which we build our lives and a sure foundation against the onslaught of hell.

Consider the words of the apostle Paul in this regard:

4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. – 1Co 10:4

While Peter was but a little stone in the work of the church, Jesus was a great Rock of security and protection from hell itself.

Verse 19

To Peter, the little stone, Jesus promised to give the keys to the kingdom of heaven. When we give the keys to our home to someone, we entrust them with responsibility and authority. We give them the right to open the door and enter our house, but we expect them to be responsible for what is in that house. We will hold them accountable for any damage. Similarly, the Lord Jesus gave Peter the authority to act on His behalf. He would open the kingdom's door by proclamation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. That truth, proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, would bring many into the kingdom. Peter would, by his preaching, unlock the truth about Jesus being the door into the kingdom of God. We must remember that Peter was not the only disciple present that day. Jesus spoke to all of His disciples. They also

would open the kingdom's door through the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Notice that Jesus told His disciples that whatever they bound on earth would also be bound in heaven, and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. In other words, heaven would stand behind them in building the Kingdom of God.

A police officer is just another human being, but there is a difference between this officer and any other person. That office represents the government of the city or nation and has been empowered by that government to enforce the law. There are serious consequences for resisting a police officer, and the government of the country stands behind them in the application of the law.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus tells the apostles that the authority of heaven stood behind them in their efforts for the sake of the Kingdom of God on this earth. To reject these apostles and what they taught was to reject God, and there would be heavenly consequences for such resistance.

Verse 20

After confirming Peter's declaration about Him being the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus commissioned the disciples to be His representatives in opening the kingdom to the people of the earth. Notice, however, that Jesus "strictly charged" His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. While it may seem strange to commission his disciples to preach this message and then tell them not to tell anyone, this command was only

temporary. He would later ask them to go into the world with this message. For now, this message would rile up the religious leaders unnecessarily before Jesus' time. It was not yet the time for Him to go to the cross. There was more work to be done. By silencing his disciples, Jesus gives Himself more time to do the job the Father had called Him to do.

Verse 21

Peter's declaration that Jesus was Christ, the Son of the living God, was very important. However, the disciples did not yet understand what that truth implied for Jesus. Jesus, therefore, began to instruct them about what would happen in the coming days.

Jesus told His disciples that He needed to go to Jerusalem, suffer and be killed at the hands of the elders, priests and

scribes. The disciples understood the reaction of these religious leaders toward Jesus and knew that if He went to Jerusalem, this would likely be the result. Notice, however, that Jesus also told his disciples that He would rise from the dead on the third day. This, of course, was not something that disciples would have found as easy to understand.

What is important to note here is that Jesus makes it clear in His teaching that going to Jerusalem to suffer and die was essential. This was why He had come.

Verse 22

When Peter heard Jesus saying that He had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, He was upset. Taking Jesus aside, he said privately to Him: "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." Peter displays his disagreement

with the words of Jesus here. He does not want to see his Lord suffer and die at the hands of the Jewish leaders.

Note here that the one who declared Jesus to be Christ did not understand the implications of carrying that title. Christ, the Messiah, would set His people free by His death on their behalf. If left to himself, Peter would have fought against the truth He declared about Jesus. The words, "This shall never happen to you," are quite strong. In essence, Peter is saying; I will not let this happen to You. I am committing myself to prevent Your death.

Verse 23

The response Peter received from Jesus was not likely one he expected. Turning to Peter, Jesus said: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me."

I am sure that Peter was shocked by this response. It was not His intention to hinder the work of Jesus. He believed that by protecting Jesus, he was encouraging His work. He had not yet seen the significance of the His and its impact on the kingdom of Satan.

Matthew tells us that Jesus turned to Peter but addressed Satan. The words Peter spoke were not inspired by God but by Satan. Satan used Peter to hinder Christ and His resolve to go to Jerusalem to be crucified.

What we see here in this interaction is that the very person who declared Jesus to be Christ, the Son of God, was used by Satan in an attempt to hinder the fulfillment of that role. Does it surprise you that Satan could use even Peter's words to impede the work of Jesus? Satan is not limited to using unbelievers in his efforts against the

kingdom of God. He will use believers to cause division in the church. He will use the words of believers to discourage other believers. We have seen this all too much in the history of the church. The comments and attitude of Peter that day were opposed to the purpose of God. If we are not watchful, we will all too quickly discover just how much devastation Satan can cause through believers in the kingdom of God.

Observe also here that Jesus accused Peter of not setting his mind on the things of God but on the things of man. We don't have to be inspired by Satan to cause damage to the church. All we have to do is to set our minds on the things of man. The ways of this world are different from the ways of God. God's ways are not our ways. If you try to run the church as a worldly business, you will fail. If you do what you think is best, you will only hinder the kingdom's

work. God's work must be done in God's way. Peter's rational mind showed him that the death of Jesus was not a good thing. In the mind of God, however, it was the only solution.

Verse 24

Jesus has been speaking to His disciples about his impending death. Peter, in particular, was upset about this prediction. Jesus reminded him, however, that it was all in the purpose of God. Our Lord goes on here, in fact, to tell His disciples that everyone who followed Him would need to deny themselves and take up their cross to follow Him.

Many follow the Lord Jesus for what they can get out of Him. They want forgiveness and eternal life. They enjoy being useful for the kingdom of God.

Notice once again what Jesus tells us here.

First, we must follow Jesus. He sets the path for our lives. We do not choose our way. We are followers. Wherever He goes, we must go also. We don't get to determine what that path is going to look like, but we must be committed to facing whatever is before us, recognizing that He is there with us all the way.

Second, if we are going to be followers, we will have to deny ourselves. This was the prayer of the Lord Jesus in the Garden when he said, "Not my will but Thine be done." When it comes to His purpose and my desire, His purpose will win every time. My life will have one goal, to live for Him.

Finally, Jesus tells us that if we follow Him, we must pick up our cross. The cross was where Jesus died. It was

where he laid everything down for us. It was a place of suffering, death, sacrifice and shame. It was what He bore for us.

Jesus makes no apology for this command. He tells us that these are the requirements for anyone who wants to follow Him.

Verse 25

Jesus reminds all who follow Him that if they want to save their lives, they will lose them. The word save is σωζω (sōzō) which means to preserve or keep safe from loss, danger, destruction or death. If you focus on keeping yourself from trouble, pain or difficulty, you will never experience true life as a follower of Jesus Christ. If you desire to be comfortable, safe and trouble-free, following Jesus is not really for you. The Christian life is a difficult one. It

will go against the flow. It will bring you trouble and trials in life.

On the other hand, however, Jesus tells us that if we are willing to lay all this aside, deny ourselves, pick up our cross and unreservedly follow after Him, those trials will give birth to true life, meaning and purpose. There will be a great reward for those who follow after Jesus.

Verse 26

Jesus leaves his disciples with an option. They can save their lives by focusing on their comfort, security and desires, or they can lose them by following after Jesus. Jesus reminds them, however, that if they save themselves and fill their lives with everything this world offers, it will be at great cost to their soul. This world will not feed their soul. Nothing in the

world can truly satisfy or save that soul.

All too many Christians need to understand this principle. We cannot fill our souls with this world and its ways and prosper. Only God can satisfy.

Ultimately, you can have every success this world has to offer, but what is all of that if your soul is lost? You will stand before a God who is a stranger to you, empty of life. Jesus reminds us here that the soul is our most treasured possession. It is here that we fellowship with God. It is this soul that will move on into eternity. We spend all we have on this perishable body but neglect our soul. The day is coming when this body will lie in the grave, and our soul will stand before God. Will that soul be admitted into His presence, or will He turn it away? Is your soul ready to face the Lord?

Verse 27

Notice how Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man here. This is a reference to the prophecy of Daniel in Daniel 7:13-14 where the prophet foretold of a Son of Man who would be given dominion over an everlasting kingdom.

It is Jesus, the Son of Man, who will come again. Notice what the Lord Jesus tells us about this second coming. First, the second coming of the Lord will be with His angels. Jesus will not come alone. Accompanied by Him will be a whole host of angels standing with Him. This coming will be very public. It will be awesome, but for those who do not know Him, it will be very frightening.

Second, the second coming of the Lord will be in the glory of His Father. When He came the first time, Jesus came

unnoticed by many. He put aside His glory to be born as a man. This second coming will not be like this. He will come in splendour and glory. The holy and magnificent presence of this divine Son will be manifested to all. He comes as a conquering God with His angelic army standing with Him.

Finally, the second coming of Jesus will be to judge. That is to say, He will demand an accounting of every person for the life they lived and repay every individual according to that life. This will be a time of separating the sheep from the goats. He will gather His own and separate them from those who stood against Him.

Verse 28

Jesus makes a confusing declaration here. He told those present that day

that some would not die until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Our immediate thought is that this refers to the second coming of the Lord Jesus, but this cannot be the interpretation here, for we still await that coming, and those present with Jesus that day are now all dead. This means that Jesus must be referring to something else. There are several ways to understand what Jesus is saying here.

First, some refer here to what would take place six days later. On that occasion, Jesus took three disciples up the mountain. On the mountain, those three men saw the glory of God descend upon Jesus as He spoke with Moses and Elijah. This is referred to as the transfiguration. These disciples had a foretaste of the eternal kingdom that Jesus came to establish.

Second, other commentators see the Lord Jesus referring to what would occur after His death. When Jesus died, incredible things took place.

Matthew tells us that after the death of Christ, the bodies of the saints rose from the dead:

52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. – Mt 27:52-53

Jesus would rise from the dead and show His presence to the disciples demonstrating that the Kingdom of God had come and was conquering death.

Some of these disciples would watch Jesus rise to be with the Father in

heaven, from where He would reign as king over this kingdom.

Sometime later, the disciples, gathered in an upper room, would witness the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower them as representatives of the kingdom.

The apostle John was given a vision of the eternal kingdom in his exile in Patmos. He would write about this in the book of Revelation.

What is clear is that there were individuals present that day who saw the glorified King of the kingdom of God. They witnessed the defeat of death in the resurrection of Christ. They were given kingdom power in the coming of the Holy Spirit. They were shown the purpose of God in visions of that kingdom.

MATTHEW 17

Verse 1

Six days after His declaration that some would not die until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom, Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high mountain. There was no one else with them on that mountain. The fact that it was a high mountain likely guaranteed that no one would follow them. It was the intention that only these three disciples be with Him on this occasion. We are not all at that same place in our spiritual walk, nor will everyone's experience in that walk be the same. These three disciples would experience what the other nine would not.

Verse 2

Matthew tells us that Jesus was transfigured before His three disciples. The word transfigured is μεταμορφῶω (metamorphóō). This word is derived from μετά, meaning change, and morphó?, meaning form. Together they imply that Jesus changed His form.

Matthew, likely hearing this from the disciples who were present, describes this change in two ways. First, Jesus' face shone like the sun. Second, His clothes became as white as light.

While Jesus changed His form, His face and clothes were identified. His shape was something the disciples could recognize, but there was no question that He was very different from the Jesus they climbed the mountain with earlier that day.

The difference was observed in the brightness of Jesus' face and clothes. His face shone like the sun and stood out above all else. His clothes were so white they blazed like a bright light, whiter than the disciples had ever seen.

There is no question that this brightness emanated from the person of Jesus and was a reflection of His glory and majesty. The form these disciples saw that day was no ordinary body. It was a glorious and awe-inspiring form filled with glory and majesty. It was a pure and holy body and inspired fear, awe and wonder.

Verse 3

As the disciples stood amazed at Jesus' form that day, two other figures appeared beside Him. Matthew identifies them as Moses and Elijah.

They spoke with Jesus as he stood in their midst.

We are not told how the disciples recognized these two figures standing with Jesus. Suffice it to say that God revealed their identity to them. It may also be that they asked Jesus after this event to explain who these individuals were.

Matthew does not give us an account of the words spoken between Jesus, Moses and Elijah. What is significant is that Moses was the lawgiver. Elijah was a prophet. Both the law and the prophets looked forward to Jesus as the Messiah of whom they spoke.

There is no further mention of Moses and Elijah. Apart from mentioning that they were present with Jesus, nothing further is said about them. Of note is that while Jesus shone with the glory of God, no such reference is made about the other two individuals. All glory

appears to be in the Lord Jesus alone. He seems to be the focus. He is the fulfillment of everything Moses and Elijah predicted. In Him alone, the purpose of God would be accomplished.

Verse 4

Notice the response of Peter to what was taking place before him that day.

First, Peter told the Lord it was good for them to be present. He does not explain what he meant by this. He may be referring to the glorious scene they had experienced that day and what it revealed about Jesus. They would certainly never be the same after this experience. They had seen the glory of Christ and His supremacy over the law and the prophets. Likely that experience clarified and strengthened these disciples in their understanding of Christ and His role.

Interestingly, Peter seems to be able to speak to the glorified Christ. There is no mention here, however, of any attempt to talk to Moses or Elijah.

Second, Peter asked the Lord if He wanted Him to make three tents, one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus. It is unclear what Peter's intention is here. The word used for a tent can refer to a booth, shelter or even a tabernacle. If Peter is using this word to refer to a shelter, he may only be thinking of the comfort of these three individuals. If he uses the term to speak of a tabernacle, it may be His way of honouring these three individuals before Him. What is clear is that Peter feels compelled to respond to what He saw.

Verse 5

As Peter was suggesting that it might be a good idea to build tents for the individuals present before him, a bright cloud appeared. A voice came from that cloud and interrupted Peter's words. It may be that God, Himself is answering Peter's question.

Notice what that voice said:

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

The Father makes no mention of Moses or Elijah that day. All attention is focused on the Son. Moses and Elijah had fulfilled their roles, but now all attention was on Jesus.

The Father declared His love and pleasure in the Son and His work. The purpose of the Father was in and through His Son.

Notice also the command of God to the disciples: "Listen to Him." The Father hands all authority over to the Son. The law and the prophets represented by Moses and Elijah were to be in submission to Jesus. Having fulfilled the law and the prophecies, Jesus would usher in a new Kingdom over which He would be the undisputed Lord and God. Things would not be the same as those under the law and the prophets. Jesus would change all that. The Father stood behind what Jesus commanded and taught. The principles of this new kingdom would be founded on the teaching of Jesus and His example. The disciples were to hear Jesus and teach those truths to the world.

Verse 6

The disciples had just heard the voice of God from the cloud declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son, with whom He

was pleased. While Peter spoke with Jesus in His transfigured form, the voice of the Father made them all fall on their faces in terror. That voice confirmed the ministry and message of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 7

The voice of God the Father brought fear into the disciples' hearts. They fell to the ground, terrified in His presence. Notice, however, that Jesus came to them and touched them. He told them to get up and not to be fearful.

The picture here is very powerful. It is the picture of every one of us. We have every reason to fear a Holy and Sovereign God. As sinners, we cannot stand in His presence. We would be forever lost were it not that the Lord Jesus touched us. His ministry pardons our sins and gives us access to the

Father. Because of the work of Jesus on our behalf, we do not need to fear. We can rise from the dust and stand before Him as His children, purified and cleansed by the blood of His Son Jesus.

Verse 8

Hearing the voice of Jesus speaking to them, the disciples lifted their eyes. Moses and Elijah had disappeared. The voice of the Father no longer spoke. Once again, they were alone with Jesus. His presence would have brought great comfort and reassurance.

Verse 9

After the transfiguration of Jesus, the small group came down from the mountain. Notice that Jesus commanded the three disciples not to tell anyone about the vision until He

had risen from the dead. Note a couple of details here.

First, observe that Jesus speaks about the events that had just taken place as a vision. We often compare visions to dreams, as if they did not happen but were in the mind only. This is not the case, however. Men and women of Scripture saw visions of angels coming to announce an important event. Those angels were present. The vision opened their eyes to what they could not normally see. We should not think that the transfiguration was only a dream for these disciples. They saw Jesus transfigured. They heard the voice of God with their physical ears.

Second, Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about what they saw that day until He had risen from the dead. There may be several reasons for this. The most obvious was the fact that this would not have been well received by

the religious leaders who were looking for an excuse to kill Jesus. The idea that Jesus was above Moses and the prophets was unthinkable to the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes. This would have caused many problems for these leaders. Understand also that if the disciples shared what they had seen that day, their lives also would be at risk.

Jesus speaks more openly now to His disciples about His death and resurrection. The disciples were likely somewhat confused about this. When the Holy Spirit came, however, He would open their eyes to understand this more fully.

Verse 10

As the disciples descended the mountain with Jesus, they had a new awareness of His identity as the

Messiah. One thing that puzzled them, however, was the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 that predicted that Elijah would come before the Messiah. They had seen Elijah with Jesus on the mountain but were unaware that Elijah had come as prophesied. They question Jesus about this.

Verse 11

In response to their question about the prophecy of Malachi, Jesus told His disciples that the scribes' teaching was indeed true. Elijah was to come before the Messiah. He would also "restore all things."

In what way would Elijah restore all things? For many years, the people of God had been under a system of laws and sacrifices. The problem with that system was that the blood of bulls and goats did not truly restore the heart to

God. A greater solution was required. This is where Elijah came in. He would announce the answer to the problem of sin. That solution would be in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 12

Jesus told His disciples that Elijah had come, but they had not recognized him. He told the disciples that the people's response was to do with this Elijah "what they pleased." In other words, they killed Elijah because of the message he preached.

Jesus prophesied that just as the people of that day killed Elijah, so they would do to the Son of Man. He would suffer at the hands of those for whom He came. Just as they did not recognize Elijah, they would not recognize Him as the Messiah.

Our preconceived ideas can often keep us from seeing the truth. Because Elijah did not look like they expected, the Jews rejected and killed Him. That same truth applied to the Messiah. God's ways are different from ours. Were it not for the fact that the Spirit of God opened our eyes, we, too, would miss the purpose of God in Jesus Christ.

Verse 13

We are not told what it was in the words of Jesus that helped the disciples understand the prophecy of Malachi about Elijah. It may have been what Jesus said about the people doing with Elijah, "what they pleased." This may have brought their mind to John the Baptist, who had announced the coming of Jesus and declared Him to be the Messiah. For this, John lost His life. He was the Elijah who was to

come, who was not recognized or accepted by the Jewish community. Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist.

Verse 14

Jesus and His disciples were on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. From that mountain retreat, Matthew tells us that they "came to the crowd." It is uncertain if the crowd had been waiting for them all along. What is clear is that many needs were present among the people. In this case, they were greeted by a man who came and kneeled before the Lord Jesus. As this man knelt before the Lord Jesus that day, He recognized Him as His superior and begged Jesus for help.

Verse 15

The man who kneeled before Jesus had a request. He recounted how his son was suffering from seizures so terrible that he would fall at times into fire and often into the water. His boy's life was a stake here.

We see the heart of a father who grieved for his son and his safety. The words "he suffers terribly" reveal the father's broken heart. He comes to Jesus seeking help and healing. What parent has not come to Jesus seeking help for a needy child?

Verse 16

The man kneeling before Jesus told Him he had brought his suffering son to His disciples, but they could not heal him. This statement is interesting in what it reveals about the disciples' ministry in those days. We assume that the Lord Jesus was the only one who

healed. From this statement, however, we see that people also came to the disciples for healing. This case seemed to be beyond their capabilities, and so the man came directly to Jesus.

Verse 17

When Jesus heard the man tell Him that the disciples were not able to heal his son, he responded:

"O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me."

Consider what Jesus is saying here. The context is a man whose son has seizures and the inability of the disciples to heal this son.

Notice first to whom Jesus speaks — a "faithless and twisted generation." Let's

consider this for a moment.
The word “faithless” in the Greek language implies disbelief or untrustworthy. Jesus speaks, therefore, to a generation that was unbelieving and untrustworthy.

The word translated “twisted” in Greek refers to something distorted, perverted or corrupt.

What Jesus is saying here is quite strong. He speaks to the generation of that time that He sees as disbelieving, untrustworthy, perverted and corrupt. These words were generally not used in the New Testament to speak of His disciples but those who rejected His message and miracles.

There is a difference of opinion among commentators over who Jesus is speaking to here in this verse. Some see Jesus as referring to the lack of faith to heal the man’s son. The

problem with this, as we have mentioned, is that Jesus does not generally speak of his disciples as being faithless and twisted.

Others see Jesus speaking to the man who had come for his son's healing. Note, however, that even after the disciples could not heal His son, the man did not give up but came to Jesus for the healing required. This does not appear to be a lack of faith or perverseness on his part.

This leaves us with the fact that Jesus speaks to the crowds who followed Him but did not believe in Him. Among them were the religious leaders who constantly tried to find a reason to kill him. The word "generation" indicates that Jesus speaks to a whole generation of people who rejected Him and questioned His claims.

Speaking to this faithless and twisted generation, Jesus asks, "How long am I to be with you?" Jesus circulated among these people for about three years, preaching and demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God. Despite this, many continued in their unbelief. He knew His time with them was ending, and He would shortly be crucified. Still, most of that generation continued questioning His claim to be the Son of God.

Notice the response of Jesus to this unbelieving generation – "How long am I to bear with you? " That is to say, how long will I hold back my wrath? How much more patience will I demonstrate before I turn to judgment? That generation continued to seek a sign but never truly believed the evidence given to them. They continued to follow and listen to Jesus but refused to be changed. The day would come when their sentence would

be sealed and their judgement proclaimed.

Despite the unbelief and the many miracles performed by Jesus before these people, Jesus demonstrates His grace and favour by calling for the man to bring His son to Him.

Verse 18

When the father brought his son to Jesus, Jesus rebuked a demon which came out of him. The result was that the boy was instantly healed. There is no question here that a demon caused the boy's affliction.

We see from this that demons have the power to cause physical affliction. In this case, the boy suffered from seizures that cast him into the fire and water. This demon tortured the boy, whose life was often at risk.

Once the source of the affliction was identified and cast out, the boy returned to normal. We should not conclude from this that every affliction is of demonic origin. It was the case here, however, and the healing took place by removing the demon.

Verse 19

Seeing how Jesus cast out this demon, the disciples came privately to Him to ask Him why they could not cast it out themselves.

Notice here that the disciples make it clear that they had attempted to cast this demon out but could not. This shows us that Jesus was not the only one who ministered in those days. The disciples also prayed for the healing of those who gathered around them.

These men were learning to minister as Jesus did. They were, however, not always successful. By questioning Jesus, they were seeking to learn more about the role Jesus had given them to play.

Verse 20

Jesus answers the disciples' question about why they could not cast out the demon from the man's son. He told them very clearly that it was because of their little faith.

What Jesus told His disciples is that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains, but because they had little faith, they could not cast out this demon. If faith the size of a mustard seed is considered little faith, why wasn't the little faith of the disciples not sufficient to cast out the demon?

The original manuscripts differ in the word used here. The Westcott and Hort text uses the word ὀλιγόπιστος (oligóistos). This is derived from two Greek words, olígos, meaning little, and pístis meaning faith. When you combine the terms, you get the phrase interpreted as "little faith."

The Textus Receptus, from which we get the King James Version, uses the word ἀπιστία (apistía), which means untrustworthy, faithless or unbelieving.

We will leave it up to the scholars to debate which word was used in the original manuscript. Both of these words, however, carry much of the same meaning. To lack faith is to have little faith. To be unbelieving results from little faith. Ultimately the idea is that the disciples did not have the faith to believe that this demon could be cast out. They did not even have faith the size of a mustard seed.

Verse 21

The English Standard Version of the Bible omits this verse, including the note: "Some manuscripts insert verse 21: "But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting."" The Bible as we know it is the result of piecing together ancient fragments discovered over many years. Not all of these ancient fragments containing this portion of Scripture have this verse. The English Standard Version, therefore, chooses to translate the verse but included it with a note.

Verse 22

Matthew tells us that it was at this time that Jesus began to think more about His crucifixion and death. It was while He and His disciples were in the region of Galilee that Jesus told them plainly that He was about to be delivered into

the hands of men. Notice how He words this:

“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”

As the Son of Man, Jesus was a man. He took on human form and lived as a man on this earth. This was a great sacrifice for which we ought to be eternally grateful.

As the Son of Man, according to the prophecy of Daniel 7, He was to be given an eternal kingdom that would never end. He was the glorious Lord prophesied by the prophets of old.

Finally, this glorious Lord, who made such sacrifice and to whom the eternal kingdom was to be given, would be handed over to mere humans. He would suffer at their hands. He would humble Himself under their cruelty and rebellion.

Verse 23

Notice what Jesus said would happen to Him at the hands of men. He told His disciples that His human enemies would kill Him, but He would be raised on the third day.

Jesus knew what was ahead. He did not shrink back from this death at the hands of His enemies. This did not mean that it was easy for Him. On the contrary, Jesus would agonize over this coming death in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was resolved to face it, for this was the purpose for which He had come.

Notice also, however, that Jesus knew that He would overcome death. He told His disciples that on the third day, He would be raised. Notice the words of Jesus when that hour was upon Him:

46 Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your

hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. – Lk 23:46

At the moment of His death, Jesus committed His spirit into the hands of the Father. There on that tree, He took on our sins. The sin and shame of humanity's failure fell upon Him. The Father turned his face away, and Jesus' life fled from Him. Despite this terrible ordeal, the Lord placed Himself in the hands of the Father, knowing that His victory was secure and that in three days, He would escape the prison of death triumphant.

While the faith of Christ Jesus was strong, the disciples struggled deeply with this news. Matthew tells us that they were "greatly distressed." They did not fully grasp the significance of His death and the victory that would be obtained.

Verse 24

Jesus and His disciples arrived in Capernaum. According to Matthew, Capernaum was where Jesus had settled after leaving Nazareth.

13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, – Mt 4:13

Arriving in his hometown, Jesus was met by a tax collector. Notice, however, that these were collectors of the two-drachma tax. Two drachmae were equal to half a shekel. This two-drachma tax was a Jewish tax used to maintain the temple. It was a requirement of the Law of Moses:

13 Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty

gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the LORD. 14 Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering. – Ex 30:13-14

We understand historically that the Romans would confiscate this offering and use it for their temples. There was some debate, therefore, among the Jews as to whether this tax should be paid if it was not going to the temple of God. The tax collector may have wanted to know where Jesus stood on this debate.

Notice here that this temple tax collector went to Peter to ask Him whether Jesus paid this tax. It is uncertain why he did not ask Christ personally.

Verse 25

Peter assured the temple tax collector that Jesus did pay his temple tax. When Peter returned to the home where Jesus and the disciples stayed, Matthew tells us that "Jesus spoke to him first." The idea seems to be that Jesus addressed the matter before Peter had a chance to bring it up to Jesus.

We are left feeling that Peter may have struggled with the question posed by the temple tax collector. If indeed the temple tax was being confiscated by the Romans and not getting back to the temple, should Jews pay it? The Law of Moses required payment, but it was not being used for the purpose the law intended.

Jesus begins by asking Peter a question: "What do you think, Simon?" This question reveals Peter's internal struggle over this tax and how it was being used.

Jesus then goes on to ask another question. "From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or others?" The kings of those days taxed the people they ruled. They and their families benefitted from the taxes they imposed upon the people. The king and his family were not required to pay taxes.

Notice how Jesus, speaking of the temple tax, talks to Peter about how kings taxed the people. This may indicate that Jesus was speaking directly to the concern of many about how the temple tax was now being directed to the king and his political agenda.

Verse 26

Peter answers Jesus' question about the source of taxes imposed by the

king. He tells Jesus that the king did not tax his family but others.

Jesus then compares believers to the children of the king. As children of the king, they were free from this tax, misused by the government of the day. While they were free from this tax, Jesus told Peter that another principle came into play. He examines this in verse 27.

Verse 27

While believers were free not to pay this tax, Jesus told them to pay it nonetheless, so as not to offend. The believer must respect the authorities in power and deliver what they demand.

The principle applies to other situations as well. We may be free to practice something, but if by doing so, we offend a brother or sister and cause

them to stumble, we need to sacrifice our freedom for their benefit. There are times when the peaceful and most beneficial thing to do is to refrain from practicing what we have the liberty to do.

In this case, Jesus asked Peter to go fishing. Peter was to open the mouth of the first fish he caught. He would find a shekel in that fish's mouth. He was to use it to pay Jesus' tax and His own.

The miracle of finding the coin in the fish's mouth should not go unnoticed. While Jesus said that the king's children were free from paying this tax, they were to do so, nonetheless, so as not to bring an offence to others. This would be an extra burden on the families of believers, but the miracle of the fish here shows us that God will provide all we need to pay what is required and live in peace.

MATTHEW 18

Verse 1

It is uncertain what brought this question to the minds of the disciples. It related, however, to the greatest person in the kingdom of heaven. From the context of Jesus' answer, the disciples were not asking about heavenly beings so much as humans who served and ministered on this earth. What kind of person was truly great in the kingdom of God?

Verse 2

As He often did, Jesus illustrated His answer. He did, placing a child in their

midst. The word Jesus uses here for a child is παιδίον (paidíon) which refers to an infant or baby of either male or female sex. This little child, being so young, was quite helpless and dependent upon its parents for support, nourishment, and protection.

Verse 3

With the infant child in their midst, Jesus answered the disciples' question about who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He told them that unless they turned and became like little children, they would not even enter the kingdom of heaven, let alone be great. Notice two important words here.

First, Jesus tells His disciples that they needed to "turn." The idea here is that a person is going in one direction, and they change direction and go in

another. Turning involves a change. What He is telling His disciples is that unless there is a change, there is no hope of even entering the kingdom of heaven. The path that we are on does not lead to heaven. We must make a course correction and reset our course. The change that must take place is a change that God makes in our lives. Everyone who enters the kingdom of heaven has experienced this change. They have turned from sin to God. They have turned from rebellion to faith. Unless we turn, we will not see the kingdom of God.

The second word Jesus uses here is the word "become." It is not enough to turn. Our lives need to be changed. The word become carries the sense of coming into existence. The idea is that something new has been born. New life has begun.

Jesus tells His disciples that unless they turn or change their course and become a new person, they have no chance of entering the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 4

It is those who humble themselves like little children, according to Jesus, who are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. What is it about an infant that makes a person great?

The little child among the disciples that day depended completely on its parents for life. One of the greatest qualities a believer can have is dependence upon God for everything. The dependent person recognizes that apart from God, they can do nothing and is driven to draw daily wisdom, direction, strength and faith from Him. The opposite of dependence is self-reliance and pride.

These qualities have no place in the kingdom of God.

Verse 5

Jesus expands His illustration of the little child by saying that whoever received "one such child" received Him. The "one such child" that Jesus refers to here is not so much the baby that had been placed in their midst but one who demonstrates the humility and dependence of such an infant.

The Lord told His disciples that whoever received such a humble believer whose heart was devoted and sold out to Him received Him. There was a special bond between Christ and those whose heart, mind and will were in tune with His. These individuals share the spirit of Christ. They had the mind of Christ. They were one with Him.

Verse 6

Jesus issued a warning here to anyone breaking the fellowship He enjoyed with those who were like little children. He tells them that if they caused them to sin and break fellowship with Him, it would be better for a millstone to be fastened to their neck and they be thrown into the sea and drowned.

What we need to see here is the incredible intimacy and jealousy Jesus has for His children. This is especially true for those whose heart is in tune with His. He jealously guards this fellowship and warns anyone who would dare break that fellowship with His child that there would be serious consequences.

Verse 7

Jesus begins this verse with the word “woe.” Woe denotes the presence of misery, disaster or calamity. In this case, misery is found in temptations to sin. These temptations trap many in their grip and bring great agony upon the world.

The word Jesus uses here for temptations is σκάνδαλον (skándalon). It refers to the trigger on a trap. The bait is placed on this trigger, and when an animal touches it, it springs shut on them, entrapping them and causing great agony.

Jesus tells us that temptations must come. He does not explain what He means by this here. Realize, however, that since the entrance of sin into the world, there is a temptation to rebel against God and His purpose. Satan will do his utmost to destroy the work of God. Our sinful flesh longs to satisfy its

evil desires. All who live in this world must beware of these traps set for us.

Notice the words of Jesus here: "Woe to the one by whom the temptation comes." In other words, great agony is coming for those who set these traps. Those who cause a believer to fall will be severely judged. Our words and examples can discourage young believers in their faith. Our inaction can also encourage them to wander. Jesus calls us to be an example of godliness. He warns anyone who would be the source of temptation for another that there is a great judgment to come.

Verse 8

Notice how serious Jesus is about temptations and sin. He told His listeners that if their hand or foot caused them to sin, they would be better to cut it off and throw it away

than suffer the eternal flames of hell. Jesus is not advocating the mutilation of one's body here. Understand that if we cut off our right hand, our left will find a way to sin. Cutting off body parts will not change our hearts.

What Jesus is telling us, however, is that we are to be radical when it comes to sin and temptation. Sin is our great enemy. It separates us from God and His purpose. It has been the cause of great evil and suffering in this world. It is not something we can afford to take lightly. We must do all we can to defeat sin and temptation.

Our Lord tells us that it would be preferable to have no hands or feet and suffer the consequences of this for a lifetime than to be overcome by sin and thrown into hell for eternity.

Verse 9

Jesus repeats the same thought as in verse 8 but uses a different body part. He tells His listeners that if their eye causes them to sin, they would be better to tear it out and suffer a lifetime of blindness rather than be thrown into hell fire.

Understand that Jesus is not advocating the mutilation of the body here. He is simply telling us that we need to be radical regarding sin. Sin has been the cause of so much pain, death, cruelty and injustice on this earth. It has separated God from His creation. It will bring eternal judgement and suffering to all overcome by it. Sin is not something we can afford to take lightly. We must deal with it seriously.

Verse 10

As chapter 18 opens, Jesus placed a little child in their midst and told His

disciples that unless they became like this little child, they could not enter the kingdom of God. He continues here with the words: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones."

The word despise καταφρονέω (kataphronéō) is derived from the words katá, meaning against, and phronéō meaning to think. Together they convey the idea of thinking evil of someone or thinking lightly of them.

The little ones to whom Jesus refers here are those who, like a little child, have humbled themselves before Him and walk in dependence upon Him for all things. Jesus calls us to respect His children, for they belong to Him.

Our Lord goes on to say that their angels always see the face of the Father in heaven. There are a couple of details I would like to examine here.

First, notice the words “their angels.” Jesus seems to be telling us that angels have been given to minister to His children. This was also the understanding of the writer to the Hebrews when he said:

13 And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? – Heb 1:13-14

Second, note that Jesus tells us here that these angels, assigned to protect His children, “always” see the Father’s face. In other words, they stand before Him regularly. The Father, before whom these angels stand, will certainly deal with anyone who despises His

children. He will dispatch His angels to address this matter.

Verse 11

This verse is not included in many ancient manuscripts. The truth it proclaims, however, is beyond dispute. The Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, came to save those lost in sin. The little children of whom Jesus speaks in verse 10 were saved and pardoned of their sin and belonged now to Him.

Verse 12

Jesus compares the little ones he spoke about in verse 10 to sheep in a shepherd's fold. He asks a question here about these sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains

and go in search of the one that went astray?

If one of the one hundred sheep went astray, what would a good shepherd do? Would he say: "I have ninety-nine more in my fold, so I am not going to worry about just one sheep. It is not worth the hassle of going out looking for it." Of course not.

A good shepherd values every sheep. Shepherds will risk their lives to defend even one of their flock. They will spare no effort or pain to rescue even a single sheep from danger.

Verse 13

Jesus reminds His listeners that the good shepherd would look for that lost sheep until he found it. When he discovered that sheep, his heart would be overjoyed, and he would rejoice

over it more than over the ninety-nine who were safe and secure in the fold.

The cause of this rejoicing is that this sheep has been restored. The shepherd's heart broke at the thought of his animal suffering alone and dying or at risk. Knowing that the sheep was now safe, brought floods of joy to the heart of the good shepherd.

Verse 14

Our Lord tells us that the heart of the Father in heaven is like that of the good shepherd. He is unwilling that even one of His "little ones" (verse 10) perish. He will spare no effort to care for those who wander. He will minister to those who have fallen prey to the enemy.

What comfort should this bring our hearts as we consider loved ones who have wandered from the fold? How it

ought to bring us to our knees in prayer for the salvation and rescuing of these little ones from the jaws of the enemy. Understanding the heart of God for His little ones should motivate us to care for them as well. By reaching out to these lost sheep, we minister to the heart of God.

Verse 15

No one goes through life without experiencing hurt in one form or another. Often that hurt comes from a brother or sister. Jesus, understanding human nature, shows us what we are to do when a brother or sister sins against us.

The first step in dealing with sin against ourselves is to go to the brother or sister and speak to them about it. This is to be done before anything else.

All too often, this is not our first step in problem resolution. We speak to other people about the matter. Or we may refuse to go to our brother and let the wound fester in our minds and make us bitter and angry.

Jesus tells us that we must speak to our brother or sister and let them know what they did. Notice that we are to do this "between you and him alone." No one else is to know. We are not to spread the news of his sin to anyone. This is a matter between us and must initially stay between us. This protects the reputation of our brother or sister who has sinned and shows our respect for them.

If our brother or sister accepts what we have to say and repents of sin, then the matter need not go any further. It is resolved between us and fellowship is restored, and no damage has been done to their reputation.

Verse 16

Not every brother or sister will receive our rebuke. Some will, out of pride, dig in and defend their actions. If this is the case, Jesus shows us the second step.

If our brother or sister does not listen to us and our rebuke, we are to take one or two other people with us and return to them. Notice that these individuals who accompany us are witnesses.

Understand here that these witnesses are impartial judges between the two parties. They may find that the brother who has offended us is proud and refuses to repent of sin. On the other hand, they may find that I have overreacted and misinterpreted his actions. Their presence gives another perspective, confirms or disproves that a sin has been committed and adds

weight to the matter. It also allows the witnesses to see the situation for themselves. No final judgment is made until there are witnesses to the sin.

Verse 17

If the one who has sinned against us refuses to listen to the witnesses we bring, the matter must be taken to the next step. This next step is to get the church involved.

The reason the church must get involved in this matter is that it will have an impact on the unity and fruitfulness of the church as a whole. Where sin and division exist, the church's work is impeded, and its testimony is weakened.

If the brother who has sinned against you still refuses to listen to the church and correct his ways, Jesus tells us he

should be treated as a Gentile and tax collector.

Consider the phrase, "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." How are we to understand this phrase? Of course, Gentiles and tax collectors were shunned by the Jews. Remember, however, that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. He would send His apostles to the Gentiles to bring them into the kingdom.

When Jesus tells us here that we are to treat the unrepentant sinner as a Gentile or tax collector, He shows us that when a church member refuses to repent of sin, there is reason to question whether that person is a believer. Repentance is a necessary step toward salvation. Anyone who willingly chooses to live in sin, despite the reprimand of the church, does not show evidence of genuine salvation. Such a person needs to repent and

experience the salvation of Christ for the forgiveness of sin. The church was not just to shun this individual but seek to win him to Christ so that he could experience genuine fellowship with Him and His children.

Verse 18

If these proper steps are taken to resolve matters between brothers and sisters in the church, Jesus assures us that we are working in accord with heaven and under its authority.

We should not see this statement to mean that God will agree to whatever we decide in this matter, but rather that what we have decreed has already been determined in heaven. God has judged the unrepentant sinner, and we, as a church, confirm that judgment. We bind what has been bound in heaven. We release what God has already

released in heaven. We are the instruments of God's judgement in this sinner's life.

Verse 19

It is in the context of addressing sin between brothers that Jesus makes the statement that if two people agree on anything, they ask the Father in heaven would do it for them. Let's break this statement down to examine its parts.

Notice that the verse begins with the word "again." The implication is that Jesus has already spoken about this matter, and He is repeating it here. In verse 18, the Lord tells His listeners that whatever they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever they loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. It appears that Jesus is expanding on this here in verse 19. This ties the verse, therefore, to the

context of dealing with a brother who sins against us and how the church is to address this.

Next, Jesus speaks about two individuals agreeing in the phrase, "If two of you agree." In using the word "you," Jesus refers to a particular group. In verse 16, Jesus tells us that if the individual who was sinned against could not reach an agreement with his brother, he was to bring two or three witnesses. Are these the two individuals the Lord speaks about here? Is He calling these two witnesses to agree in this matter related to the sin against a brother? The context refers to how a church deals with internal conflict. At the very least, Jesus is speaking to believers here and possibly more specifically to the witnesses called to examine a case between two brothers.

Notice next the words, "agree on earth." Once again, we see the connection with what Jesus has been

teaching in verse 18, where He uses the same words:

18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. – Mt 18:18

Jesus tells the church and the two or three witnesses that what they bind “on earth” would be bound in heaven, and what they loosed “on earth” would be loosed in heaven. Could it be that by repeating the words “on earth,” Jesus is expanding on what He has been teaching about the discipline of a brother who had sinned?

Jesus speaks about two individuals agreeing on earth about “anything they ask.” This phrase can be difficult to understand. Many believers interpret this to mean that if I can find someone

to agree with me, I can have anything I want. Let's consider this for a moment.

Why does Jesus speak here about two individuals agreeing? Once again, the context is helpful. Jesus talks here about a brother who cannot resolve a matter with another person. He, therefore, invites two witnesses to join him. These witnesses question both parties to get a better understanding of the situation. Their presence confirms or disproves the claims of the offended brother.

How easy it is for us to ask God for things that are not for our good or the benefit of our brothers and sisters. A second person can correct any selfishness, misunderstanding or ungodly attitude on our part. This is especially necessary when we disagree with a brother in Christ. A second person may see what we cannot see and correct errors.

Consider next the word “anything.” The word anything needs to be qualified. The fact that Jesus tells us that two people must agree is the first qualification and rules out asking whatever we want and obliging God to fulfill our every whim. We have seen that the individuals spoken of here in the word “you” were part of the church and may have even been witnesses seeking to resolve a matter between two brothers. This then places a second qualification on the word anything. That is to say, it is anything that these two believers pursuing the harmony of the body and actively seeking to deal with sin ask.

The word “anything” comes from two Greek words. The first is πᾶς (pás) which means all, the totality or the whole. The second word is πρᾶγμα (prágma) which speaks of a thing, deed or act. It is used in the New Testament

to talk about a business transaction (Romans 16:2, Acts 5:4) or even a lawsuit (1 Corinthians 6:1).

What do we see from examining the individual parts of this verse? We see that Jesus is speaking to believers who desire harmony of the body and victory over sin. He is telling us that if two of these individuals agree on a matter that they have been addressing for the harmony and godliness of the church, they will have the blessing of God on their effort.

In this case, Jesus may be repeating what He has just said about the witnesses binding and loosing what was in the heart of God on earth.

Verse 20

Jesus concludes His discussion about dealing with sin in the church with the

words:

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Many people interpret this to mean that if two or three people gather in the name of the Lord, He promises to be with them. This is certainly true, but realize that the presence of God is not limited to two or three. He promises to be with the one person who stands alone as well.

The phrase "two or three" may refer to the witnesses brought to resolve a conflict between brothers. In other words, when these two or three witnesses gather in the name of Jesus Christ to address a matter of sin in the church, the Lord Jesus stands with them, and they go in His authority.

Verse 21

Matthew has just recorded the teaching of Jesus regarding how to deal with a brother who has sinned against us. It is in this context that Peter has a further question to ask the Lord.

"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus had just instructed His disciples on what to do when a brother refused to repent. Peter's question seems to be related to a brother who does repent but continues to sin against him. At what point do we stop forgiving such a brother?

Notice that Peter offers a suggestion here. Should we forgive a brother "as many as seven times?" These words indicate that, for Peter, this was more than enough times to forgive.

Verse 22

Jesus' response to Peter is to forgive a brother who sinned against him not seven times but seventy-seven times (ESV). Other translations read "seventy times seven" (KJV) or 490 times. The differences depend on how the Greek words are translated here.

What is clear is that Jesus does not intend the number to indicate how many times we should forgive but rather a declaration that we should always forgive. Our hearts should always be willing to forgive, realizing that as often as we come to God, He is willing to forgive us.

Verse 23

To illustrate His point, the Lord Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king settling His accounts with his

servants. In making this comparison, the Lord Jesus shows us some of the key principles of this kingdom. Notice here in this illustration of a king settling his accounts the principle of justice. In the kingdom of heaven, every debt and obligation must be paid. As we enter the kingdom of heaven, in particular, the debt and obligation of sin must be addressed. We must be right with the King to be in His kingdom.

Verse 24

Notice here that each servant is issued into the presence of the king. Each one stood before the king with a debt owed. Not one of us stands before the king free of debt. Each one of us has a deficit in our account before him. Not one of us is without guilt and sin.

Notice also that Jesus tells us that this particular individual brought to stand

before the king owed him ten thousand talents. The English Standard Version of the Bible has a note attached to this verse that reads:

A talent was a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a laborer.

Jesus illustrates an amount beyond any possibility of paying for the average labourer. This labourer was so much in debt that he would never be able to pay what he owed to the king.

Jesus tells us that those who belong to this kingdom stand before the Father with a debt of sin and obligation they could never afford to pay. There is no exception; everyone stands before the king, having fallen short of God's standard and unworthy of entering the king's presence.

Verse 25

The principle of justice, rooted firmly in the kingdom of heaven, demanded that the man's debt be settled in full. In this case, the sentence was that he, his wife, his children and everything he owned were to be sold to pay what was owed. In other words, this man would lose everything. Such was his debt.

The king of that kingdom could not be faulted for demanding payment of what he was owed. Such was the demand of justice.

Verse 26

We come now to the second great principle of the kingdom of heaven -the principle of honest confession and recognition of guilt. This principle is so important that no one can enter the

kingdom of heaven unless they demonstrate this quality.

Notice what takes place here. The servant does not dispute his debt. He knew that he was guilty before the king. That moment before the king, he falls on his knees, confessing that his debt was so great that he owed his very life to his master.

This brings us to the third great principle of the kingdom of heaven – repentance. Notice that the servant not only recognized his guilt before the master but implored him to have patience with him, and he would pay for everything he owed. Repentance is a commitment to make things right.

We are not told why the servant was so in debt to his master. He does not offer the king any excuses for his debt. He confesses his sin and determines to make this matter right. Confession is a

recognition and acceptance of guilt. Repentance is assuming the responsibility to make it right.

Verse 27

Note here the kingdom principle of mercy and forgiveness. The king, seeing the genuine confession and repentance of the servant, took pity on him and determined to release him from his debt. What justice demanded, mercy pardoned. The great burden was lifted, and the man was free from the mortal burden of his guilt and shame.

No one who belongs to the kingdom of heaven has failed to experience this mercy. It is only by means of that grace that we have been granted pardon and entrance into the presence of the King.

Verse 28

See next the kingdom principles of holiness and godliness. They who are holy and godly take on the character of their Lord. In this case, however, the servant fell short and did not do to his fellow human being what was done to him.

Jesus tells his disciples how this man, who had been forgiven a much larger debt, seized his fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii and demanded he pays what he owed him. A note in the English Standard Version of the Bible says this about a denarius:

A denarius was a day's wage for a labourer.

This means that this servant owed him for one hundred days of work.

Note how this forgiven servant treated the man who owed him the equivalent of one hundred days of labour. Verse 28

tells us that he “seized” him and began to “choke him.” He violently demanded payment, threatening serious consequences if his fellow servant did not pay him everything he owed.

We must see what is happening here in the context of Peter’s question about how many times I should forgive my brother. Jesus shows Peter that God had forgiven him much more than he would ever have to forgive a brother or sister.

Verse 29

Just as the forgiven servant had done before the king, the man who owed one hundred denarii fell and pleaded with his benefactor to be patient until he could pay his debt. We who have been forgiven will find ourselves needing to forgive. We who have been the beneficiaries of divine mercy will be

called upon to show compassion to those who have offended us.

Verse 30

The response of the forgiven servant is unlike that of the king toward him. Jesus tells us that he, who had received such abundant mercy from his master, refused to allow such compassion to his debtor. He demanded that the man who owed him be put in prison until the debt was paid in full.

It is easy to forget the great debt from which we have been pardoned. How easy it is for us to demand our rights. We who have been forgiven have not always forgiven. We who have received such mercy have not been patient with those who have offended us.

Verse 31

Note here how this matter affected the man's fellow servants. This harshness distressed them so much that they reported it to the master.

The hypocrisy and ungodliness of our actions will distress our fellow servants. The refusal to pardon a brother caused turmoil and division among the servants. It was a great barrier to unity. This ungodliness brought shame and guilt to their family and was an ugly stain in their midst. Jesus' illustration causes us to wonder if we have ever brought such shame into our fellowship through our actions or attitudes.

Verse 32

Notice the response of the master to the distress of his servants. He summoned the servant he had forgiven and rebuked him for his lack of compassion and hypocrisy. He

reminded him of how much he had been forgiven and brought to his attention how he had pleaded with him to be patient in paying his debt.

The master calls his servant wicked because of how he treats his debtor. Understand that this man's request was just. He was owed the equivalent of one hundred days' wages. What made his demand for payment wicked, however, was how he had been pardoned for so much more but chose to oppress his brother for so much less.

There is a time when demanding what is legally ours becomes a sin. That is when what we require is much more than we deserve. In this case, he, who was forgiven so much, had no right to demand so little from his brother.

Verse 33

Jesus reminds us that the one who had received such abundant mercy was required to show that same mercy on his brother and sister. It is the height of hypocrisy and injustice not to treat others as God has treated us. Shall we show less compassion to our brothers and sisters than God has revealed to us? Shall we refuse to pardon others when we have been so abundantly pardoned? We who have received are obligated to give. We who have been forgiven must learn to forgive.

Verse 34

Note how the master, who had forgiven this servant of such a huge debt, was angry when he learned that he did not demonstrate the same mercy to his brother. As a result, he revoked his order of pardon and demanded he be imprisoned until his debt was paid in full.

Our unwillingness to pardon and offer the same forgiveness and patience we have received to others angers the Lord God. His mercy places us under an obligation. In the case of Peter's question about how often he was to forgive his brother, Jesus responds, "As often as God forgives you." As long as you are forgiven, you must forgive. As long as you have received mercy, you must demonstrate that same kindness to others. To do any less is to anger the Lord and place ourselves under His judgment.

Verse 35

Jesus concludes this illustration with these powerful words:

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

We cannot expect to be forgiven if we refuse to forgive our brother or sister. It is a grave sin to receive from God what we are unwilling to offer to others. We must always treat others as God has treated us.

Note here that this forgiveness is to be offered with sincerity "from the heart."

MATTHEW 19

Verse 1

Jesus' ministry brought Him to many different regions of Israel. Matthew tells us that He left the region of Galilee and went to Judea beyond the Jordan River. What the inhabitants of Galilee did not know was that Jesus would never return to them. Instead, He made His way nearer and nearer to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified.

Verse 2

Often as Jesus travelled, large crowds accompanied Him. Matthew tells us that the people in that crowd were needy,

and Jesus healed them as He journeyed to Judea. He has no rest from ministry as He made this trip. Remember here that our Lord grew weary just like us. We can only imagine how that crowd wore out His physical and mental resources.

Verse 3

Among those who followed Jesus were some Pharisees. They likely accompanied the crowd with a critical attitude, seeking to find fault with His teaching. This is evident here in verse three.

Matthew tells us that the Pharisees came up to Jesus with a question. He is quite clear about the intentions of these Pharisees here — they wanted to test Jesus. In other words, they tried to find some fault in his doctrine so they could accuse him of false teaching.

The question the Pharisees asked related to divorce. They asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason.

The question likely comes from the law of Moses regarding divorce.

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house – Dt 24:1

The law of Moses stated that a man could divorce his wife if she “finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her.”

There was confusion among Jewish scholars over the interpretation of this

law. Two schools of thought immersed. The school of Shammai taught that “no favour” and “indecent” referred to marital unfaithfulness. They allowed divorce only for adultery.

On the other hand, the school of Hillel interpreted the phrase “she finds no favor in his eyes” and “some indecent” to refer to any reason. If a man did not like something in his wife or was offended by something she did, the school of Hillel saw this as a legitimate cause for divorce. The Pharisees seek to get Christ involved in this controversial debate to find fault with Him and His teaching.

Verse 4

Notice how Jesus responds to the theological question of the Pharisees. He brings them back to the Word of God, as found in the book of Genesis.

Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?

In bringing the Pharisees back to the book of Genesis, Jesus reveals the purpose of God for marriage and His original intention. He begins with the fact that God created human beings as male and female. In other words, they were different from each other but complimented each other. God intended that males and females work together for His purpose. Marriage was in the plan of God from the beginning of time.

Verse 5

Jesus continues with His response to the Pharisees about divorce by showing them the intention of God from the beginning. He reminds them of the

teaching of Genesis 2:24, where God revealed His purpose for a man to leave his father and mother and “hold fast” to his wife. In the eyes of God, they would become “one flesh.”

Jesus emphasizes that from the beginning, God planned that a man “hold fast” to his wife. The phrase “hold fast” in the Greek language is προσκολλάω proskolláō. It means to glue together. When used with the words “one flesh,” we have the idea of two items being so firmly glued together that they are, in essence, only one object.

Verse 6

In verse 5, Jesus stated that a husband and wife have been “glued” together as one flesh. Notice the phrase, “what therefore God has joined together.” In saying this, Jesus tells the Pharisees

that the one who has “glued” the couple together as one flesh is God.

If God has made these two people one, it was wrong to undo what God had put together. Jesus does not get into the theological debate between the different schools of thought in the day. Instead, He places the Word of God before the Pharisees and reveals God’s original intention for marriage.

Verse 7

Unsatisfied with Jesus’ response, the Pharisees asked Jesus why Moses commanded that a man give a certificate of divorce to his wife and send her away. The Pharisees refer here to the word of Deuteronomy 24, which says:

1 “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no

favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, – Dt 24:1

There is no doubt that while God intended that a man and his wife become one flesh, Moses did permit them to divorce. The Pharisees seek clarification from Jesus on this seeming contradiction.

Verse 8

Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question about why Moses permitted divorce if it was the intention of God for a couple to hold fast to each other and become one flesh. He tells them that while it was not the will of God from the beginning, Moses made an exception because of their hard hearts.

Consider what Jesus had to say about the human heart in Matthew 15:

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. – Mt 15:19

The hard human heart is capable of many evils. Among those things are adultery, immorality, slander and murder. Imagine a husband or wife trapped in a relationship with someone with such a heart. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Is it the intention of God that a wife remains in a relationship where her life is at stake? Is it God's will that a wife remains in a marriage where a husband constantly abuses her with a hard heart? The Law of Moses was not without grace. Moses saw the abuse and evil caused by one partner to another and determined that a greater sin was being committed by a

couple remaining together. He permitted divorce to release a partner from this evil to live in peace. According to Jesus, however, this was an exception to the law and was not what God intended for marriage. Nor did it give partners an excuse not to seek to work out their problems. It was an exception permitted when there was no other alternative due to the hardness of a partner's heart.

Verse 9

Notice how Jesus returns to God's original purpose for marriage in His answer to the Pharisees. He tells them that whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. The only exception to this is in the case of sexual immorality.

The word Jesus uses here for sexual immorality is the Greek word πορνεία (porneía), which refers to any sexual

sin forbidden by God and not limited to adultery. The intention of God is absolute devotion and sexual faithfulness to one's marriage partner in thought and deed.

It is the intention and will of God that husband and wife rejoice and find satisfaction in each other. Solomon expressed this in Proverbs 5 when he said:

18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? – Pr 5:18-20

The purpose of God for marriage is that husband and wife delight and fully

satisfy each other. God felt so strongly about this that He permitted divorce only when these vows were not taken seriously.

We often look at this law from the negative side. That is to say, we are not to be unfaithful to our marriage partner. This law of God was intended, however, to be an encouragement and incentive to cultivate a healthy sexual relationship in a marriage where both partners were satisfied and delighted with each other. When this is the case, the temptation to look elsewhere is removed.

Verse 10

Notice the response of the disciples to Jesus' answer.

"If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

If a man is obligated to a wife for life, would it not be better not to marry? What the disciples seem to be saying is that if a man must put up with a wife who displeases him, what kind of life would he have to live? If a wife had to stay with a husband who disrespected her, wouldn't it be better for her never to have married him in the first place?

The disciples understood that marriage would have its struggles. They had likely seen marriages that had gone bad and struggled with the idea that these partners were stuck with each other for life.

Verse 11

The disciples asked Jesus if it would be better never to have married than to be stuck with a bad marriage. Jesus responds by telling them that not

everyone can remain single. Let me make two points here.

First, Jesus is telling His disciples that God has created people who can remain single. Others, however, need a partner. This need may be sexual or emotional. Jesus recognizes these needs as being legitimate. God created marriage for the satisfaction and fulfillment of those needs.

Second, it was God's intention from the beginning that the world be populated by means of the sexual union between a husband and wife in a committed relationship. God created marriage. It is an institution into which He calls many men and women. We who have been called to it are to be faithful to that calling.

Verse 12

Jesus goes on here to describe those who have been called to singleness. He describes three types of celibates here. First, a person born to live a life of singleness. These individuals, for example, may have been born with deformities and cannot have a sexual relationship or satisfy a partner. They may not have the same need as others for a sexual or emotional connection with a partner. They may be driven by other influences in life and find maintaining a relationship with a wife and family more than they can handle or even desire. These individuals are born with different passions and desires, and marriage and family would only hinder them in their life goals and ambitions.

Second, there are those made eunuchs by men. In those days, kings would castrate servants who were in charge of their harem to avoid any temptation. At other times, men would be castrated as a punishment for crimes. Beyond this,

some accidents caused the crushing or loss of a man's sexual organs, rendering it impossible for them to be sexually active.

The third group Jesus mentions here are those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. These individuals determine to refrain from marriage to serve the Lord. They could marry and have a family, but they have chosen to deny themselves this privilege to focus on serving the kingdom of heaven.

Notice what Jesus says about this third group – "Let the one who is able to receive this receive it." This is a gift given by God to certain individuals. The gift of celibacy requires the denial of sexual desires. It will mean not having a family or the emotional support of a partner. This is not a gift that everyone can receive. Jesus challenges those

who have this calling to receive this gift for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Verse 13

It was not just adults who came to Jesus. These adults also brought their children to Him as well. They wanted the blessing of the Lord Jesus for their children. They brought them to Him so He could lay His hands on them and pray for them.

Notice the disciples' attitude toward these parents –they rebuked them. Consider this for a moment. Jesus does not seem to have any rest. Everywhere He went, thousands of people followed him, demanding that He heal them of their afflictions. There were times when Jesus ministered to these people from morning to evening. Some of those brought to Jesus were very sick and on the verge of dying.

Then these parents came wanting Jesus to pray for their perfectly healthy children. Likely in the minds of these disciples, these children were not the priority. Unfortunately, this can still be the reality in our churches today.

Verse 14

When Jesus saw the disciples rebuking parents for bringing their children, He said: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them." Jesus wanted these children to come to Him. Their lives were as important as those of the adults before Him. Notice two details here in these words of Jesus.

First, Jesus commands His disciples to let the little children come to Him. The word Jesus uses here for little children is παιδίον (paidíon) which refers to a very small child or infant. These little children were coming to Jesus for

prayer. What Jesus is saying is that we ought not to wait until our children are having problems with the world before praying for them. They must be in our prayers from their birth. We need to cry out for the blessing of Christ in their lives from the moment they enter this world.

Second, Jesus told His disciples that they were not to hinder these little children. The word "hinder" is κωλύω (kōlúō) which means to weaken, prevent, restrain or cut off. The general sense here is that the disciples were to do nothing that would prevent a child from coming to Christ. The door was always open for any child to come before Him. They were never to hinder these children in their spiritual walk. They were to live the life of Christ before them so that they would see and know Him as their Saviour.

Notice that Jesus ends the verse with the words, "For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." We need to understand that likely among the children present that day were those who would reject Christ and His purpose. Jesus is not telling us here that all children will go to heaven. Notice the words "to such." The idea here is that the kingdom of heaven belongs to individuals with the characteristics of "little children." What about little children do we need to exemplify in our lives?

Little children were helpless and needy. They needed someone to care for them. This is how it needs to be in our Christian walk. The more we mature in Christ, the more we realize our need for Him for everything. All too often, the work of the Lord is hindered by human wisdom and effort. God is not as interested in our efforts as in our dependence on Him.

Second, while a young infant is helpless, it trusts its parents. These parents will feed and provide for its every need. The child lives each day in dependence on these parents. It recognizes its need and relies completely on its providers for everything. Once again, we find in this an example for us as believers seeking to live for Christ.

The kingdom of God belongs to those who, like little children, know their needs and trust the Lord God to provide everything.

Verse 15

Jesus takes the time here to lay His hands on these children to bless them. He did this because their parents brought them to Him. There is an important point we need to make here.

There is a blessing that only comes from asking. This is what is happening here. These parents pushed through the crowd and came to Jesus with their children. They pleaded with Him to pray for and bless their infants. Jesus was only too happy to do so.

These parents set an example for us. We, too, must continually present our children to Jesus. Some parents never receive this blessing from Jesus for their children because they do not bring them to Him. There are blessings we will only receive when we ask.

Notice that after blessing these little children, Jesus left that region and moved forward in his journey toward Jerusalem.

Verse 16

The next encounter Matthew records for us with a man who came to Jesus asking Him about eternal life. Notice some important details here in his question.

First, the man called Jesus, "Teacher." Many people came to Jesus as a healer. This man recognized that He was also a spiritual teacher.

Second, the man came to Jesus for a deeper understanding of how to have eternal life. Obviously, the man had some concerns about this matter and wanted to be sure that he was not missing out on the eternal life God provided. He believed in eternal life and wanted to have this life forever in the presence of God.

Third, notice that the man wanted to know what good work he needed to do to obtain this eternal life. It was his belief that he had to pay for this life. He had not come to understand that

eternal life was a gift and not a commodity to be purchased or earned.

Verse 17

The man had asked Jesus what good work he had to do to obtain eternal life. In reality, he was asking how he could be good enough to merit eternal life or what deed would be considered good enough to give him entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

By telling the man that only one person is good, Jesus is saying that good is only in God and that only what He does is truly good. Humans cannot do absolute good, for all they do has been tainted with sin.

Jesus then goes on to tell the man that if he wanted to enter life or know the eternal life God offered, then he was to keep the commandments. In other

words, if he could keep the commandments perfectly, he could merit eternal life.

Having said this, Jesus knew that the man could not keep these commandments perfectly, for even one sin rendered him unworthy of the kingdom of God. There is no one, apart from Jesus, who could live a perfect life, so all are sinners undeserving of this life God offers.

Verse 18

Having heard Jesus' response, the man wanted a more precise answer. It seems the answer Jesus gave was insufficient. He wanted to know what commandments he should obey to enter eternal life. It appears that he did not have the assurance of his salvation. He came to Jesus seeking that assurance.

Jesus responds by giving the man a list of commandments he should obey. Here in verse eighteen, He cites four commandments:

- 1) Do not murder
- 2) Do not commit adultery
- 3) Do not steal
- 4) Do not bear false witness

Verse 19

Jesus adds another two commandments the man was to obey here:

- 5) Honour your father and mother
- 6) Love your neighbour as yourself

It is uncertain why Jesus presented these particular commandments to the man that day. There were other commandments He could have asked

him to keep, but for some reason, Jesus chose these six.

Verse 20

Once again, the man does not seem to be satisfied with Jesus' answer. In his mind, he had already kept these commandments but still had no assurance of his salvation. He pursues the matter with Jesus by asking a further question: "What do I still lack?"

Something was nagging the man's spirit that day. He sensed that he did not have this eternal life Jesus spoke about, but he could not understand why. In his mind, he had lived a good life. He had obeyed the commandments. What more did God want from him? How could he have the assurance he needed?

Verse 21

The man told Jesus that day that he had obeyed the commandments of God but still did not have an assurance of eternal life. Ultimately, this is what Jesus intended. He wanted him to see that all his efforts to do good were insufficient to merit eternal life.

Notice, however, that when the man asked Jesus what he lacked to have the assurance of eternal life, Jesus responded with the following words:

"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Observe first the phrase: "If you would be perfect." This shows us something important about the man. He attempted to be perfect. He felt he needed to get everything right and no longer sin to have eternal life. He was

doing his best to be perfect before God so that God would accept him.

Jesus meets this man where he is. Instead of telling him he could not be perfect, Christ wanted him to discover this humbling reality himself. To do that, Jesus told the man to sell everything he possessed, give it to the poor and then come and follow Him as His disciple.

Understand that Jesus is not saying that to have eternal life, we must give everything away and live in poverty. Jesus is responding to a very particular need here. This man does not have the assurance of salvation, and Jesus wants to show him what he lacked to obtain that assurance. His challenge to this man was intended to reveal what he lacked.

Verse 22

Jesus' challenge to this man to sell everything he had and give to the poor struck home. Notice two details here in his response to Jesus.

First, the young man was sorrowful. This challenge brought deep grief to the man's life. He found himself conflicted by this challenge of Jesus. Matthew tells us that the man had great possessions. He would have been quite happy to add the assurance of eternal life to his accumulated possessions. The idea of having to give up his riches to obtain eternal life, however, was too much for him to bear. We can imagine just how those words struck that man. To lose everything to have Christ was too much for him to accept.

Second, notice that Matthew tells us that the man went away. In other words, he wanted no more talk on this matter. He didn't like the answer he

received from Jesus. The Lord's challenge struck home. He loved his riches too much. He loved them more than eternal life. This was his great sin. He worshipped another god — the god of wealth and comfort. As long as he bowed the knee to this god, he could never have the assurance of his salvation. Until he was willing to sacrifice everything, he would never know this life he longed to obtain.

Verse 23

As Jesus watched that young man leave, He spoke to His disciples and told them that it was only with difficulty that a rich person could enter the kingdom of heaven.

In saying this, the Lord Jesus showed His disciples how powerful the pull of materialism and worldly riches is. The love of comfort, possessions and ease

appeals to the flesh. The enemy tempted Eve with the delightful taste of the forbidden fruit. The world will offer us everything our flesh desires, but satisfying those fleshly desires will cost us our relationship with God.

The Bible teaches that we must die to the flesh and its desires if we are to follow the Lord. That is to say, these passions must never take His place in our lives. Those who follow Christ must be willing to deny the flesh, take up their cross and follow Him. Not everyone is ready to do this. Jesus warns us here of the great appeal of riches, comfort and the satisfaction of the flesh. Many have fallen prey to these temptations and are unwilling to turn from them to follow the path of eternal life.

Verse 24

The pull of the flesh, riches, comfort and possessions is so strong Jesus told His disciples that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone caught up in the riches of this world to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Materialism has taken its toll on the Christian church. Who among us has not felt the tug of the flesh seeking satisfaction? How often has this kept us from growing spiritually? How often has ministry suffered because people were unwilling to make the sacrifices required? How many men and women have turned their back on God because they were reluctant to die to the world? We must learn to see the world and the flesh as an enemy of the kingdom of God.

Verse 25

Jesus has spoken to a rich young ruler and watched him reject eternal life for the riches of this world. He compared the salvation of the rich to a camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle. When the disciples heard Jesus tell them that it was very difficult for those who loved the riches of this world to be saved, they were "astonished."

The word "astonished" is interesting in this context. Consider the rich young ruler Jesus spoke to in the disciples' presence. I am sure the disciples noticed a couple of admirable qualities in this individual.

First, he came to Jesus seeking eternal life. He was genuinely interested in what Jesus had to say. He had been doing a lot of thinking about this and wondered what he was lacking to find this eternal life.

Second, this young man told them that he was a faithful follower of the commandments of God. In other words, he lived a good life and did what he could to obey God in everything he did.

These qualities of good living and seeking eternal life were remarkable. Maybe the disciples were impressed by this young man, his devotion to God, and his intense desire for spiritual matters. It was astonishing, therefore, that Jesus would say this about an individual who had shown so much potential.

The response of Jesus to this young man was such that it forced the disciples to ask, "Who then can be saved?" If a young man with so much desire to obtain eternal life could not be saved, the disciples did not know who could be.

Verse 26

Notice how Matthew begins this verse — “Jesus looked at them and said.” This is important. These words convey the sense that the words Jesus said were important. Jesus did not continue what He was doing and speak at the same time. He stopped momentarily and looked directly at the disciples as if to say, what I am going to say here in response to your question is important for you to understand.

The response of Jesus to the question of who can be saved is striking — “With man this is impossible.” Jesus does not limit his response to the rich here. He uses the word *ἄνθρωπος* (*ánthrōpos*), which refers to all members, male or female, of the human race.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that the human race couldn't save themselves from sin to obtain eternal life. There is nothing we can do to merit the salvation of God, for not one of us is either worthy or capable. Left to ourselves, our salvation would be impossible.

Jesus concludes His thought, however, with the words: "But with God, all things are possible." While salvation is impossible by any human effort, God can save us from sin and give us eternal life. If you want to know the salvation of God, according to Jesus, God needs to do this for you. Just as it was not in your power to be born physically, neither is it in your capacity to be born again spiritually. This is entirely a miraculous work of God.

Verse 27

When Peter heard that salvation was impossible by human effort, he responded by saying:

"See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"

Jesus had just told the rich young ruler to sell all he had, give it to the poor and follow him. When the man walked away instead, Jesus used him as an example to show how difficult it was for the rich to obtain eternal life because their possessions often take priority over God.

Peter reminds Jesus that, unlike the rich young ruler, they had left everything to follow Him. He seems to be asking the Lord what their reward would be for doing so. It is hard to know Peter's intention in asking the question. If it was impossible to be saved by human effort, what was the

benefit of leaving everything to follow after Jesus?

Verse 28

While we may question Peter's intention in asking the Lord what would be their reward for leaving everything to follow Him, the Lord takes the opportunity here to teach about rewards in heaven.

Understand here that there is a difference between salvation and rewards. The rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking eternal life. Jesus told His disciples that earning salvation by human effort was impossible. Salvation was only possible through the grace and forgiveness of God.

On the other hand, note how Jesus responded to Peter. He told Him that when He returned to sit on His "glorious throne." The disciples would

also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. There are several details we need to examine in this statement.

First, notice that Jesus speaks here about a new world. Peter, would talk about a coming day when the heavens would pass away and be dissolved:

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. – 2Pe 3:10

The apostle John prophesied of a day when there would be a new heaven and earth.

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,

and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. – Rev 21:1-2

According to Scripture, that new earth will be inhabited by those who love the Lord and are subject to His reign and authority. Jesus speaks to Peter here about this new world to come.

Second, Jesus tells the disciples that in that new world, He, as the Son of Man, would sit on His glorious throne. The picture of the Lord Jesus seated on that throne is one of authority and dominion. He will be the King of this new world. His reign will be uncontested, and He will rule in peace and righteousness.

Third, Jesus told His disciples that they would have a function to play in that new world as well. They would sit on

twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Once again, notice that the disciples would sit on twelve thrones. The idea here is that they would be given a position of authority and leadership in the new world.

Notice that the disciples would be given the authority as they sat on their thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The concept of the twelve disciples judging the twelve tribes is a difficult one to understand. Let me make a few points here as we seek to understand what our Lord says.

The Lord speaks here of the new world. This is clear by the words "in the new world." This places the fulfillment of the words of Jesus not in this world but in the next.

This seems to be emphasized because Jesus speaks of a future time when the disciples would sit on twelve thrones. The words, "You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," seem to indicate that this had not yet taken place but would at a later date.

Consider also the word "judging." Jesus tells the disciples that in the future time, they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The statement of Jesus is interesting in light of what He said in John 5:22:

22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son – Jn 5:22

All judgment belongs to the Lord Jesus. If the Father Himself does not judge, how could the disciples take on this role? To understand this, it is clear that the judgment spoken of here is not a

final judgment. Nor should we assume that the disciples will determine the eternal destiny of the twelve tribes of Israel. This belongs to Jesus Christ alone.

What we need to understand is the role of the Judge in the Bible. The judges in the Old Testament did not simply sit behind a bench and decide the punishment of those brought before their court. Judges were rulers, warriors and advisors. They acted as governors on behalf of the Lord God. It was their role to lead the people in the ways of the Lord. They were spiritual leaders tasked with the responsibility to lead God's people into the enjoyment of His purpose for their lives.

Verse 29

While Jesus has a particular role for the twelve disciples, there would be others

who followed after them who would also leave their homes, lands and families to follow Jesus. Jesus tells the disciples that anyone who willingly left these things to follow him would be rewarded a hundredfold and inherit eternal life. Let me break this down. First, there will be times when the Lord Jesus will require that we leave houses, land and family for His sake. That may be because the Lord calls these individuals to leave their homes and family to go far away lands to share the Gospel. It may be the believer is forced out of his home because their family threatens to harm them because their faith in Jesus puts them at odds with the traditions and faith of the family. Whatever the case, the believer must decide between his family, home and lands or Jesus.

Jesus tells those who decide to leave for His name's sake that they will "receive" a hundredfold for their

willingness to be faithful to His word. That one hundred-fold may not be in material wealth and prosperity. It may not come in the form of an easy life or lack of persecution. What we can be assured of, however, is that the blessing of the Lord will be shown to those who are faithful to Him. Even in hardship, persecution and trials, they will experience the abundance of the Lord's presence and blessing in their lives.

Jesus also tells the disciples that those willing to leave homes, families and lands would also inherit eternal life. The call of the Lord Jesus is extended here to us all. This world, with all its attractions, will keep us from eternal life and salvation. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves, our ambitions and our passions. He invites us to leave our nets behind and follow after Him. He wants to make us His children and give us a new life in Him. Salvation by human effort is impossible, but for

those who surrender everything and come to Him, God will forgive and give His children all the rights and privileges. The inheritance of every child of God is eternal life.

The word “inherit” is important in this context. I don’t do anything to inherit. I inherit because of who I am. I am a child. I became a child of God not because of what I did but by God’s grace. I left the world and stood naked before Him, but He accepted me, forgave me, and transformed my life. He made me His child. As His child, I inherit eternal life. We are richly blessed. We know one hundredfold blessing in this world and eternal life in the world to come.

Verse 30

Jesus concludes his teaching with the words: “But many who are first will be

last, and the last first.” Many people want to be first in this world. They want recognition, comfort, ease and everything this world provides. They gain the admiration and respect of those around them, but that will not last. The day is coming when they will stand before God. All they accumulated on this earth will mean nothing on that day. They will understand that they lived for themselves and have nothing to show for their life of ease and prosperity. If anything, they denied the Lord and were unfaithful in service. They stand condemned and judged before their Creator.

On the other hand, those who left everything to follow Him stand naked and bruised before Him after living a life of faithful service. They cared for His sheep at their own expense. They blessed His children to their hurt. They stand naked before Him, mocked and rejected by this world, but in the eyes

of God, faithful servants who will
receive His reward.

MATTHEW 20

Verse 1

Jesus has just spoken to the rich young ruler about eternal life. This led the disciples to ask: "Who then can be saved?" Our Lord moves now into a discussion about the kingdom of heaven.

Notice how the Lord compares the kingdom of heaven to a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire some workers for his vineyard. Notice a few details here.

First, the master of the house had a job to do. The harvest was ready, and he

wanted to bring those grapes in from the vine. To accomplish this task, he rose early and searched for workers. The master takes the initiative to find the labourers necessary.

Second, the master gives the task of harvesting to these hired labourers. They will be responsible to Him for the crop.

Jesus tells us that there is work to be done in the kingdom of heaven. This is especially true these days before the return of the Lord Jesus. There is a great harvest to be taken in, and you and I are His servants tasked with this responsibility. The kingdom of God here below requires hard work. The time for rest will come, but for now, there is much to do.

Verse 2

Upon finding some willing workers, the master told them he would pay them a denarius for the day's work. Each worker agreed to this amount, and so he sent them to his vineyard to work. The wages offered here were fair and the usual amount paid for a day's work.

Verse 3

After three hours of labour, the master determined that he needed more workers to bring in the harvest on time. He went out again and found men in the marketplace who had no work. These men would join those who had been hired three hours earlier.

Verse 4

The master told this second group to go to his field, and he would pay them a fair wage. There does not seem to be an agreed rate here, but the men were

only too happy to get some work so that day would not be wasted.

Verse 5

About six hours into the workday, the master felt the need to add to his labour force to complete the harvest. He went out a third time and hired more men. Another three hours later, at the ninth hour, the master of the house hired yet another group to assist those already working.

Verse 6

Eleven hours into a twelve-hour day, the master went out for the fifth time to hire the last group of men to complete the harvest. This final group would have worked briefly before the darkness set in and the day ended. Notice what the master says to these men he found at the eleventh hour:

And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'

There was a great harvest, but these men were not involved. They sat idly all day long. When the master spoke to them, however, they were more than willing to take the work he offered. All they needed to hear was the command of the master.

Verse 7

When asked why they sat all day idly, the men the master met on the eleventh hour of the day told him that they were willing to work, but no one hired them. Hearing this, the master permitted them to work in his vineyard. There is no discussion of the wage. The men were likely happy to receive anything at that point in the day. They,

too, went to the vineyard to work for what was left of the day.

Five groups of men were hired, the initial group and those employed at the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hour of the day. Each worked for the master, but not all had the same time in his service. Some worked twelve hours while the last group only had one hour to work.

Verse 8

Finally, the end of the day arrived, and the master told his foreman to pay the labourers their wages. Notice that he told his foreman to pay those who were hired last first.

The fact that the last hired were paid first is significant. The Lord Jesus wants to communicate an important message in this fact about the kingdom of God.

Verse 9

Jesus tells us that those hired at the eleventh hour received a denarius for their short work day. This amount was agreed upon by those engaged first thing in the morning.

Verse 10

When the labourers hired first thing in the morning saw that those employed at the eleventh hour received a denarius for their short day, they anticipated receiving much more. In the end, however, the foreman gave them the same wage. There was no allowance made for the number of hours served. Everyone who worked that day received the same pay.

Verse 11

Notice the response of those hired first thing in the morning to receive the same wage as those engaged the last part of the day. They grumbled at the master. In their mind, it was unfair for them to work all day and receive the same wage as those who had only laboured an hour. They believed they were being treated unfairly.

Verse 12

The labourers hired first thing in the morning reminded their master that those employed at the eleventh hour only worked for one hour while they had worked the longest and hardest. They had suffered the sun's heat throughout the day and felt they deserved more wages than those who only laboured for a single hour.

When we see someone being treated better than us, we can respond with

deep emotions. We often attribute this to a sense of justice and fairness, but it goes deeper. Ultimately it is our pride that is the issue here. We want to be treated as good or better than everyone else. When this is not the case, we become jealous and angry, feeling that people are taking advantage of us.

Verse 13

Notice the response of the master to those hired first thing in the morning.

*"Friend, I am doing you no wrong.
Did you not agree with me for a
denarius?"*

Consider this for a moment. If the master had not hired other workers at different hours, these men would have received their wages and gone home

content. They were quite happy to work for a denarius until they saw others paid the same amount for less work. The issue was not the wage the master paid but that others were getting the same salary for less work. This was the fruit of pride and jealousy in their heart.

The contract these workers agreed to was for one denarius for the day's work. The master paid these workers exactly what they agreed on for the day's wage.

Verse 14

The master does not compromise in his contract with those he hired first thing in the morning. He paid them what he owed them and sent them on their way with the words, "I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you."

Was the master at fault for paying a typical day's wage to those he hired in the morning? Was he at fault for being generous with the last worker and paying him a day's wage for less than a day's work? We must agree that the master was not at fault in either case. He paid a good salary to one and was generous to another. Nothing obliged him to be generous to everyone.

Imagine that you meet a beggar on the street. You feel compassion for him, and so you reach into your pocket and give him some money. When his friends see you have given him this money, they all come rushing to you and demand the same. When you refuse, they tell you that you are unfair and accuse you of not being compassionate. Does it negate your act of generosity when you give to one person and not another?

Notice the words of the master, “I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.” The decision to bless the last worker was a conscious choice of the master. He decided to be generous to him in particular.

The issue here is not with the master paying what he owed or even the master choosing to be generous but with the pride and jealousy of the labourers that didn’t want the last workers to receive what they did.

Verse 15

Notice how the master reminds his workers that he was allowed to do what he wanted with what belonged to him. He tells them that they are not to begrudge his generosity.

Consider this for a moment. The thief dying on the cross had lived his life

without any concern for Jesus, yet that day, moments before his death, he turned to Jesus and heard him say, "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). This man, who lived his life as a sinner receives a place beside the saint who struggled and faced persecution for his Lord year after year. Will we look down on that thief when we get to heaven, or will our fleshly pride be broken to rejoice with him in his salvation?

God chooses to use one person in very public and spectacular ways. Another believer is used in small ways. Shall we look down on the one and honour the other? Or will we rejoice in the multiple ways the grace of God is revealed?

Verse 16

Jesus tells us here that in the kingdom of God, the last will be first, and the

first will be last. Certainly, the humble will be lifted up in the kingdom of heaven. But there is something else we need to see in this phrase "The last will be first, and the first last."

The kingdom of heaven is not based on a system of merit. It doesn't function on a "first come, first served" basis. The world in which we live is very different. We earn our wages and feel we deserve them because of our hard work. We reward people who have a higher education or greater experience. We look up to and respect a person who has made a name for themselves.

The kingdom of heaven is very different. None of these things matter. Nothing is based on merit but on grace. Your years of faithful service will not guarantee more blessings. As the master of the house said: "I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you." Those who belong to the kingdom

of God do not deserve to be part of it. They are children not because they were good enough but because God, in His mercy, accepted them and made them His own. The last is as important as the first. Those who worked harder are no more deserving of God's grace than those who worked hardly at all. This concept of a grace-based kingdom is hard for those who live in a merit-based world to grasp.

Verse 17

Jesus is moving closer to the city of Jerusalem. The time of His crucifixion is approaching. Jesus needed to prepare the twelve disciples for what was ahead. It would not be easy for the disciples to understand why He had to die, but by speaking to them now, he was helping them to deal with the event when it took place.

Verse 18

Jesus speaks very plainly to the disciples here. Notice how He speaks of Himself as the Son of Man. The prophet Daniel prophesied that one like the Son of Man would be given dominion and an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14). The term Son of Man spoke of the Messiah, who would reign forever over the kingdom of God.

This Son of Man, however, would be handed over to the chief priest and scribes. The scribes were interpreters of the law. They would examine Jesus in an attempt to accuse Him of wrongdoing.

Jesus informs His disciples that these religious leaders would succeed in condemning Him to death in an act of great injustice. The Son of Man, the king of the eternal kingdom of God, would die.

We can only imagine how difficult it would have been for the disciples to hear Jesus speak of His death. In their mind, the idea was repulsive to them. How could evil triumph over the Saviour of the world? Why did Jesus have to die? These were likely questions the disciples were asking themselves.

The words Jesus spoke that day, however, would have helped the disciples deal with His death. They would hear Jesus talk about it and see how boldly and confidently He faced it. This would have enabled them to understand that all this was in the purpose of the Father for Jesus.

Verse 19

Jesus not only told His disciples that He would die but prophesied the details of

that death.

Jesus prophesied that He would be delivered over to the Gentiles. These Gentiles were Romans. Our Lord would be handed over because the Jews had no authority to pass a death sentence.

Second, Jesus predicted that these Gentiles would mock and flog Him. He would be mistreated not only by the Jews who were offended by His teaching but also by Gentiles who would make sport of Him.

Next, Jesus informs His disciples of what the ultimate sentence would be. He would be sentenced to die on a cross, the most humiliating and painful death possible.

Finally, Jesus tells His followers that He would overcome death and rise on the third day. Death would not contain Him. He would overcome its stronghold and live again.

Verse 20

It is in the context of Jesus' words about dying that the "mother of the sons of Zebedee" came to Jesus with a very particular request. Matthew 4:21 tells us who these sons were:

21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. – Mt 4:21

It is quite clear, therefore, that the woman who approached Jesus was the mother of James and John, His disciples.

Notice that she kneels before Jesus. This act of kneeling reveals how much this request meant to her.

Verse 21

Seeing the mother of James and John kneeling before Him, Jesus asked her what she wanted. Her request was quite bold. She asked that her two sons be given the privilege of sitting one at His right hand and the other at His left hand in the kingdom of God.

She requests that Jesus give James and John a place of prominence and authority in His Kingdom. These seats would place them over the other disciples in rank.

As a mother, she is seeking the very best for her sons. Her request, though bold, is not unlike many similar requests parents make on behalf of their children today.

Verse 22

Notice the response of Jesus to the mother of James and John:

"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"

What is particularly interesting here is that when Jesus asked this question, James and John responded: "We are able." This shows us that they were fully aware of their mother's request, and while she spoke to Jesus about it, it was ultimately what James and John wanted themselves.

What is particularly important here is what Jesus tells these men about the position they requested. Observe the qualification for the privilege of sitting at Jesus' right and left hand in the kingdom:

"Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"

The requirement for this position of authority and privilege was the ability to drink that cup that Jesus drank. Jesus speaks of the cup that he was to drink in Matthew 26:

27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. – Mt 26:27-28

The cup Jesus speaks about was his blood that was poured out for the forgiveness of sin. It represented the death of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that it accomplished. What Jesus is saying is that to obtain a position of authority in the kingdom of God requires the death of self. The way to greater authority passes through the gate of humility.

Some years ago now, I was asking the Lord for greater authority in my ministry. He showed me a picture of a pouch and told me it represented humility. He went on to say that all authority He gave would go into that pouch and that I could only have as much authority as my pouch of humility could handle. That picture continues to be burnt on my mind and influences my ministry.

Verse 23

Hearing the response of James and John to His question of whether they were able to drink His cup, Jesus replied: "You will drink my cup." That is to say, they would lay down their lives for Him. Jesus prophesied their death here.

Regarding the privilege of sitting on His right and left, Jesus told James and

John that those positions were not His to grant. Only the Father had this right. It is interesting to see how Jesus, though He is the king of the kingdom, must walk in submission still to the Father.

Verse 24

Understanding human nature, the response of the other ten disciples to the request of James and John was fairly predictable. Matthew tells us that they were indignant.

The Greek word for indignation here is ἀγανακτέω (aganaktéō). It comes from two words, ágan, meaning very much, and áchthos, referring to pain. In other words, they were very hurt by their request. I suppose they felt betrayed by James and John, who, by this act, seemed to break the bond of harmony they had experienced to this point.

Verse 25

Noticing the dissension among His disciples, Jesus calls them together to speak about this request of James and John. By doing this, the matter is brought out in the open, where it could be resolved.

Jesus tells the disciples how Gentile rulers “lorded it over them.” The disciples understood perfectly what Jesus was saying here. They had seen how the Romans came into Jerusalem and took over. As Jews, they had no ultimate say in their affairs. Rome forced them to submit and pay taxes. The Romans imposed their laws and demanded the Jews obey. Of course, the Israelites resented Rome for this.

Verse 26

While the Gentile world ruled by “lording it over” those under them, Jesus taught that this was not the way in the kingdom of God. Those who would be great in the kingdom of God would be its most humble servants. We must understand this in the church of our day. We have all met pastors and spiritual leaders who demand obedience and respect. They want the seat of honour and demand to be served. This is the way of the world, but it is not the way of Christ. A true servant of God is humble. He feeds the sheep and cares for them at his expense. Like Jesus, he lays down his life for the sheep. His attitude is one of service. To be great in the kingdom of heaven, the true servant of God must be a humble and joyous servant of the body of Christ putting the needs of others before his own.

Verse 27

In verse 26, the Lord told His disciples that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was a servant. The word He uses here is δῖάκονος (diákonos). We get the English word deacon from this. Deacons were ministering servants tasked with serving in practical ways for the benefit of the church.

In verse 27, Jesus changes the word He uses. He told the disciples that whoever wanted to be first must be their slave. The Greek word used here is δοῦλος (doulos). The term describes a person who is bound to serve another and whose purpose in life is to accomplish the will and desire of that individual. Unlike the word δῖάκονος (diákonos), the slave is not free to make their own decision.

Jesus seems to be using the word δοῦλος (doulos) to emphasize a point. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is one who sacrifices their rights and privileges and commits

themselves to minister to the needs of the kingdom of God. To do so, they die to themselves, humble themselves, and devote their lives to ministering in the name of Christ.

Verse 28

Jesus sets Himself up as an example of a servant. Although He was the prophesied “Son of Man,” He came to this earth to serve. He healed the sick, cared for the oppressed and faithfully taught the truth of God. He would even lay down His life as a ransom for the payment of our sins. Notice a couple of details here.

First, as the Son of Man, Jesus demonstrates how we are to live. If there was anyone who could have demanded respect and service, it was Jesus. But He did not live His life as a king. Instead, He mingled with the

people. He ate with outcasts and cared for the sick. He did not live in a castle or dine at fancy restaurants. He lived a simple life and gave what he had to serve humanity. He was misunderstood and disrespected. His goal in life was not to be served but to serve –not to receive but to give.

Second, Jesus told His disciples that He came to this world to give His life as a ransom for many. He came to die. He willingly chose this task. He did so because we were enslaved to sin. As long as we were in its grips, there was no hope of eternal life. The penalty for our sin was death. Jesus paid that price and set us legally free from our debt.

Finally, notice the word “many.” Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many. The idea here is that not everyone would be pardoned. Many would turn their backs on this payment. But, as John tells us:

*12 But to all who did receive him,
who believed in his name, he gave
the right to become children of
God, – Jn 1:12*

Verse 29

Jesus and His disciples continue their journey toward Jerusalem. We find them here in Jericho, about forty kilometres from Jerusalem (about 25 miles).

Notice that even as Jesus heads toward where He was to be crucified, He continues ministering to the crowds. Matthew tells us that “a great crowd followed Him.”

If you knew that you were about to die a violent death, what would be your response? Many of us would likely pull aside from people and feel the agony of what was ahead. We might even fight

or become bitter with God for allowing this to happen. Notice here that Jesus heads straight toward the purpose of God. As He does, He continues to use every moment to His glory. The crowd followed Him, and He ministered to them all the way to His death.

Verse 30

In the region of Jericho, Jesus encountered two blind men sitting by the roadside. These men heard that Jesus was passing by and cried out to Him: "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Notice first that they called Him Lord. They saw Him as a man worthy of respect. There is also a hint here that they saw Him as the Messiah who was to come.

Second, the blind men addressed Jesus as the “Son of David.” This was certainly a reference to His lineage, but it was much more than this. The Messiah was to come from the line of David. The blind men see Jesus as the Anointed One who was prophesied by the prophets of old.

Finally, the blind men asked Jesus, the Son of David and prophesied Messiah to have mercy on them. There was a great crowd following Jesus that day. There were likely also many needs present among them. These men, however, do not hesitate to bring their request to Jesus. Listen to the words of the apostle James in this regard:

2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. – Jas 4:2

James told his readers they did not have because they did not ask. It is all too easy for us to sit on the roadside feeling like Jesus has better things to do than look to us. There are so many people with needs. Why should He be concerned about us? These men, however, dare to ask the Messiah for mercy. They dare to ask for what seemed impossible from a human perspective.

Verse 31

Notice the response of the crowd toward these two blind men.

The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent. These men were making quite a commotion as Jesus passed by. This irritated the crowd, who did not seem to have compassion for two blind men sitting on the roadside. These men, because they could not see, were

likely reduced to begging to survive. Many people would have turned their heads and passed them by.

Matthew tells us that the crowd rebuked them. They rebuked these men because they saw what they did as a nuisance. They felt they were out of place as poor blind beggars crying out and interrupting the Lord Jesus.

The blind men, however, refused to listen to the crowd. When they were rebuked, they cried out even more. They were not interested in what the people had to say to them; they wanted to hear from the Lord Himself.

Verse 32

Hearing their insistent cries, Jesus stopped and spoke to them directly. These words would have silenced the crowd that day. Instead, all ears would

be tuned to this interaction between Jesus and the blind men.

Jesus asked the men what they wanted Him to do for them. It was clear that these men were blind. By asking this question, Jesus is forcing them to be very specific about what they were asking. He was also testing their faith. As a great crowd stood before them, Jesus asked them to confess their need and declare their faith in Him to heal.

The verse challenges us to be clear and honest before the Lord. There are many blessings the Lord wants to give, but we are unwilling to ask. The ministry the Lord has given us has often been hindered because we have not been willing to go against the crowd and ask God to pour out the blessing he has deposited in our name.

Verse 33

That day before the large crowd, the blind men declared their need. They needed their eyes opened. "Lord, let our eyes be opened," they responded. These words reflect their understanding. They believed that all Jesus needed to do was to give permission for their healing to take place. They were being held in darkness. The gates of light were standing at attention, waiting for His command. With a word from the Lord of lords, these gates would open wide and flood these men with light and sight. All Jesus needed to do was to permit it to happen.

Verse 34

Jesus pitied these men. Walking over to them, He touched their eyes. That touch was sufficient to release the darkness. Their blindness fled, and the men recovered their sight.

The power of God was revealed that day in the lives of these two blind men. The crowd saw sight being restored and darkness fleeing at the touch of Jesus.

The crowd also saw the compassion of Jesus on two men they would not have thought twice about. The people present that day rebuked these men. They saw them as a nuisance, unworthy of the Lord's attention. Jesus chastised the crowd by this decision to listen to and heal these unworthy blind beggars on the side of the road.

Notice the response of the blind men to their healing. They followed Jesus. They joined the very crowd who rebuked and looked down on them. Of course, their attention was not on the people but on Jesus and hearing what He had to say. It is hard to know what the response of the crowd was to their

presence among them that day. They certainly would have been rebuked by Jesus for their lack of compassion.

MATTHEW 21

Verse 1

From Jericho (Matthew 20:29), Jesus and His disciples went to Bethphage. Bethphage was a suburb of Jerusalem. In particular, they arrived at the Mount of Olives. Jesus is now within the city limits. This was the place where He would be arrested and crucified. He does not shy away from this responsibility but faces it boldly.

Verse 2

When they arrived at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples into the village of Bethphage. He told

them that when they arrived in the village, they would find a donkey. Now while seeing a donkey was common enough, Jesus had a particular donkey in mind. The disciples would recognize this donkey in three ways. First, they would know this donkey "immediately." The idea is that they would not have to look. The donkey would be visible as soon as they entered the village. Second, the disciples would see that the donkey was tied. This would prevent her from wandering. She was at the right place and would stay there until the disciples found her. Third, the donkey had a colt with her.

The disciples were not looking for just any donkey roaming the streets. The Lord had a specific animal in mind when He sent these two men into the village. God had prepared that animal for a purpose. It was tied with a cord, so it could not move from that place until the disciples found her. Jesus told

the disciples to untie the donkey and its colt and bring them to Him.

There is some question as to why Jesus would require both the donkey and her colt. The donkey was a symbol of humility. Unlike the war horse often ridden by warriors and kings, the donkey was a common animal used for various purposes in Israel. It was also a symbol of peace. The donkey would not be ridden into battle. Instead, it carried burdens and pulled carts loaded with produce. The donkey was a very useful animal in times of peace and prosperity.

Beyond the obvious symbolism of the donkey, however, is the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9:

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and

having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. – Zec 9:9

Notice several details about the prophecy of Zechariah.

First, Zechariah speaks about the people of Jerusalem rejoicing. As we continue in this passage, we meet the inhabitants of the city greeting the Lord with great joy as he rode into the city.

Second, Zechariah prophesied that a great king would come to Jerusalem. Jesus was that great king who entered the city.

Third, this great king, according to Zechariah, would humbly ride a donkey into the city. He would not come as a great king dressed in all his fine robes, riding a great stallion. Instead, this king who entered Jerusalem came in simple dress, riding on a humble and ordinary donkey.

Fourth, notice also the reference to “a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Years before Jesus entered the city, Zechariah prophesied that this colt would come into the city with Jesus, the king. The colt and its mother would enter that city in fulfillment of the word of the Lord through Zechariah. Seeing these two animals with Jesus that day, anyone familiar with that prophecy would see and know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this was indeed the king spoken of by the prophet and Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Verse 3

Going into the village of Bethphage, finding a donkey and colt, untying it and taking it to Jesus was a strange request. In normal circumstances, if these disciples were seen doing this, they would be accused of stealing.

Notice, however, that permission to take these animals would be granted to the disciples. Jesus assured them that if anyone saw them taking these animals and asked them what they were doing when they told them that the Lord needed them, that permission would be granted. The owner would “send them at once.” The phrase “send them at once” shows that the owner had no hesitation in giving Him to the Lord.

Verse 4

Matthew is quick to point out here that what Jesus was doing with the donkey and the colt was in the purpose of God. It was in direct fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah.

Verse 5

Jesus’ actions were in direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. The

prophet foretold of a time when a king would come into the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Notice the reference to "a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."

From what Zechariah tells us, Jesus was mounted on the colt as he rode into Jerusalem. The mother likely walked beside that colt. If this is the case, this animal may have never been ridden by anyone else. This colt had been reserved for the Lord Jesus and Him alone to ride. The task for which Jesus had come to Jerusalem was for Him alone. No one else could accomplish what He was about to do.

Verse 6

Matthew tells us that the two disciples went into Bethphage and did as Jesus told them. There may have been some uncertainty as they went into the

village. But, just as Jesus told them, they found the donkey and its colt, and there was no opposition to them taking them from their owner for the Lord's purpose. The blessing of God was in their obedience. They were directed to the exact place and animal prophesied by Zechariah many years earlier.

Verse 7

The two disciples returned to Jesus with the donkey and colt. Notice that they did not have a saddle or blanket for the donkey, so they took off their cloaks and put them on the colt's back. Jesus mounted the donkey sitting on these cloaks.

The picture here is one of simplicity. There was no fancy adornment. Jesus rode into the city in his ordinary, everyday clothes. The donkey, a simple and common animal of the day, was

the transportation of choice. There was no fancy saddle or ornamented blankets for the donkey. Instead, the simple coat of a traveller was used to cover the animal so that the King of kings could ride into the city.

There are times when we miss the most significant work of God because we are looking for the spectacular. Jesus often reveals Himself in the ordinary.

Verse 8

Notice what took place as Jesus began His journey into the city. Matthew tells us that “most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road.” In our day, we roll out a red carpet for dignitaries. That carpet is a sign of honour and respect. This is what is happening here. The crowd, out of respect for Jesus, lay their cloaks on the ground for Him to ride his donkey on.

Notice that Matthew tells us that most of the people present that day chose to throw their cloaks on the ground. Those who did not lay down their cloaks, however, cut branches from trees and spread them on the road for him to ride over.

There is a deep respect for Jesus, or at least for what the people thought He had come to do. They knew Him as a miracle worker. He was a man of justice and integrity. The power of God was upon Him, and He would make a great king. How things would unfold in the days to come, however, would break all hope these people had in Him as their king.

Verse 9

We catch a glimpse of what was taking place the day that Jesus entered the

city of Jerusalem. A crowd of people went before him. There was also a crowd that followed behind Him. This was a great parade with Jesus in the middle riding a donkey.

Jesus understood that The Jewish leaders would shortly arrest Him. Many in His situation would have avoided Jerusalem altogether, or if they had to enter the city, would have done so quietly and unnoticed. This is not what is taking place here. Jesus enters very publicly. He faces His enemies boldly. He declares by this very public entrance that He had come as the King of the kingdom of God. As the crowd walks ahead and behind Him, the people shout out:

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord! Hosanna in the
highest!"*

Consider what these people are crying out as Jesus rode into the city that day.

First, the people cried out, "Hosanna." The word Hosanna means to save. That day, there was a high expectation that the Lord Jesus would save them. Their concept of salvation, however, was not what we understand it to be today. These people were looking for release from the bondage of Rome. They were looking for peace and prosperity. The salvation Jesus came to offer was different from this.

Second, the crowd declared Jesus to be the Son of David. It was understood that the Messiah would be the Son of David. He would come from the line of David. They knew Jesus was of this line and saw Him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Third, the crowd also cried out:

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

As they walked into the city that day, the people declared Jesus the one who came in the name of the Lord. That is to say, God had sent him and came to accomplish His purpose on earth as His representative.

Finally, the crowd shouted: "Hosanna in the highest!" What they appear to be saying is that salvation had come to them from the highest. God had sent down His salvation in the person of the Lord Jesus, who rode the donkey into Jerusalem.

Verse 10

The entrance of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem was not quiet. Matthew tells us that the whole city was stirred up. The word used here is σείω (seíō)

which means to agitate, shock or cause to tremble with fear. The word seí? lets us know that the city was not just curious but quite disturbed by what was happening.

This fear may have been for various reasons, but remember, we can imagine that the city would have constantly been afraid of repercussions from Rome for any sign of rebellion. The entrance of one who claimed to be a Jewish king would have certainly caught the attention of Rome.

What is clear is that the parade that travelled through the city that day caused people to ask about Jesus and His purpose in Jerusalem.

Verse 11

Jesus riding into Jerusalem caused a great stir in the city. Verse 10 tells us that the citizens wanted to know about

this parade. They asked the people who this man was coming into their city. The crowds walking ahead and behind Jesus answered these questions posed by the bystanders. They told them that it was the prophet Jesus from Nazareth.

Notice here that they call Jesus a prophet. They recognized Him as a very important prophet who came in the name of the Lord. He was a king and prophet, but they fell short of seeing Him as the Son of God.

Verse 12

One of the first places Jesus went when he entered the city of Jerusalem was the temple. It was at the time of the Jewish Passover when He arrived in the city, so the temple was quite busy then. As Jesus entered the temple, he saw merchants and money changers busy at work. Consider the context. People

came to Jerusalem from many different regions to celebrate the Passover. During those days, they would bring an offering to God. If they travelled any distance to get to Jerusalem, it was often easier to purchase a sacrificial animal when they arrived rather than bring it with them. The merchants in the temple met this need. They sold sacrificial animals to those who came from other regions.

The other problem encountered by Jews visiting from other regions was that their money needed to be exchanged into local currency to purchase the sacrifices required. The moneychangers set up tables in the temple court to exchange their money. They saw themselves as offering a service to the Jews travelling from other regions.

What struck Jesus as He entered the temple was that it was filled with

merchants, money changers, and animals. The temple courtyard was no different from a busy marketplace. This angered Jesus, so He overturned the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold pigeons. This is one of the few times we see Jesus angered in this way.

Verse 13

We discover the reason for Jesus' anger over the merchants in the temple. As He lashed out in anger that day, the Lord Jesus quoted from two Old Testament passages.

The first passage comes from Isaiah 56:

6 "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath

and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— 7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” – Isa 56:6-7

Isaiah speaks of a time when people from all nations would worship the Lord and bring their offerings to Him in His house of prayer.

What Jesus saw that day, however, was not what Isaiah spoke of but rather what Jeremiah prophesied to the people of his day:

*9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known,
10 and then come and stand*

before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. – Je 7:9-11

Instead of the temple being a place of prayer for all people, it had become a “den of robbers.” Those who gathered were like the people Jeremiah rebuked in his day. They were robbers, murderers, adulterers, and liars. They worshipped other gods and still came to the temple to bring their sacrifices to God. The merchants in the temple were not there for the Lord but for their pocketbooks. They wanted to make money. These merchants were not the only ones Jesus was angered by that day. He was angered by the hypocritical religious leaders who made a show of

religion but secretly wanted to kill the Son of God. He was angered by the people who wanted Him to deliver them from their every pain and problem but had no desire to bow down to Him as their Lord.

The picture of Jesus overthrowing the tables in the temple is one we need to examine afresh in our day. We are the temple of God today. What is in your heart? Does your heart need to be cleansed of its evil and sinfulness? Is your heart filled with the world and its philosophies? Does the love for the world push Christ aside? Would the state of our hearts anger Christ today?

Verse 14

After chasing out the money changers and merchants from the temple, Jesus received the blind and lame. These individuals came to Him “in the temple,”

and “He healed them.” Let me make a few points here.

First, notice the priority of Jesus. He chased away the money changers and merchants but received the blind and lame. The heart of Jesus was to minister to those who knew their need and sought Him for the answer.

Second, as long as the money changers and merchants were in the temple court, there was no room for true ministry. The blind and the lame would be ignored as people moved to and fro, purchasing their sacrifices and exchanging their currency.

Third, those who busied themselves with buying and selling were doing so for religious purposes. They followed the traditions of the day and obeyed the law of Moses, but their hearts were not in tune with God. Outside were men and women crying out in need.

These blind and lame were seeking an answer to their need, but the tradition of the day blinded the eyes of the religious to this.

Verse 15

Jesus chased out the merchants from the temple and received the blind and lame. He healed these individuals as they came to Him in the temple. Notice the response of the chief priest and scribes when they saw “the wonderful things that He did.”

When the chief priests and scribes saw how the crowd cried “Hosanna to the Son of David” and how Jesus had been healing the sick, they were “indignant.” The Greek word translated as indignant is ἀγανακτέω (aganaktéō). It is derived from ágan meaning, very much, and áchthos, meaning pain or grief. In other words, the chief priests and

scribes experienced much pain and distress when they heard what the people were saying about Jesus and saw how Jesus was healing them.

Verse 16

With angry hearts, the chief priests and scribes came to Jesus in the temple. What they say to Jesus indicates what was causing them such emotional distress:

“Do you hear what these are saying?”

The people cried, “Hosanna, to the Son of David.” The reference to the Son of David was an indication that they saw Jesus to be the promised Messiah. The chief priests and scribes could not accept this. According to them, by allowing people to call Him the Messiah, He was blaspheming the name of God.

Jesus does not back down. When asked if He heard the word of the people, Jesus says, "Yes." He was fully aware of what they were saying. He goes even further, however, and asks the chief priests and scribes if they had ever read Psalm 8:2:

'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise.'

By quoting Psalm 8:2 in His answer, Jesus is telling His accusers that what the people said was a fulfillment of the prophetic words of the Psalm. We can only imagine how this would have angered the chief priests and scribes even more.

Verse 17

Jesus left the temple after His interaction with the chief priests and

scribes. Matthew tells us that he left the city and stayed in Bethany. Bethany was about 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) from Jerusalem.

By distancing himself from Jerusalem, Jesus got away from the chief priest and scribes who were angry with Him. He is also far enough away from the people who saw Him as the Son of David, the Messiah. Being around them at this time would only have stirred up the religious leaders even more. Jesus is not afraid to face the wrath of the religious leaders here, but He also does not want to stir up unnecessary anger and chaos.

Verse 18

Matthew tells us that in the morning, Jesus got up and returned to the city. He was not afraid of the religious leaders who were angry with Him. The

last time He entered the city was on a donkey with a great crowd crying out, "Hosanna, to the Son of David." This entrance would be much more subtle. As He travelled the 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) into the city, Jesus began to get hungry.

Verse 19

Being hungry on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig tree and went over to it. The tree was full of leaves, but there was no fruit for Him to eat. Rebuking the tree, He cursed it, saying: "May no fruit ever come from you again!"

Matthew tells us that the fig tree immediately began to wither. Let me make a few points on this passage here.

First, we understand that the Passover was about to take place in Israel. Most

commentators agree that at this time of year, the fig trees were not ready to produce fruit. Jesus would have known this.

Second, we all understand how hunger can make us do or say things we should not. This, however, is not the case for Jesus here. He is not acting out of hunger. There is a much greater purpose in what He is doing.

Third, notice how Matthew places this story between two interactions with the religious leaders. Jesus left the temple after being challenged by the chief priest and scribes over what the people said about Him. The next morning He returned and was again confronted by these leaders.

Likely on Jesus' mind was the state of the Jewish faith in those days. He had cleansed the temple the day before, demonstrating His anger with how the

house of God had become a “den of robbers.” The chief priests and scribes had challenged Him for allowing the people to call Him the Son of David, revealing their disbelief in Him as the Messiah. The temple was no longer a “house of prayer” as the Father intended. The religious opposed the purpose of God and clung instead to their positions and a vain tradition.

Consider the picture of Jesus standing before the fig tree. The Son of Man came to find something to eat, but the tree was not ready to yield its fruit for Him. Similarly, He came to His people, who were unprepared for Him. Like the fig tree filled with leaves, the Jews of the day were filled with traditions and celebrations. At a distance, they looked healthy and full of life. But when you approached, it was easy to see there was no fruit. They had nothing to offer the Son of God. Just as He did when He cleansed the temple the day before,

Jesus responds angrily, cursing a faith that had nothing to offer a world in need.

In cursing that fig tree, Jesus symbolized the judgement of a religious establishment that had rejected Him and His purpose. He had entered that city as the Son of David, but they refused to accept Him. He came as a deliverer on a colt, the foal of a donkey, but they did not want Him. Now He would enter as their Judge. The fig tree outside the city would stand as a testimony of God to their judgment.

Verse 20

Notice the response of the disciples to the withering of the fig tree. They marvelled that it should wither so quickly. There are two points I want to make here.

First, the disciples very likely missed what Jesus was demonstrating through the cursing of the fig tree. What they saw was the power of Jesus over nature. They saw that the fig tree withered immediately when Jesus cursed it. This would have strengthened them as they entered the city where Jesus would die.

Second, the disciples were shocked at how quickly the fig tree withered. This reminds us of how dependent we are on the blessing and provision of God. What would happen to the religious leaders who rejected the Lord Jesus? When the Lord pulled back His blessing and favour, they, too, would wither like that fig tree. Consider the words of Jesus to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:

*4 But I have this against you, that
you have abandoned the love you
had at first. 5 Remember*

therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. – Rev 2:4-5

Jesus tells them that if they did not repent, He would remove their lampstand. Their light would go out. In an instant, they would be plunged into darkness.

We dare not turn our backs on the source of our life and hope. How quickly our light will go out and how fast we will wither should He remove His blessing.

Verse 21

Jesus responds to the disciples' amazement at how quickly the fig tree withered. He told them that if they had

faith and did not doubt, they could do what He did to the fig tree and more. He promised they could tell the mountain to be uprooted and cast into the sea.

Understand that the faith Jesus speaks of here is in God and not in ourselves. There is a world of difference between trusting that I have the faith to do great things and having the faith to believe that nothing is impossible with God. We have all met people who believe in their faith. They feel strong enough to do great things for God. When their prayers are answered, they are convinced it is because of their strong faith. They pat themselves on the back for being so strong. People marvel at them and admire their abilities. Yet somehow, in the process, some of the glory due to God falls on them.

True faith that moves mountains, however, is not about me. It is a faith that trusts God and His purpose. It is a faith that is silent before God and confident in His purpose. When confronted with a mountain of affliction and confusion, the faith Jesus speaks about will stand firm and secure.

There was a great mountain ahead of Jesus when He uttered these words. In just a short time, He would be arrested and convicted. Soldiers would strip Him of His clothes and beat Him. The disciples, facing this mountain, would flee and abandon Jesus. Our Lord, however, would demonstrate His faith in God with absolute confidence. He would pass through the valley of death, but in three short days, He would rise in victory. Sin and death would crumble at His feet. The evidence of Jesus' faith was not in His telling this mountain to go, but by facing it head-on with conviction in the purpose of the Father.

Those whose confidence is in their faith will surely fail in the end. Those whose trust is in the Lord, however, will be victorious.

Verse 22

The Lord concludes his discussion with the disciples about faith by telling them that if they had faith, whatever they ask in prayer, they would receive.

The key to understanding what Jesus is telling us in this verse is the word "faith." The word Jesus uses here is πιστεύω (pisteúō) which means to believe or to trust. The object of that trust is not faith but God.

We can trust our faith. That is to say, to convince ourselves that we believe enough to obtain favours from God.

The faith Jesus speaks about here is a belief and confidence in God. The focus

is not so much on how great our faith is but rather on how big the God of our faith is.

True faith is focused on God. He is the mover of mountains. The person of faith is surrendered to God and His purpose. The request of faith honours God and elevates His plans. The walk of faith is a walk of obedience. The character of faith is in tune with the fruit of God's Spirit.

The faith Jesus speaks about is not just a belief that I can have whatever I want if I believe it strongly enough.

That is a very shallow understanding of Jesus' teaching. To have faith, as Jesus speaks about here, affects every part of our lives. It implies godliness of character, thought and action. It indicates submission to God and His purpose for my life. It insinuates that I am in tune with Him and have His mind and heart. Those who have such faith

will lack nothing they need to live life to the full or to serve their Lord faithfully.

Verse 23

After cleansing the temple, Jesus returned the next day to teach the people who were gathered. Among them were the chief priests and elders, some of whom had likely confronted Him after He cleansed the temple the day before. As Jesus taught, these leaders asked Him about His authority to do what He had been doing.

Certainly, Jesus did come across as one who had authority. He had chased the merchants and money changers out of the temple and was now teaching the people gathered there that morning. The question these religious leaders asked was, who had given Him permission to act and teach this way?

Verse 24

Jesus knew the heart of the religious leaders who asked for his credentials. He understood that they would not accept His authority. He told them that if they could answer a question He asked them, He would tell them by what authority He ministered that day.

There is wisdom in the response of Jesus here. He could have cited His authority, but that would have only created more conflict. Their hearts were not ready to receive the answer He would give. We would do well to follow His example. Not all responses, even if they are true, are helpful.

Verse 25

Notice the question Jesus asked the religious leaders.

The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?"

John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world. He declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who took away sin. By asking the religious leaders to John, Jesus was underlining his prophetic message and what he claimed about Him.

The chief priests and elders heard Jesus' question and discussed it among themselves before answering. They found themselves in a predicament. If they said they believed John's baptism was from God, Jesus would ask them why they didn't believe Him, for John baptised Him and declared Him to be from God.

Verse 26

As the chief priests and elders discussed how to answer Jesus'

question about John, they understood that if they publicly declared that his baptism was not from God, they would have to deal with the anger of the crowds who held him in high regard as a prophet.

The question of Jesus trapped them. If they said John's baptism was from God, they were declaring that his prophecy about Jesus was also true –He was from God. If they denied the baptism of John and his message about Christ, they rejected the words of a man widely accepted to be a prophet of God.

Either way, they would be exposed as leaders who rejected the prophetic word of God in favour of their ideas. Jesus reveals their hypocrisy through this question.

Verse 27

The religious leaders did not answer Jesus' question lest they lose face before Him or the crowd. They respond by saying: "We do not know." Because they did not answer His question, Jesus refused to answer theirs.

The words "we do not know" are striking here for two reasons.

First, the words are not completely honest. The truth of what they thought about Jesus and His authority was quite clear. These very men secretly plotted to kill Jesus because they refused to believe what John spoke about Him.

Second, the answer, "We do not know," was an attempt to avoid facing the truth. It reflected a heart that did not want to accept the obvious. "We do not know" is the answer of one who does not want to know because there is too much at stake.

Verse 28

While Jesus does not answer the question of the chief priest and elders, He does continue to speak to them through a parable of a man with two sons.

The father of the two sons went to the first son and told him to work in the vineyard. Notice that this is not a request but a command. If the son did not go, he would disobey the father. Our service to God is not optional. Each of us has been gifted and called for a specific role. Not to serve and use our gifts is to disobey and be unfaithful to the Father.

Verse 29

Notice the response of this first son. He told the father that he would not work that day in the vineyard. As he

reflected on this, however, he realized his error, changed his mind and went to the vineyard to work. He repented and made things right.

Verse 30

The father also went to his second son and told him to work in the vineyard that day. This son was very agreeable and told the father he would go. In the end, however, this second son refused to go. His words said one thing but his actions another.

Verse 31

Having described the two sons, Jesus then asked the chief priests a second question that day:

"Which of the two did the will of his father?"

The answer to that question was quite simple. While the first son said he would not work, he repented and did work. He was the one who truly obeyed the father. Obedience is reflected not in words but in action.

Jesus then applied the truth of this parable to the leaders before Him that day. The first son was like the tax collectors and prostitutes. They openly declared their disregard for the things of God, but when they met the Saviour, their hearts were changed, and they repented and accepted him.

The second son, like the religious leaders of that day, declared his allegiance to God and their desire to serve Him, but their hearts were far from him. They were distracted by other things, and their hearts became proud and hardened to the things of God.

Looking at the chief priests, Jesus boldly told them that the tax collectors and prostitutes that repented would enter the kingdom of heaven before them.

Consider this in the context of the question Jesus had asked them about John's baptism. These men who stood before Jesus had heard the prophetic message of John but rejected it. They put up a great show of religion but rejected the Messiah and the words of His prophet. The tax collectors opened their hearts to Jesus and ate with Him. The prostitutes fell before Him and, with tearful eyes, washed His feet, drying them with their hair. The chief priests and Pharisees had all the right words, but it was the tax collectors and prostitutes that opened their hearts to Jesus.

Verse 32

Jesus told the chief priests that day that John had come as a righteous prophet declaring the truth, but they did not believe him. Jesus was not deceived by their response about John's baptism earlier in this chapter. He knew that they rejected what John had declared about Him.

On the other hand, the tax collectors and prostitutes believed the prophecy of John about Jesus and their lives were transformed as a result.

Notice how Jesus told these chief priests, that even after seeing Jesus and His ministry for themselves, their hearts remained hard and unrepentant. They saw Jesus' miracles. They heard His teaching but refused to change their minds and believe. While the tax collectors and prostitutes repented, these leaders remained in their stubborn pride. They would be condemned, but the tax collectors and

prostitutes would be forgiven. Religion alone does not make the heart right with God.

Verse 33

Jesus was likely still in the temple with the religious leaders who had asked Him by what authority He had taught and cast out the money changers. He has just told them the parable of the two sons (verses 28-32). He continues here with another parable in response to their objections.

Many commentators see here a reference to the words of Isaiah 5:2, which uses very similar terms:

2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to

yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. – Isa 5:2

Jesus speaks here about a man who plants a vineyard. Isaiah tells us that the vines planted there were “choice vines.” The vineyard was fenced around for protection, and the owner also built a tower. Isaiah calls the tower a “watchtower.” In all likelihood, it was designed to protect the vineyard from any intruder. This property was well protected.

Notice also that the owner dug a winepress. A press was installed over a large pit to collect the wine that was pressed through the winepress.

When everything was completed, the owner leased the property to a tenant and left the country. The idea is that this tenant would work the land and make a profit for him.

Verse 34

While the master was away, he still expected the tenants to work his land and produce a crop for him. When harvest season drew near, the master sent his servants to the property to collect the harvest.

Understand that this parable speaks to us. God has given us a responsibility as tenants to cultivate and use the gifts He has loaned to us. The day will come when He will demand an accounting. This is what is happening here.

Verse 35

Notice what happened when the landowner's servants visited the property to collect the harvest. Jesus told the religious leaders that the tenants beat one of them, killed another and stoned the third.

While neither the land nor the harvest was theirs, these tenants resented that the landowner demanded his right. Consider this from the perspective of our own lives. We do not belong to ourselves. Our lives on this earth have been loaned to us by God, who will demand an accounting of how we use them. How easy it is for us to believe that our lives are ours to do with as we please. It is all too easy for us to resent the requirements of God and His purpose for what He has loaned to us.

Verse 36

Seeing what they did to the first group of servants who visited the property, the master sent another group. Notice, however, that there were more servants this second time. By sending more, the master was attempting to protect his servants but still collect the harvest.

Jesus tells us that the tenants, once again, overcame this larger group and did the same as they did to the first group he had sent.

There is a battle here over the rights to the property. While everything belonged to the landowner, the tenants seemed to claim the right to keep what they had harvested. In their mind, they had worked the land, and they should benefit from the harvest.

This matter of ownership and rights is still being fought today. Do we have the right to do as we please, or should we surrender all our rights to God? Can He demand what He pleases from us, or do we have a right to resist His demands? I have found myself in this battle. How often have I claimed as mind what truly belongs to God? How often have I resisted surrendering parts of my life to Him? I, too, have been

guilty of holding back what was not mine to keep.

Verse 37

Since Adam and Eve fell into sin, there has been a battle between humanity and God. Human beings have claimed the right to do as they please. God demanded obedience and surrender.

Throughout the Old Testament, God sent His prophets and servants to speak to His people, demanding their obedience, but God's people resisted Him. They killed His prophets. They stoned those who dared to challenge their right to do as they pleased.

As we come to verse 37, notice in the parable that the master determined to send his son to deal with the dispute between himself and his tenants. The

reason is that the master believed they would respect and listen to his son.

Verse 38

Observe the response of the tenants to the presence of the master's son.

'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'

The tenants, upon seeing the son, realized that he was the heir to the land they worked. If they killed him, there would be no one to inherit the land after the death of their master. They determined, therefore, that they would kill the son to take the land for themselves.

Jesus speaks prophetically here. He compares Himself to the master's son. The religious leaders before Him that day would do what these tenants did—

they would kill Him to maintain the right to do as they pleased rather than submit to the will of God.

Verse 39

The tenants captured the son, forced him out of the vineyard and killed him. This is exactly what the religious leaders did to Jesus. They captured Him, took Him outside the city and crucified Him. In doing so, they rejected the claim of God upon their lives.

Verse 40

As Jesus concludes this parable, He asks the religious leaders a question:

"When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

In asking these religious leaders what they felt the master ought to do to these tenants, Jesus asks them to pass their own sentence. They were the ones who were going to kill the Son of God. They were the tenants in the parable. They rejected the claim of the Father on their lives. Their religion was about pleasing themselves and gaining favour in the eyes of the community. They refused to surrender to the truth of Christ and God's purpose. By killing Jesus, the Son of God, they fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus in this parable and sealed their own judgement.

Verse 41

Without hesitation or discussion among themselves, the religious leaders told Jesus that the landowner ought to put his tenants to death and hand the vineyard over to other tenants who

would surrender the crop to Him as was his right. Notice two details here.

First, the religious leaders declared the ultimate judgement on the tenants. In their mind, what they did was unforgivable. They deserved to die. They understood the seriousness of the crime in the parable but failed to see themselves as guilty of the same offence. Like the tenants in the parable, they, too, had rejected the Son. They would very soon be guilty of killing the Son of God.

Second, the religious leaders determined that because the tenants in the parable were unfaithful, the landowner should give the land to those who would surrender the harvest to Him. This is what would happen very soon. The message of the gospel Jesus came to preach would move from the Jews to the Gentiles. A kingdom of God would be leased out to Gentile

servants. The good news would be delivered to them, and they would take that message, bringing in a harvest of souls. We see the result of this even in our day as people of every nation work for the sake of God's kingdom and surrender to Him a great harvest of salvation, righteousness, and praise.

Verse 42

Having heard the response of the religious leaders to His parable, Jesus now points them to the prophecy of Psalm 118:22-23

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?

In this psalm, the psalmist speaks of how builders of a great building

rejected a stone. This stone was seen as unworthy of the building they were erecting. That stone would, however, become the cornerstone of the whole building. The cornerstone was set in place, and from it, all measurements were taken. It was the principal stone from which the entire building would be constructed.

Notice how the psalmist rejoices that this particular stone was chosen as the chief stone. The Lord Jesus is the stone from which His entire church is built. He is the one upon which the rest of the building is measured. He is the example we follow and upon whom we must build our lives.

Of particular note here is that the psalmist prophesied that this chief cornerstone would be rejected. This was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Jesus was showing the religious leaders that their rejection of Him as the chief cornerstone was prophesied by the

Psalmist and proved that He was who He said He was.

Verse 43

When they heard the parable of the vineyard, the religious leaders declared to Jesus that it should be taken from the tenants and given to those who would surrender its fruit to the landowner. Jesus now applied that judgement to the chief priests and Pharisees present that day. He informed them that the kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to a people who would produce fruit.

These leaders had not produced fruit for the kingdom of God. They encouraged a religion of tradition and law, but that did not lead the people they served to God. They plotted to kill the Son of God and rejected His teaching and ministry among them.

The work of the kingdom would be taken away from them. God's Spirit would move through others who would bring in a harvest of righteousness, salvation and praise. The fulfillment of those words of Jesus would begin through His death and the subsequent ministry of His church.

Verse 44

Not only does Jesus inform the chief priests and Pharisees that the kingdom of God would be taken from them, but He also offers them a warning because they had rejected the chief cornerstone God had put in place.

Jesus tells the religious leaders present that day that the one who fell on this stone would be broken to pieces. The one on whom that stone fell would be crushed.

The words Jesus uses here refer back to the prophecy of Isaiah, who said:

14 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” – Isa 8:14-15

Isaiah prophesied that the “Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 8:13) would be a “stone of offence” and “a rock of stumbling” for Israel. As a result, many would fall and be broken. This is what was happening with the people of Jesus’ day. Jesus was not what they expected as a Messiah. They rejected Him and sealed their judgment.

Notice in Jesus’ words that He speaks about two groups of people here. First,

some fell on this stone. These individuals were broken to pieces. The second group was those upon whom the stone fell. They were crushed. The IVP Bible Background Commentary cites an ancient rabbi who said:

"If a pot falls on a rock, woe to the pot; if a rock falls on the pot, woe to the pot—either way, woe to the pot!" (Walton, John H; Matthews, Victor H; Chavalas, Mark W. (ed): The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Comments on Matthew 21:44: Laridian: Marion, Iowa, 2000, PocketBible for Android)

We should not make too much of a distinction between these two groups of people here. Either way, the judgement of God falls on them. Suffice it to say that some people cannot accept the Christ of the Bible and stumble over His person and life, sealing their

judgement. Others care nothing about the person of Christ and live their lives with no thought of Him at all. They, too, seal their fate.

Verse 45

When Jesus had finished speaking to the chief priests and Pharisees, they understood that he had been talking directly about them. In his words, Jesus quoted from Old Testament prophecies. He had proven to them that He would be rejected as the chief cornerstone. They had even fallen into the trap of judging themselves by telling him what should happen to the tenants in the parable. Jesus had given them much to think about, but it would not change their mind. They would ignore the prophecy of John the Baptist about Jesus. They would reject the words of Isaiah and the psalmist and proceed

with their attempt to sentence Him to death.

Verse 46

The religious leaders closed their eyes and blocked their ears to the prophecies of Jesus, Isaiah, John the Baptist and the psalmist. Their hatred of Jesus was so intense that they turned their back on the Word of God and sought to arrest Him.

While they cared nothing about the prophecies cited by Jesus speaking about Him, they did fear the crowd and what they would think if they arrested Jesus in public. This crowd believed Jesus to be a prophet. The only thing that kept them from arresting Jesus right then was not the Word of God but the people's opinion.

Can you identify with this fear? The desire to please people can sometimes be stronger than our desire to please God. I have to admit that there was a time when I had to struggle with this very issue. I praise the Lord that in that particular issue, He did give me strength to overcome my fear of displeasing man. By His grace, I was given power in this issue to overcome and walk in obedience. Understand, however, that we are ultimately only accountable to God, and it is Him we must fear above all others.

MATTHEW 22

Verse 1

Matthew begins chapter 22 by telling us that Jesus again spoke to them in parables. The word “again” shows us that it was a common method that Jesus used. The attempt here is to communicate spiritual truths through examples in everyday life. This helped people remember the lessons He taught and provided an illustration that helped them grasp the spiritual lesson He was communicating.

Verse 2

Jesus begins with an explanation of what the parable is about. It is about the kingdom of heaven. When people thought of a kingdom, they thought of it as a political entity. The kingdom of heaven was very different.

Remember here that Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is here that He will be arrested and crucified. It was through His death that many would enter the kingdom of heaven. His followers, however, would be tempted to see His death as the end of any hope for a kingdom on this earth. It was important, therefore, that Jesus communicated the truth about this kingdom before He left His disciples.

As Jesus begins His parable, He introduces us to a king who is giving a wedding feast for his son.

Verse 3

In preparation for the wedding feast, the king sent his servants to call those who were invited to the feast. The idea seems to be that they were to get some confirmation about the number of people accepting the invitation. This would have helped in the preparation of the venue and the food.

Notice that while the invitation went out, the guests rejected it and chose not to attend the feast. Not everyone who receives an invitation will accept it. People decline invitations for a variety of reasons.

Remember that the parable relates to the kingdom of heaven. The invitation Jesus speaks about goes out to many people. In this case, it went out to the Jewish nation, but they rejected Him, who was the door into the kingdom.

Verse 4

When news came to the king that the guests had declined the invitation to his son's wedding banquet, he sent out other servants to encourage these guests to come. These servants told the guests that the king had prepared a great meal for them. He had slaughtered his oxen and fatted calves in preparation for this great event. Everything was ready for them to enjoy the feast. All they had to do was accept the invitation and come to the table the king had prepared.

The guests did not have to do anything to enjoy this great feast. All they had to do was accept the invitation and enjoy the meal.

As we consider this illustration of Jesus, we see how God did send His prophets to plead with His people to enter the kingdom of heaven, but they resisted. In some cases, they killed the prophets who came to them from God. They

wanted nothing to do with the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Similarly, God's call goes out today, but there are many distractions in this world. Many who receive this invitation ignore it in favour of this world and its attractions.

Verse 5

Jesus tells us that those who received the invitation to the wedding banquet paid no attention to it. Instead, they went off to care for their farms and businesses. These were the priorities of their lives. Their possessions and work ambitions were of greater significance to them than the invitation to the wedding banquet.

Verse 6

Some people invited to the banquet became violent toward those who invited them to attend. They resented that they would expect them to leave their homes and take time off their business to attend this feast. Their anger toward the king's messengers was such that they seized them, treated them with contempt and killed them.

I remember being in a coffee shop one day when a believer left, followed by an unbeliever. While outside, the believer attempted to share the gospel with the man who followed him. I was there when the unbeliever returned to the coffee shop filled with anger. "I came this close to punching him in the face, he announced," as he held up his thumb and index finger to show everyone how close he came. He resented the gospel and wanted nothing to do with it. The simple invitation of Christ drove him to anger

and almost to violence. There is something about the presentation of the gospel that infuriates some. Those who share the love of Christ and invite unbelievers into the kingdom need to be prepared to face this fury.

Verse 7

The king's response toward those who killed his servants is understandable here. He had prepared a rich banquet in honour of his son, but those invited rejected that invitation and killed the messengers who brought the invitation.

The king determined to send his troops into the city of those who murdered his servants. These troops killed the murderers and burned their city. Those invited to the banquet offended the king and his son by rejecting his offer and killing his servants.

While the invitation is free and a tremendous blessing for all who accept, there is a steep price to pay for rejecting this wonderful offer. God's judgement falls on all who reject the invitation to the banquet feast in the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 8

Notice how Jesus tells us in this parable that those invited were not worthy. The Greek word translated as worthy is ἄξιος (áxios). It refers to the act of weighing something. Imagine a set of scales with a weight on one side. An object is then placed on the other side, but it falls short. It does not have the same weight as the first object against which it is being weighed.

Those who had been invited to the wedding banquet did not measure up. They proved that they were unworthy

of being in the presence of the king and his son.

Their rejection of the invitation demonstrated the unworthiness of those invited, but this rejection was a symptom of something deeper. These individuals were more concerned for their farms and businesses than the king. They had no time for the king and his business. They showed no honour to his son.

Verse 9

Because those who were originally invited rejected the invitation, the king sent his servants to the main roads to ask as many as possible to the banquet.

When the Jewish nation rejected the Lord Jesus, the door to the kingdom of heaven was opened for the Gentiles.

They would be invited to become children of God and citizens of His kingdom.

Understand that the decision to invite the Gentiles was not an afterthought or plan B. From the book of Genesis onward, we have hints of God's plan for the world. Way before Jesus came to this earth, the Old Testament prophets foretold how Gentile nations would come to the God of Israel. They also predicted the rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish race.

It was the will of the Lord, however, that the message of the kingdom of God be offered first to His people. Jesus was born among them. The gospel was first preached to them. They were the first to be invited. Only after they had received the invitation would the Gentile world hear that call.

Verse 10

Following the king's instructions, his servants went to the streets and invited those they found to the wedding hall for a feast. Notice that Jesus tells us that the king's servants found "both bad and good."

There were no qualifications for coming to the wedding banquet. Some who finally gathered lived a good life, but there were also people whose life was questionable. The respected and the dishonourable dined side by side in honour of the king's son. What is Jesus telling us here about the kingdom of heaven?

The Jewish religious leaders of the day were very particular when it came to their associations. They condemned Jesus for eating with tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus is telling us that the kingdom of heaven is not just for the

religious but for everyone who will accept the invitation.

We must understand here that while there is no place in the kingdom of heaven for sin and rebellion, all who accept the invitation can be forgiven. Those who lived a religious life live side by side with those who committed horrible crimes. Both can know the forgiveness of God and experience full pardon. You don't have to measure up to become a citizen of this kingdom, but you must be pardoned. All who accept this offer can experience this pardon. The kingdom of heaven is comprised of forgiven sinners and forgiven saints. Both rejoice in the goodness of the banquet prepared for them in honour of the King's Son who made this all possible.

Verse 11

Jesus tells us that when the king came to see the guests, he found a man among them who was not wearing a wedding garment. Remember that the kingdom of heaven is not only a future reality, but it is also a reality in our day. The kingdom of God is His rule in the lives and hearts of His people. It is not at this point evident as a physical kingdom but a spiritual kingdom.

As the kingdom of God is being built in our day, many move among us who are not truly children of God. Some people serve God but do not know Him. The Spirit of God has not transformed some who worship in our churches. Weeds grow among the wheat as the kingdom of God is being built on this earth. There will be a day of judgment where the grain will be separated from the chaff, but for now, we should not assume that everyone who associates with us in the kingdom's work is a child of God.

Verse 12

Notice the king's words to the man not dressed in a wedding garment. 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' The fact that the king calls this man "friend" is interesting. There is gentleness in the king's relationship with this man. Remember that among those present at the banquet were both good and bad. This man's sins were no different from many in the feast. The difference was that he was not dressed in a wedding garment.

There are many in our churches who are interested in spiritual matters. We dare not confuse interest in God with salvation. The fact that this man was at the banquet indicates that he accepted an invitation to come. Not everyone who accepts a gospel invitation, however, is a child of God.

This man seems to blend in with the others at the banquet. The servants appear to take no notice of him. It is the king, however, who takes note. He alone knows those who are truly his. It is the king who makes the judgment on this man. Notice, however, that as He judges, He still calls him a friend.

When asked how he came into the wedding banquet, the man had nothing to say. From a practical perspective, he accepted the general invitation and walked in like everyone else. This, however, is not the essence of the question the king asked him that day. As this man stood before the king, his hypocrisy was exposed. He circulated among the invited but was not like them. He had not been changed. He was not wearing the garment of righteousness given to all who entered that wedding hall. He had slipped in without being changed. He knew deep down inside that he did not belong with

the children of God. He understood he was an intruder who benefitted from the feast but whose heart was not for the king's son. He had nothing to say to the king. He bows his head in shame.

Verse 13

While the king calls the man not dressed in a wedding garment a friend, he is still compelled to remove him from the banquet. He orders that he be bound "hand and foot" and be cast into "outer darkness." Note that in this place of outer darkness, there would be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There is a strange mixture of friendship and judgment in this verse. Jesus' enemies called Him the friend of sinners. He ate with sinners and allowed prostitutes to associate with Him. His friendship with sinners, however, did not mean that He would

not judge them. Jesus demonstrated the love of God to those who would be with Him forever in heaven, but also to those who were destined for eternal separation from Him in hell. He shows us that we can love those with whom we disagree. We can show compassion to those whose lifestyle is not in line with the truth of God. We do so, however, without ever compromising the truth. Loving those with whom we do not agree does not mean we accept their ways. Jesus taught the truth and demonstrated the purpose of God. He warned the sinner and called him to repent. How can the sinner ever know the love of God and the alternative to their lifestyle if we do not demonstrate this to them?

Verse 14

The Lord Jesus concludes the parable with the words: "For many are called,

but few are chosen.” Let’s take a moment to consider Jesus’ words here. Consider first the word “called.” The Greek word used here is κλητός (klētós). It speaks of an invitation. In the parable, the first group was invited to the banquet but declined the invitation. The call of the Gospel goes out to many people, but not everyone will accept that invitation. We are called to invite everyone to the wedding feast of the Son.

The second word Jesus uses here is the word “chosen.” While many are called and invited to the wedding banquet, Jesus tells us that a few are chosen. The word chosen is ἐκλεκτός (eklektós). Unlike the word called, chosen implies a more deliberate action.

In this parable of Jesus, we see that the first group invited to the banquet declined the invitation and did not attend the wedding banquet. Notice,

however, that a group was invited and clothed in wedding garments. Anyone found without these garments was bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness.

Those who are chosen are also prepared for the banquet. They are dressed in wedding garments. They are forgiven, cleansed, pardoned and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. You may be invited and never experience this transformation. Those who are chosen, however, are changed. A miracle takes place in their lives. The old street garments of the flesh are stripped away, and they are dressed in the fruit of righteousness. They become new creatures. To be chosen is to be renewed and experience a new birth. Not everyone who had been invited experiences this transformation.

Verse 15

Jesus had been teaching through a series of parables. In Matthew 21:45, we read they the Pharisees and chief priests understood that they were the subject of these words.

Notice the response of the Pharisees to this teaching. They “plotted how to entangle Him in His words.” In other words, they put their heads together to find some way of revealing some inconsistency in His teaching. They were desperate to accuse Him of false teaching so that they could discredit Him before the people and find an excuse to have Him tried for some religious or political crime.

The response of these religious leaders is purely from the flesh. When accused of hypocrisy, they react with anger and a desire to get even. They do not have the humility to consider what Jesus is saying. If I am honest with myself, I have to admit that there have been

times when accused of some inconsistency that, I desired to find the same fault in the one who challenged me rather than humbly examining myself and confessing my guilt.

Verse 16

To entangle Jesus, the Pharisees sent their disciples, along with some Herodians, to ask Him a question. The Herodians were a political party in Israel supporting the rule of Herod the Great and his family.

Notice that the Pharisees did not go to Jesus with their question. This was likely part of the ploy. They wanted the question to appear serious, so they sent their disciples and these Herodians in their place.

The Pharisees' disciples and Herodians begin with a series of compliments designed to give the impression that

they trusted Jesus and believed He would not lead them astray. Notice several details here.

First, they call Jesus a teacher. This was intended to demonstrate that they respected Him as a teacher and looked up to Him as one who would show them the truth.

Second, they tell Jesus that they knew he was true and taught the way of God truthfully. This was not what the Pharisees believed. The question was intended to entangle Jesus and find fault with Him.

Third, they tell Jesus they knew Him as one who did not care about anyone's opinion. The popular views of the day would not influence him, but He stood firm on his beliefs, even if no one supported Him. This was true about Jesus. He stood firm on the truth and was not swayed by the popular opinion

of the day. The Pharisees, however, bring this up to encourage Jesus to speak His mind on the question they will ask, even if it is not the position held by the majority.

Finally, the Herodians and Pharisees tell Jesus that they knew Him to be one who was not swayed by appearances. In other words, He would not speak one thing in front of the common people and another in front of a religious leader. He was not hypocritical. They talk here of Jesus' consistency, but their question was designed to find inconsistency.

Verse 17

The question they ask is simple enough: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

It is helpful to understand that the Pharisees and the Herodians disagreed on this matter. The Herodians were supporters of Rome and believed that taxes were necessary. The Pharisees, however, resented these taxes as well as foreign domination.

Notice how the question is worded. It begins with the words, "Is it lawful?" By using these words, the Pharisees are making this a legal matter. The law they followed, of course, was the Law of Moses. The question was this: Is it right, according to the Law of Moses, for us to pay taxes to a foreign nation?

The Pharisees believed they were under God and that the Romans had no right to be in their land. They felt they should not be paying taxes to a pagan nation, forcing them to observe a law other than the Law of Moses. Should they pay money to a godless nation

that oppressed them as the people of God?

Verse 18

We discover here that the Pharisees and Herodians did not deceive Jesus. He saw their hypocrisy and challenged them on it. Notice that Jesus was aware of their “malice.” The word used here is πονηρία (ponēría), which speaks of evil and wickedness. These men utilized deception and trickery to find a false reason to kill Him. Their hearts were filled with lies and murderous intent. Jesus accused them of hypocrisy, a charge they could not deny.

Verse 19

Despite their evil intent, Jesus was still willing to answer their question. To do so, he asked that the coin used to pay taxes be brought to Him.

The Romans controlled many different nations. Each of these countries had its currency. Imagine what it could have been like to convert these currencies into Roman money. The exchange rates and the bother of exchanging this currency were not something Rome wanted to do. Instead, they demanded that all taxes be paid in Roman money. The coins used had the image of the Roman emperor stamped on them. While local currency might be used for business, all taxes would be paid with Roman money. In this case, the money used for taxes was a denarius, equivalent to a day's work.

Verse 20

When the Pharisees and Herodians presented Jesus with a Roman denarius, He asked them whose image was inscribed on the coin. Being a

Roman coin, the head of the Roman emperor would have been stamped on each of these coins.

Verse 21

The Pharisees and Herodians told Jesus that the image of Caesar was stamped on the Roman denarius. Jesus then told them to pay Caesar what He required. In saying this, Jesus taught obedience and submission to the authorities God placed over us.

Notice also the second part of Jesus' answer. He also told them to give to God what He required of them. In other words, they were to pay their taxes without neglecting their obligation to God.

Verse 22

When the Pharisees and Herodians heard what Jesus had to say, they marvelled. His answer provided them with no means for rebuttal. There was nothing they could say against Him. There was no inconsistency found in His response. They fell short of entangling him, so they left and went home.

Jesus tells us here that we are to accept the authorities God has placed over us and be good citizens of our country and faithful servants of God.

Verse 23

On the same day Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees came to Him with a question as well. One distinction between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was the doctrine of the

resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection.

Verse 24

Notice that the Sadducees recognize Jesus as a teacher. The question they have for Jesus pertains to the doctrine of the resurrection. We can legitimately ask ourselves why these Sadducees would ask a question about the resurrection if they didn't believe in it. The answer seems to lie in that, like the Pharisees and Herodians, they were trying to trap Jesus.

The Sadducees present a case to Jesus for resolution. They begin with the Law of Moses. Moses stated that if a man died without having children to carry on his name, his brother was to marry his widow, care for her, and provide her with offspring to carry on his late

brother's name. We read this law
in Deuteronomy 25:5:

5 "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. – Dt 25:5

Verse 25

The case the Sadducees presented to Jesus was designed, in their mind, to demonstrate the confusion there would be if the doctrine of the resurrection were true. The Sadducees tell Jesus of a man who had seven brothers. He died without giving his wife a child to continue his line. According to the Law of Moses, the first brother married the widow and tried to give her a son to

carry on his late brother's name. He was unable to do so, however, before he also died.

Verse 26

When the second brother died, the responsibility of providing offspring to the eldest brother fell to the next brother in line. In this case, he, too, could not give her a child. This continued through all the brothers, but all of them died without providing offspring to carry on the name of the eldest. The idea is that this woman had been married to seven brothers.

Verse 27

After having married all seven brothers, the woman died without having borne offspring for any of them.

Verse 28

After presenting the case to Jesus, the Sadducees now ask Him their question:

"In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

In the mind of the Sadducees, this scenario presented a real problem. Whose wife would this woman be in the kingdom of God? Would she have seven husbands? How would these seven husbands live together with a single wife? For the Sadducees, the doctrine of the resurrection created innumerable problems and confusion.

Verse 29

Jesus listened to their question and responded: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus shows the

Sadducees that they failed to answer this question for two reasons.

First, they did not know the Scriptures. They were trying to find an answer to this problem by relying on their human reason, but they did not seek the solution in the Scriptures. This is not a new problem. Too many people resort to human logic to answer spiritual questions that defy human reason.

Several years ago, I talked with a man about the doctrine of the Trinity. He told me that he could not believe this because it did not make any sense. How could three persons be one? I remember my response. I told him how thankful I was that there were things about God I could not understand. If I could understand everything about God, He would be no bigger than my mind. I told him that I needed a God that was bigger than me. I have come to understand that human reason is not

the measure of all truth. My authority is found in the Scriptures.

The point Jesus makes is vital. There is a difference between human reason and faith. Faith trusts what the Scriptures say, even when it defies human logic. Faith chooses to do things God's way even when society tries to show us that what we do in their mind is foolish and outdated. Jesus accused the Sadducees of not knowing the Scriptures and relying instead on human reason.

Second, Jesus told the Sadducees that they failed to answer this question because they did not know the power of God. They approached Jesus with what they saw to be a failure on God's part. Did they believe that God had not thought this through? Did they believe God could not solve this problem in heaven?

Verse 30

Jesus answers the Sadducees' question by telling them there was no marriage in heaven. Notice how Jesus words this. First, "they neither marry." This seems to speak of the man who takes a wife. Second, "nor are they given in marriage." This refers to the woman who is given to a man in marriage.

Jesus tells us that in the resurrection, we will be like the angels. To understand what Jesus is saying here, it is helpful to look at Luke's account in Luke 20:34-36:

34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, 36 for they cannot die anymore,

*because they are equal to angels
and are sons of God, being sons of
the resurrection. – Lk 20:34-36*

In telling the Sadducees that those who are resurrected are like angels, Jesus is referring to their immortality. We will be like angels in that death will be banished from heaven.

One of the purposes of marriage is the creation of a family. Children are born to those who enter marriage, and the human race is perpetuated. God has determined that children be born in the context of a committed relationship between a husband and wife. Because we are mortal, the human race would not continue if we did not have children. Death, however, is banished from heaven. There is no need for childbirth when we live forever.

The social structures in heaven will not be like they are here below. God has

ordained marriage, as we know it, for this world only. We will not have the same need in heaven as we do here.

Verse 31

Having pointed out that there would be no marriage in heaven, Jesus pointed the Sadducees to the Scriptures and what they said about the resurrection. Jesus respected the Word of God and used it as His authority in matters of doctrine and lifestyle. He wants to show the Sadducees that what He said was taught in the Word of God. Our only true authority is the Scriptures and what they teach.

Verse 32

To prove the doctrine of the resurrection was scriptural, Jesus refers the Sadducees to Exodus 3:6, which he quotes here:

'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'

In this verse, God declared Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He uses the present tense in this declaration – “I am the God of Abraham.” When this passage was written, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died, yet God still tells His people that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jesus explains that God was not the God of the dead but of the living. By saying, “I am the God of Abraham,” God was telling His people that while Abraham’s body may have been in the ground, he was very much alive in the presence of God. He was affirming that there was life after death.

Verse 33

As Jesus answered the questions from the Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees, many people curiously listened to His answer. None of these groups were able to trap Jesus. He answered all their difficult questions with ease and wisdom. This amazed the crowd, who were “astonished at His teaching.”

Verse 34

Matthew describes a time in Jesus’ life where He was questioned by the leaders of the day. They intended to find fault with Him and bring Him to trial. The Pharisees and Herodians had attempted to trick Him with a question about paying taxes, but Jesus’ answer was wise and discerning. More recently, the Sadducees challenged Him on the doctrine of the resurrection, but they could find nothing in His answer worthy of judgment. Seeing that they could not

find fault with Him individually, the Pharisees and Sadducees determined to band together to form a united front to find something with which they could accuse Him.

These leaders are desperate to get rid of Jesus. They have no crime with which they can accuse Him, but they are determined to find something.

Verse 35

Among those banded together was a lawyer. From the context, we might assume that the Pharisees and Sadducees chose this man to act on their behalf. As a lawyer, he would have been accustomed to speaking and defending cases. Notice, however, that he was not an honest lawyer. Matthew clarifies in the verse that he asked Jesus a question “to test Him.” In other words, it was his intention as a lawyer

to trick Jesus into saying something they could use to accuse Him.

Verse 36

The question the lawyer asked was about which commandment of Jesus was the greatest. The question was designed to start a debate. If Jesus said one commandment, they could point to other equally important commandments. Of course, they would use this time to make Jesus look bad before the people and accuse Him of inconsistency. You can be sure that they would twist what Jesus said that day in an attempt to accuse Him of error.

Verse 37

The answer Jesus gave was not what His opponents expected. He told them they were to love the Lord their God

with all their heart, soul and mind. If Jesus had told them that not murdering was the greatest commandment, they could have accused Him of being soft on the sin of adultery. When Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5, however, His accusers were left silent. How could they argue with this answer? Jesus left them no fuel for their fire.

Verse 38

According to Jesus, loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind was the greatest and first commandment. The word “first” is important here. It is first in priority because if we love God with all our heart, soul and mind, then all the other commandments will fall into place. You may keep every other commandment, but if you do not love God, you are still under His judgment.

Verse 39

Jesus tells the lawyer who asked this question that the second greatest commandment was to love our neighbour as ourselves. This commandment was second in priority because, according to Jesus, no one could truly love their brother or sister until they first loved God. Being in a relationship with God changes everything. It gives us the ability to love others as God loves us. The word Jesus uses for love is ἀγαπάω (agapáo). This kind of love is not just a warm feeling toward another but a much stronger type of love demonstrated in the willingness of Jesus to die for us when we were His enemies. This kind of love is from God. If we want to demonstrate this love, we must know God and receive it from Him. It is for this reason that entering into a loving relationship with God must come first. It is in the strength of that relationship that we can love our neighbours.

Notice one final detail here. Jesus tells us that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. How do we love ourselves? We do so by caring for ourselves and our needs. When our body is hungry, we feed it. When we are in pain, we do what we can to alleviate that pain. This kind of love is active. It feels the pain of others and responds to their need.

Verse 40

According to Jesus, all the commandments of Scripture could be boiled down into two. If we love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves, everything else will fall in place.

Notice the word “depend” in this verse. The Greek word κρεμάννυμι (kremánnumi) means to hang or suspend. Imagine a person dangling

over a cliff by a rope. That rope supports their full weight. Remove that rope, and the person falls to their death. Jesus shows us how important loving God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbour as ourselves is here. These two commandments are so essential that without them, there is no hope of keeping the others.

Verse 41

Matthew does not tell us what the response of the Sadducees and Pharisees was to Jesus' answer about the greatest commandment. It was not what they had hoped, for we have no record of any rebuttal.

After answering the lawyer's question, while the Pharisees were still together, Jesus turned the tables and asked them a question.

Verse 42

Jesus asked the Pharisees two simple questions. The first related to what they thought about the Christ. The word Christ referred to the "Anointed One" God chose to be the Messiah and Saviour. The Pharisees understood that He had been promised for generations. They looked forward to His coming, but they rejected Jesus as the Christ.

The second question is more specific. Jesus asked them about the family line of the Christ. "Whose son is he?" He questioned. There was no hesitation on the part of the Pharisees. The Scriptures foretold that the Messiah would come from the line of David. The Pharisees understood this to be the teaching of their Scriptures. They all agreed on this point.

Verse 43

When the Pharisees correctly answered His question about the lineage of Christ, Jesus presented a follow-up question. The question related to David calling this son "Lord." We will consider this word more fully in verse 44. There are two details we need to see in Jesus' question.

First, the word Lord denotes respect. The one calling Christ Lord here is David. By calling the Christ Lord, David is assuming a lower position. This Son and descendant would be greater than him. In this case, we have the father bowing down with respect to the son. This was not usual. It was expected that the son bow to the father. The second point Jesus makes here is that when David called his "son" Lord, He was doing so "in the Spirit." In other words, he was being inspired by the Spirit to do so. The Spirit of God led David to bow in respect to the son He would give to him.

Verse 44

Jesus quotes a passage from Psalm 110:1 where David, inspired by the Spirit, writes.

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"

Let's take a moment to consider what Jesus is trying to convey to the Pharisees through this verse.

Note first that the word "Lord" is repeated twice in this psalm of David — "The Lord said to my Lord." In the Hebrew language, these two words are different. The first word translated as Lord is יהוָה (yehōwāh). . This refers to the God of Israel. This name was held in high regard, and Jews would not even pronounce it out of respect for God.

The second word is אָדוֹן ('ādôn) which refers to a human lord. So it could be used to speak of a slave master or a king. The words of David here could be translated as: "The Lord God of Israel said to the king." In this case, David, the psalmist, hears the call of God to rest at His right hand until He had conquered his enemies and placed them under his feet.

The next point we need to make about this verse has to do with how Jesus interpreted this verse. The context of Matthew 22:44 is Jesus' question about the Christ (Messiah). Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 because He sees it as a reference to the Messiah who was to come. This Messiah would conquer our enemies and place them under our feet. The greatest of these enemies was sin.

Jesus points the Pharisees to a verse inspired by the Spirit of God where David the king speaks about the

Messiah and calls Him Lord יהוה (yehōwāh), the name reserved for God alone.

Verse 45

Jesus comes now to the point He was trying to make to the Pharisees:

"If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

Jesus has two very important points to make here. First, the Messiah was the son of David. The implication is that, as a descendant of David's line, He was fully man.

The second point Jesus makes is that David, speaking in the Spirit, calls this descendant Lord יהוה (yehōwāh), a name reserved only for God. This implies, therefore, that the Messiah was also fully God. King David tells us that

the Messiah, who would put all our enemies under our feet, was fully man and God.

The Pharisees sought a man God sent to deliver them from their oppressors. They did not understand, however, that this Messiah was also God. They had accused Jesus of blasphemy for claiming to be the son of God, but their Scripture testified that the Messiah would be fully man and son of David but also fully God.

Verse 46

No one among the Pharisees could answer the question Jesus asked that day. It is important to note that Jesus pointed these leaders to the Scriptures. This was His authority. He did nothing contrary to these Scriptures. The Pharisees had nothing more to say. They saw that Jesus' understanding of

Scripture and His wisdom were greater than theirs. He answered all their questions, and they could not find fault with Him. Matthew tells us that they didn't dare ask any more questions. His superior wisdom made them look inferior before the crowd.

MATTHEW 23

Verse 1

The Herodians, Pharisees and Sadducees have questioned Jesus. All these groups wanted to trap Him so they could have cause to accuse Him and bring Him to trial. Jesus, however, successfully answered all their questions and managed to turn the tables on them and reveal their hypocrisy. Very likely, the crowd heard the questions these groups asked Jesus, and so here, in chapter 23, Jesus speaks to them about their leaders. As we begin, Jesus speaks to both His disciples and the crowd.

Verse 2

Jesus tells the crowd here that the scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat. Moses was known as the lawgiver. It was through him that the Lord God gave His law to the people of Israel. As the lawgiver, Moses taught the law to the people and judged cases of lawbreaking.

The Pharisees saw themselves as judges and teachers of the law in Israel. They carried on the role Moses played as teacher and judge. It should be noted here that it was the custom of teachers to sit while teaching. By sitting in Moses' seat, the Pharisees were taking on the task of teaching and expounding the law of Moses.

Verse 3

Jesus accuses the Scribes and Pharisees of hypocrisy. Notice that he had no issue here with what they were teaching. He tells the crowd to observe whatever the Pharisees and Scribes told them to do. Jesus does take issue, however, with the religious practices of these leaders. He tells the crowd that they preached well but did not practice what they preached.

In chapter 22, we see how the Scribes and Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus by asking difficult questions. They intended to bring Him to trial and ultimately accuse Him of something worthy of death. These men studied the law of Moses. Their heads were filled with Scripture, but there was a hatred for Jesus in their hearts. They were filled with pride and concerned with what people thought of them. They loved the best positions and turned their backs on the outcast. Their lives showed a great disconnect

between the law and their life. They excelled in the heartless application of the law but were very weak in mercy, compassion, humility and integrity. What Jesus is telling us here is that our correct theology and understanding of Scripture, while important, must be reflected in how we live our lives. Jesus has harsh words to speak to those whose teaching was to be observed.

Verse 4

Jesus takes the time here to speak to the crowd about the Scribes and Pharisees and the issue He had with them. He told the crowd that these teachers of the law tied heavy burdens on the shoulders of those they taught.

The word Jesus uses for heavy here is βαρὺς (barús) and refers to something burdensome, grievous or even severe. The idea seems to be that

they were placing an unnecessary weight on the people, one they were having great difficulty carrying. There is no mercy or compassion in their dealing with the people of that day. While Jesus does not seem to take issue with the law and its interpretation, He does seem to have a problem with how the Pharisees and Scribes were using it to weigh down the people with unnecessary burdens.

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 119 about his delight in the commandments of God:

*35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.
– Ps 119:35*

The Scribes and Pharisees, however, had a way of making these very same commandments a grievous burden too heavy to bear. This produced a faith that did the right things but with a

bitter and resentful heart. This, of course, brought no honour to the Lord God.

Notice how Jesus told the crowd that while the Pharisees and Scribes taught the rigorous application of the law, they were unwilling to “move them with their finger.” Jesus speaks here about the tremendous burden these teachers of the law imposed on others. They weighed their students down so much they could not move, but the Pharisees and Sadducees showed no concern. They wouldn’t move a finger to help ease the burden they imposed on their students. People were secondary to the rigorous application of the law. They saw themselves doing the will of the Lord in this.

Verse 5

Notice what Jesus tells the crowd was the motivation behind the religion of the Pharisees. They wanted to be seen by people. They wanted people to think highly of them. They did not practice their faith to honour God but themselves. According to Jesus, this was evident in how they made their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

Phylacteries were pouches or boxes containing portions of Scriptures that the Jewish leaders wore on their foreheads and wrists. The idea came from passages such as Deuteronomy 11:18, which says about the laws of God:

18 "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. – Dt 11:18

The religious leaders of Jesus' day took this verse literally and bound portions of the law, written on paper, to their forehead in a pouch. In this case, Jesus accuses them of making "broad" phylacteries so that people would see them and note their devotion to the Law of God.

Jesus also speaks about long fringes. To understand what Jesus is saying here, consider the commandment of God in Numbers 15:37-40:

37 The LORD said to Moses, 38 "Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. 39 And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and

your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. 40 So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. – Nu 15:37-40

God commanded the priest of the Old Testament to make tassels for their garments. These tassels were to remind them of their obligation to the commandments of God, to observe, teach and obey them. The religious leaders of Jesus' day seemed to exaggerate this commandment by making extra long fringes of tassels so that people could see and respect their position and responsibility. The idea here is that they were doing this for show. They wanted people to notice them. Jesus describes the Scribes and Pharisees as attention-seekers whose desire was more for themselves than it was for the people they served or for God.

Verse 6

Jesus notes how the religious leaders of His day loved to sit in the place of honour and the best seats in the synagogues. They demanded respect and service from those they taught.

Admittedly, we must learn to respect those in authority over us. There is, however, another Biblical principle that comes into play for Christian leaders. Jesus teaches that those who want to be great in the kingdom of God become servants.

*26 It shall not be so among you.
But whoever would be great among
you must be your servant, – Mt
20:26*

Great leaders excel in being servants. They do not demand the best seat or the best parking spot. They do not have to dress up in fancy clothes to be

noticed. They do not need to be first but are quite happy to give that position to someone else. They excel in serving the sheep and do so at their expense. They are willing to sacrifice themselves, just as Jesus did, for the good of the body.

Verse 7

The Pharisees enjoyed “greetings in the marketplace and being called rabbi.” The marketplace was usually very crowded, with people buying and selling their goods. If there were a place to be noticed, it would be here. As these Pharisees strolled through that marketplace dressed in fine clothing, people would greet them, calling them rabbis (teachers). This was a term of respect for their great knowledge and position. All of this fed their ego and fed their pride. They wanted people to

notice and respect them as men of learning and status.

Verse 8

Notice the words of Jesus here – “you are not to be called rabbi.” This is because there is one teacher, and we are all brothers. We must understand this in the context of what Jesus says about the Pharisees. They wanted people in the marketplace to call them “rabbis.” In their mind, when people called them “rabbis,” they were setting them apart from everyone else in the marketplace and giving them a higher status. Jesus tells the believers of His day, however, that every one of us is under God, who is our true Teacher. Under Him, we are all brothers. That is to say, we are all of equal standing. The “rabbi” is no more important than the ordinary believer in the eyes of God. Before God, we are of equal

status. No one is more important than the other. When we go around expecting people to call us “pastor,” “teacher,” or “prophet,” expecting that they will treat us better than anyone else, we fail to realize that our brother or sister is just as important in the eyes of God. Titles do not make us important or give us a greater status with God. Each one of us, though we have different roles, is just as important as our brother or sister in Christ. My calling does not give me a higher standing. This may be how the world sees things, but we dare not allow this to be our point of view.

There is another aspect to this verse we need to consider. When we use our titles to demand respect and honour, we take what is due to God for ourselves. When we want people to look to us as the source of good teaching, we take the focus off God as our true teacher and without whom, we

would have nothing to teach. Jesus accuses the teachers of distracting people from giving all honour to God.

Verse 9

In verse 8, Jesus spoke about people who wanted respect and recognition through their titles. In verse 9, He speaks to the tendency of people to lift up men and women of God as idols. Notice how Jesus tells us not to call any man "father." This is because there is only one Father, and He is in heaven.

I have met believers who have their spiritual heroes. These heroes may be alive or dead. They lift up these individuals and their teaching. There are times when these individuals place as much or even more value on the learning of these pastors, teachers or writers as they do on the Scriptures themselves. God has given us teachers

and preachers for our encouragement. Realize, however, that they are not infallible. They are just like us. God may use them in special ways. Their ministries may have had a powerful impact on our lives, but they are not God. If our attention is drawn to them and not to God, we are in error. There is only one God. There is only one word that is beyond question. We dare not lift up human idols and bow down to them.

Verse 10

Continuing with the same theme, the Lord challenges us as believers not to be called instructors. We should not demand this title or seek attention and honour through it. We must always remember that we are no better than anyone else. When our title causes us to lose sight of who we are, we must

see this as a sin and distraction in our Christian life.

Verse 11

Jesus reinforces the idea that if we want to be great in the kingdom of God, we must be servants. Pride and self-seeking have no place in the church. We must be willing to sacrifice ourselves for one another.

Verse 12

Jesus tells us that if we do not humble ourselves, we will be humbled by God. Pride and self-seeking hinder the work of the kingdom of God. For the church's good and the advancement of His kingdom, we must become true selfless servants. No church can thrive where servanthood and sacrifice are not of utmost importance.

It is those who humble and sacrifice themselves that will experience the approval of God and His favour in their lives and ministries. God delights to honour those who want to honour Him and care for His children. His pleasure is upon those who seek Him and His glory above all else.

Verse 13

Jesus speaks directly to the scribes and Pharisees here. He does not hold back His words. Notice, first, how He calls them hypocrites. These people looked critically at others but failed to see their own failures.

Notice that Jesus told these leaders that they “shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces.” People came to the doorway of the kingdom seeking admission, but these scribes and Pharisees slammed that door in their

faces refusing to allow them entrance. They were more concerned about their traditions, laws and influence over the people than they were that they entered the kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that these scribes and Pharisees had not entered the kingdom of God, and they were keeping others from entering as well.

Not all religious leaders point people to the kingdom of God. Some keep them from the kingdom by their false teaching. These leaders will have much to answer for on the day of judgment.

It is not just leaders that can keep us from the kingdom of God. Remember here that the kingdom of God is about the rule of Christ in our hearts and lives. Many things can keep this from happening. I have been in churches, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, so focused on traditions that they turned their back on the rule of Christ. Our

denominations, practices, and distinctives can replace Christ in our churches. The kingdom of God demands that He be first and His purpose above our preferences and agendas.

Verse 14

Verse 14 is not found in many of the early Greek manuscripts used to translate our Bible. For this reason, certain versions of the Bible do not include it. The English Standard Version includes it in a footnote. Let me comment briefly on the verse.

According to Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites because they “devoured widows’ houses.” These widows were vulnerable in that society. We are not told here how they devoured their houses. Suffice it to say that they took advantage of them in

their vulnerable state. While they did this, they delighted in praying long prayers in public with a desire to look pious. Because of this hypocrisy, they would receive a greater condemnation. It was serious enough to take advantage of widows, but it took the seriousness to a new level when they added to this the sin of hypocrisy.

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, even while for a pretence ye make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive greater condemnation.

Verse 15

Jesus warns the scribes and Pharisees of the coming judgment. They barred the way for people to enter the kingdom of heaven. Notice how zealous these leaders were according to Jesus –

“you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte.”

Jesus does not fault their zeal here. They would travel across land and sea to win a convert. They spared no effort in an attempt to gain a following. Hard work and sacrifice, however, do not always equal godliness. Jesus tells these leaders face to face that they are children of hell. They travelled land and sea to make disciples who would go to hell just as they would. The scribes and Pharisees, although they taught the same Scriptures as Jesus, misled their disciples and slammed heaven's door shut in their faces. Their disciples, deceived by their teaching and practices, were being led straight to hell.

These were strong words from Jesus. They would surely not gain Him any favour from the scribes and Pharisees, but they needed to be spoken. The

leaders needed to be rebuked, and the people warned that if they chose to follow the way of the scribes and Pharisees, that way would lead straight to hell and eternal condemnation.

Verse 16

According to Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees sought to lead people into a truth they did not know. Jesus calls them blind guides. Jesus takes a moment to show them their inconsistencies and lack of understanding.

The Pharisees and scribes said that if anyone swore an oath by the temple, they were not bound to keep their promise. If, however, they swore on the gold in the temple, they were required to keep their word. In the mind of these religious leaders, the value of the gold gave weight to the vow.

Verse 17

Jesus accused the religious leaders of the day of being blind. That is to say, they had no concept of right and wrong or the purpose of God. Their priorities were not God's, nor did they understand His will.

Jesus challenges the view that the temple's gold was greater than the temple itself. These leaders had a worldly mindset. They would swear on the gold in the temple because, to them, that gold had real value. But they would allow people to be unfaithful in their promises if they swore by the temple. By their teaching, they despised the house of God. They let people go back on their promises if they swore their oath by the temple building.

How easy it is to get our priorities mixed up. We spend hours seeking to

make our lives comfortable but little time with God. We value how people see us but not how God sees us. We find excuses not to keep our word and justify our failures. This, according to Jesus, was not true faith.

Verse 18

Similarly, an individual who swore an oath by the altar was not required to keep that oath. If, however, they swore that oath by the gold on the altar, they were bound to keep their words.

Consider the kind of faith that allows a person to be unfaithful to their oaths. This was a compromised faith that pursued godliness when it was convenient. It was a faith that justified ungodliness. The faith Jesus professed was very different. It was faithful even when it hurt. It was sincere even when people were not looking. It did not

compromise. It did what it promised to do and did not seek to excuse failure.

Verse 19

Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of spiritual blindness. They did not have the heart or mind of God. They valued the gift on the altar more than that altar itself. This may be in part because they were given a portion of this offering for their personal and family needs.

They devalued the altar upon which the sacrifice was made and concerned themselves with the benefit they would receive from the offering. I have met many believers who value their blessings in Christ more than Christ Himself.

Verse 20

Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes that He made no distinction between the altar and the gift when swearing an oath. To swear by the altar, the believer also swore by what was on that altar. At that moment, the altar and the gift were one. Without the altar, there would be no sacrifice. Without the sacrifice, the altar served no purpose. The attempt of the religious leaders to separate the two showed how they were seeking to find a way out of their commitment to honour their vow. This revealed their hypocrisy.

Verse 21

According to Jesus, those who swore by the temple or its gold swore by the One who dwelt in it. What value was the temple or its gold if God did not bless it with His presence? The attempt of the religious leaders to separate the temple from the gold was simply an excuse to

justify breaking a promise when it was not convenient. Jesus tells us that whenever they swore, they did so in the presence of God and were bound to keep their word.

Verse 22

Jesus shows the Pharisees and scribes how foolish their human laws were. They claimed that a vow on the altar or the temple could be broken, but one made on the gold was to be kept. Jesus told them that the altar and the temple were God's, and when they swore by them, they swore before God. Similarly, if they swore by heaven, they did so before that throne of heaven and by the God who sat on it. In other words, whatever they swore, by the altar, the temple, heaven or the gold, they did so before God and were bound to keep their words. Jesus describes here a religious leadership that justified their

dishonesty and who made up rules to suit their purposes.

Verse 23

Jesus reminds the Pharisees and scribes of how they tithed their spices but neglected the laws of God about justice, mercy and faithfulness. They mistreated people and heaped burdens on their shoulders that they themselves could not bear but patted themselves on the back for how they religiously tithed their mint seed.

Maybe you have been in churches that are proud of the doctrine they preach but have no tolerance or compassion for anyone who does not see things as they do. Maybe you have been in churches that experience the wonderful work of God's Spirit but whose members live in sin with no sense of the victory of God in their lives.

The faith Jesus taught was one of truth, obedience, compassion and power. Imagine a soldier going into battle with his helmet but no spear. Imagine he stood before the enemy with his sword but no armour. What would you say to this soldier? Would you not show him that both spear and armour were important? You can't take part of the faith you like and reject the rest. We must walk in truth, but we must also walk in power. We must observe the commands of God, but we must also demonstrate His love and compassion. We cannot pick and choose what we want. We cannot accept what we like about God and reject what we don't like about Him. We must take Him as He is and walk in absolute obedience.

Verse 24

The Pharisees and scribes had no sense of the priorities of God. Jesus accused them here of “straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.” They focused on the small details of tithing their spices seeds but neglected to show compassion. Jesus does not condemn their tithing but reveals that they focused so much on this that they ignored even more important things.

We can become so focused on getting our doctrine right that we show intolerance to other believers who do not agree with us. We can be so focused on the letter of the law that we discourage people and turn them away from the Lord. We, too, can be guilty of straining the gnat and swallowing the camel.

Verse 25

Jesus did not endear Himself to the Pharisees and scribes as he spoke frankly to them. Here He accused them of hypocrisy. He compared them to a cup and plate that was clean on the outside but full of greed and self-indulgence on the inside.

These men were self-centred and demanded respect and admiration in the marketplace. They wanted the best seats and the places of honour wherever they went. They cared nothing for the ordinary person but heaped burdens on them that even they were unwilling to carry. They presented themselves as religious and holy people, but their hearts were full of sinful greed and selfishness. By using the word “woe” in this context, Jesus tells the Pharisees that judgment was coming for them.

Verse 26

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes, saying that they were to clean the inside of the cup so that the outside would also be clean.

There is an important lesson in these words of Jesus for us. Anyone who has tried to change a habit or sinful behaviour knows that unless we change our hearts, we will continue to fall back into our errors. It is very difficult to change something you have no desire to change. Unless your attitude toward that practice changes, you will not likely be able to change it. Change the heart, and you change the habit.

There is another aspect to these words of Jesus as well. The believer, in whom the Spirit of God dwells, understand what it is like to be transformed from the inside out. As the Spirit of God works, we are transformed in attitude and deed. All true change must begin from the inside. Our attitudes and

desires must be transformed. When this takes place, our actions will follow.

Verse 27

The scribes and Pharisees knew nothing of the inner work of God's Spirit to transform their lives from the inside out. Jesus compares them here to whitewashed tombs. They presented themselves as clean and white on the outside, but everyone knew that that cleanliness was on the exterior only. Inside those tombs were dead bodies, bones and the stench of rottenness.

The Lord God is not looking for a piety that is only skin deep. He examines our hearts and seeks purity through and through. He will not tolerate hypocrisy. He desires holiness from the depth of our being.

Verse 28

Jesus recognized the outward "righteousness" of the Pharisees and scribes, but that "righteousness did not penetrate very deeply. Inside they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

We can only imagine how the Pharisees and scribes, teachers of the law, would have felt being accused of lawlessness. In their minds, they observed every tradition and law of Moses. Jesus, however, is not looking for an outward show of righteousness. He looks at the heart and desires righteousness that springs from the very core of our being.

All too many people believe they are right with God because they go to church, read their Bible, live a good life and pray. If the heart has not been transformed, however, all this is outward show and not the faith Jesus demands. The faith Jesus requires is in the person whose heart, mind and

attitude have been transformed by the inner work of His Spirit. These individuals are the same on the inside as on the out.

Verse 29

Jesus tells us that the scribes and Pharisees built tombs for the prophets and decorated monuments for the righteous. These tombs and monuments were symbols of respect. The Pharisees and scribes demonstrated how they honoured the memory of godly prophets and saints who went before them.

Verse 30

The Pharisees and scribes honoured the prophets and saints by building tombs and monuments. Many of these individuals perished at the hand of the people they ministered to. Their

message was rejected, and they were killed for declaring the word of the Lord.

Notice how the Pharisees and scribes declared that they would never have taken part in the death of these great men of faith. They told people that they would never have been guilty of shedding the blood of these prophets. It is easy to look at others and truly believe we would never have fallen into their error.

Verse 31

While the Pharisees and scribes declared that they would never have murdered the prophets and saints of God, Jesus informs them that they were, in fact, sons of those who murdered them. In saying that they were the sons of those who murdered the prophets, Jesus is saying that they

had the same murderous heart. The same sinful nature was in them as was in those who killed the saints of God.

Even as Jesus spoke, we can imagine the anger rising in the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes. They wanted nothing more than to get rid of Jesus. They hated Him for exposing them to the people. Like their fathers who listened to the prophets, they were plotting how to kill the greatest prophet of all time, the Lord Jesus.

Verse 32

Jesus tells the Pharisees and scribes to fill up the measure of their fathers. There are several points we need to make here.

First, the context indicates that their fathers murdered the prophets and saints of God. Jesus accused the

Pharisees and scribes of being like their fathers.

Second, the measure Jesus speaks here refers to the actions of these fathers. That is to say, the sin of killing those God sent to them. Imagine, if you will, a cup filled to the brim with sin and evil. Jesus tells them to do what their fathers had done and load their cups with rebellion and murder.

Third, many commentators see Jesus as speaking sarcastically here. While this may certainly be the case, let's remember that these religious leaders sought to kill Jesus. Jesus is telling them that they are to go ahead with their goal. He is permitting them to take His life. In saying this, Jesus is submitting to the purpose of the Father for our forgiveness.

Finally, Jesus is not encouraging sin here. He is simply accepting what was

going to happen as a result of the rebellion of these leaders against the purpose of God. They would kill the great Prophet of God. They would murder the Messiah. While the intention of these religious leaders was evil, God would use it for good and the salvation of His children. Jesus was telling the scribes and Pharisees to do what they were going to do. He said a very similar thing to Judas, who would betray Him. Speaking to Judas, Jesus said:

27 "What you are going to do, do quickly." – Jn 13:27

Verse 33

While Jesus permits the scribes and Pharisees to proceed with their murderous intent, this does not mean they are free from judgment. Jesus gives them over to their sin and

rebellion, but they would suffer the consequences of their actions.

Jesus calls these leaders a brood of vipers. That is to say, they were unclean, and the poison of their example and teaching was destroying those who listened to them and followed their example.

While allowing these leaders to continue in their path, Jesus also reminds them that the fires of hell would be the result.

Verse 34

While the scribes and Pharisees prided themselves in their faithfulness to the Law of Moses, Jesus prophesied that they would kill and crucify the prophets God sent to them. Under their orders, these prophets and wise men would be

flogged and persecuted from town to town.

That prophecy of Jesus would come true. He would be the first to be crucified by these religious leaders. His disciples would be put in prison and persecuted by them as well. Saul, who would later become known as Paul the Apostle, was a Pharisee and proved, at that time of his life, to be the church's worst enemy. As Jesus predicted, he went from "town to town," rooting out Christians to bring them to trial.

Verse 35

Jesus speaks, in this verse, to the Pharisees and scribes but groups them with those of like mind who murdered the prophets of God. He tells them that the blood of the righteous would fall on them. That is to say, they would be accountable to God for the innocent

blood of His servants who died at their hands.

The day was coming when this group of murderous sinners would answer to God for the blood of His saints, from Abel to Zechariah. Abel was the first of the saints of God murdered in Scripture. His story is recorded for us in Genesis 4:3-8. Zechariah was the last of the Old Testament prophets to be killed. We read of this event in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21:

20 Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'" 21 But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned

him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD. – 2Ch 24:20-21

Zechariah was killed in the temple of the Lord. It is striking that Abel was killed because he offered a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. Zechariah was killed because he preached the truth of God's Word to the people of his day. The day is coming when we can expect even more believers will be killed because of their faith in the Lord Jesus. Be assured, however, that Jesus is aware of every saint who suffers on His behalf. They will be rewarded, and the persecutors brought to justice.

Verse 36

Jesus has just prophesied that the scribes and Pharisees would be guilty of killing and persecuting the prophets and wise men God sent them, just as their fathers had done. Notice here that

He tells them they would not have to wait long for this prophecy to be fulfilled. Jesus tells them that His words would be fulfilled in their generation.

Within a few short years, these scribes and Pharisees would kill Jesus and persecute His disciples. Saul would go from town to town, rooting out believers in Jesus Christ for trial. A great evil would be unleashed upon the followers of Jesus Christ. Despite this evil unleashed, the kingdom of God would advance as never before.

Verse 37

Jesus reflects here on the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. This was the city of the temple where His Father had manifested His presence. It was a city filled with the chosen people of God. It was from this place that the

gospel message would spread to the entire world.

While the city of Jerusalem was a chosen city, it was also a city of terrible evil. Prophets of God had been martyred behind its walls. The Son of God, Himself, would be lifted on a cross within its city boundaries.

Notice how Jesus grieves for the city and its response to the offer of the gospel. Jesus longed to gather the inhabitants of this city to Himself like a hen gathers its chicks under her wings. He loved the city and its people, but they did not return that love. They rejected His tenderness and pushed Him away. They were unwilling to accept Him and His offer of salvation and hope. The great and chosen city turned its back on her Saviour. This rejection breaks the heart of Jesus.

Verse 38

In light of Jerusalem's rejection, Jesus makes a further prediction:

38 See, your house is left to you desolate. – Mt 23:38

Jesus was not the only prophet to make this prediction. Jeremiah, many years earlier, spoke a similar word when he said:

7 "I have forsaken my house; I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. – Je 12:7

Isaiah prophesied:

11 Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised you, has been burned by fire, and

*all our pleasant places have
become ruins. – Isa 64:11*

These prophecies were fulfilled in different ways. In 70 AD, just a few years after this prophecy of Jesus, the Romans invaded and destroyed the temple of Jerusalem. Beyond this, however, Jesus, the Messiah, would be killed and leave them to their fate.

Verse 39

Jesus interprets his words in verse 38 by telling the scribes and Pharisees that in just a short while, they would not see Him again until they saw Him coming in His glory.

Jesus looks ahead to His crucifixion. He would die and be risen from the dead to be with His Father. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would not see Him again until He returned with His angels to gather His followers to Himself, judge

the unbeliever and establish His eternal kingdom.

We can only imagine what that appearance will be like. For those who know Him and accept Him, it will be a glorious day. For those who rejected Him, however, it will be a day of tremendous dread and fear. Speaking to these scribes and Pharisees, Jesus declared that while they would kill Him, it would not be the end. He would rise from the dead and return to judge them for their deeds

MATTHEW 24

Verse 1

After His conversation with the Pharisees and scribes in chapter 23, Jesus was leaving the temple with His disciples when they commented about the temple and all its buildings. Matthew does not tell us what it was that caught the attention of these disciples. The temple in Jerusalem was a matter of great pride for the Jews.

Verse 2

Hearing His disciples' comments about the temple, Jesus informed them that the day was coming when it would be

destroyed. This destruction would be so great that no stone would be left upon another. It would have been difficult for the disciples or any Jew of that day to imagine such devastation. In 70 AD, however, the Romans invaded the city, pulled down the city wall and demolished the temple, just as Jesus predicted.

Verse 3

From the temple, Jesus and his disciples travelled to the Mount of Olives. As they sat alone, the words of Jesus about the temple seemed to stir up the disciples to ask further questions about what was to come.

Notice what the disciples asked Jesus that day as they sat alone on the Mount of Olives.

"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

The first part of the question reveals something of the disciple's understanding of Jesus second coming – "What will be the sign of your coming?" they ask.

These words show us that the disciples understood that Jesus needed to go away, but He would return to establish His earthly kingdom.

The second part of the question speaks about "the end of the age." The disciples also understood that the world as we know it would end. The prophets of the Old Testament spoke of a time when peace and righteousness would reign. Consider, for example, the words of Isaiah:

5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. 6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. 9 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. – Isa 11:5-9

Jesus' disciples asked Him when these days would come and how they would recognize they were near.

Verse 4

Jesus responds to His disciples' with a warning: "See that no one leads you astray." The warning reveals something important. As the end draws near, there will be greater trials and temptations. The enemy will unleash his arrows upon the earth seeking to deceive and discourage many. Jesus warns His disciples here that not everyone would persevere. Some would wander from the path and fall into error and sin. One of the first signs of the second coming of Jesus is an increase in deception and error, with many people falling prey to the empty promises of the flesh and Satan.

Verse 5

As the end of the age draws close, Jesus tells us that many will come in His name, saying that they are the

Christ, leading people astray from the truth.

Notice that these individuals come in the name of Christ. Understand that not all who come in the name of Jesus belong to Him. Some who claim to come in the name of Jesus preach error. They use the name of Jesus to gain a following, but they do not preach the truth. In this case, these individuals lead people from Christ to themselves. They lead people to believe that they are the anointed one of God who came to save them.

We need to see here that some will openly declare that they are “the Christ.” Others, however, will be more subtle. They will gather a following for their purpose, declaring themselves to be the chosen of God, come to save and rescue God’s people. Jesus tells us that these individuals will succeed in their deception, and many will follow after their false teaching.

Verse 6

Not only would the disciples recognize the end of the age because of the false teaching and deception but also by means of an increase in wars and rumours of war. As evil, pride, greed, and lust grow, nation will rise against nation.

Jesus tells His disciples that they were not to be alarmed by these wars and rumours of wars. The words, "see that you are not alarmed" place a requirement on us all. We are to understand that this is part of what must take place before Jesus returns. We are not to be overwhelmed by these wars. They are not out of God's control.

Finally, Jesus teaches His disciples here that these wars do not indicate that the end has come. They are just the beginning of birth pains and a sign of much more to follow.

Verse 7

Jesus told His disciples that nations would rise against nation as the end of the age draws closer. This was a reflection of the evil that reigned in the human heart. Beyond the clashing of sinful hearts, however, there would also be physical signs on the earth. The earth would begin to lose its productivity causing famines. Earthquakes would increase around the world as the earth began to shake and break apart.

Verse 8

These wars and signs on the earth were not an indication of the end but the beginning of the end. They were warning signs that the end was coming but no clear indication of when that end would be. Jesus describes them as birth pains. The mother giving birth to a

child may experience pain for a short or long time. What is clear is that the child is going to be born, and everything is getting ready for that to happen.

Verse 9

As the end draws near, Jesus tells us that believers in His name will become the target of attack. They will be delivered over to be put to death and universally hated by all nations.

There is a strange comfort in this reality. As Satan and evil make their final push, they focus on believers in Jesus Christ. This is where the truth is found. Satan and evil know their enemy. There is none they fear so much as Jesus Christ and His followers. As believers become the target of attack, be assured that it is because they stand on that path of truth.

Verse 10

As the day of the Lord's return draws nearer, Jesus tells us that many will fall away, betray and hate each other.

The reference to falling away speaks of the principles of godliness. Those who fall away turn from the purpose of God to follow their own path, doing what is right in their own heart without concern for God's ways.

Jesus told His disciples that in the last days, people would betray and hate one another. This is the natural result of falling away. When there is no godly authority to guide our path, we do whatever pleases us. My desires, pleasures and ambitions take priority. Without divine principles to guide me, I willingly step on other people to accomplish those objectives. I use people for my selfish purposes.

Verse 11

In the godless environment of the last days, there will be many false prophets. Because people will fall away from the authority of God's Word, the door is wide open for error of all kinds. Proud and ungodly prophets, taking advantage of this situation will arise and lead many astray.

Jesus tells us there will be "many" false prophets in the end times. Error and falsehood will abound as these false prophets and philosophies flood our world. Without knowing God's Word, many will be swept away by this flood of deception.

All of this shows us the importance of knowing and accepting the authority of God's Word. It will be our protection in those days.

As the day of the Lord's return draws nearer, Jesus tells us that many will fall away, betray and hate each other. In the godless environment of the last days, there will be many false prophets. Because people will fall away from the authority of God's Word, the door is wide open for error of all kinds. Proud and ungodly prophets, taking advantage of this situation will arise and lead many astray. As the day of the Lord's return draws nearer, Jesus tells us that many will fall away, betray and hate each other.

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authority to guide our path, we do whatever pleases us. My desires, pleasures and ambitions take priority. Without divine principles to guide me, I willingly step on other people to accomplish those objectives. I use people for my selfish purposes.

Verse 12

Lawlessness will abound before the return of the Lord Jesus. Jesus has already told us that many will fall away from the truth of God and His Word. False prophets replace the instruction in Biblical principles. The result will be lawlessness. According to Jesus, lawlessness will cause the love of men and women to grow cold. Consider this for a moment.

Love and lawlessness cannot co-exist. Lawlessness gives birth to abuse, greed, selfishness, lust and pride. What

relationship can survive when these characteristics abound? When pride keeps you from seeking forgiveness, can your relationships thrive? When lust causes you to abuse those closest to you, can you expect to grow in love? Where self-centredness demands satisfaction but gives nothing in return, the natural result is a love that grows cold and indifferent. For love to grow, it must be fed and nourished by godliness.

Verse 13

Whenever believers see the word “saved” in Scripture, the natural tendency is to think of salvation, forgiveness and eternal life. Depending on the context, this is not always the correct interpretation of the word. We have an example of this here. Jesus tells us that whoever endures to the end will be saved.

If we see the word salvation to refer to forgiveness and eternal life, we might conclude that our forgiveness is dependent on our ability to endure the trials of life or to resist false teaching. We know, however, that every one of us falls short of God's standard. Many saints have fallen into sin. Some have even fallen into theological error. My salvation in Jesus Christ depends not on my ability to endure or hold onto a certain teaching but upon the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross alone.

Some interpret this verse to mean that everyone who endures proves their salvation. In other words, those in whom the Spirit of God dwells will not fall away or be deceived by false teaching. There is certainly an element of truth in this. An examination of Scripture, however, shows us that even believers fail their Lord. Peter denied Jesus. David fell into the sins of

adultery and murder. John the Baptist asked Jesus if He was the one who was prophesied. The grace of God reached out and forgave those who could not endure these times of trouble. If my salvation were dependent on my ability to endure, I am afraid that many would not experience eternal life.

The word, saved, does not always imply forgiveness and eternal life. There are times when it simply refers to being rescued or spared from trial and suffering on this earth. If this is the correct understanding of the word saved, then Jesus is telling His people that if they remained faithful to His word, He would keep them in their hour of need. He would not leave them but be their support, comfort and blessing in these evil days.

Verse 14

Jesus told His disciples that yet another sign of His return would be the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ would go from nation to nation. All countries will hear the truth of Jesus Christ.

Evil will indeed abound more and more, but this will not restrict the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The light of truth will continue to shine amid terrible evil and rebellion. The hope of Jesus Christ will continue to be proclaimed to those who have fallen away. Only when everyone has heard will the end come.

Verse 15

Jesus speaks here of what He calls “the abomination of desolation.” He says two things about this event. First, it was prophesied by Daniel, and second, it

would stand in the holy place. To understand what Jesus is referring to, we need to examine the prophecy of Daniel. Consider first what Daniel says in Daniel 9:25-27:

25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. 26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. 27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall

put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” – Da 9:25-27

Consider also Daniel’s words in Daniel 11:31 about the temple in those days:

31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. – Da 11:31

Let me summarize what the prophet Daniel tells us in these verses.

First, Daniel prophesied that an Anointed One would come (Daniel 9:25). That Anointed One would be cut off (Daniel 9:26). After the Anointed One was cut off, a prince would come

and destroy the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary (Daniel 9:26). At that time, this prince would put an end to all sacrifices and offerings (the practice of the Jewish faith). The temple would be profaned, and an abomination that makes desolate would be set up.

Around 66 AD, history shows us that revolutionaries slaughtered priests in the temple of the day. In 70 AD, the Romans came into the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the city and pulled down the temple and placed their emblem over it.

Jesus speaks here about the fulfillment of this word of Daniel that would take place within a few decades of His death. The temple of Jerusalem would be defiled, and pagans would enter it, pull it down and place their standard in it.

Verse 16

Jesus issues a prophetic warning for those living in those days. He tells them to flee to the mountains. In other words, when the Romans came into Jerusalem, pulled down the temple, and destroyed the city, they would also cause great pain for its inhabitants. So great would be the persecution in those days that Jesus encouraged those who could to leave everything behind and escape to the mountains where they would not be discovered.

Notice here that Jesus does not always require that we stay where we are persecuted. There are times when fleeing persecution is the best alternative.

Verse 17

The houses of Bible times had flat roofs that were used for various things. They were accessed by a stairway built on the outside of the house. Inside stairways, as we might have today, were uncommon. Jesus tells those who heard of the Roman invasion not to go down those stairs and enter their house for their belongings. Instead, they were to leave everything they had behind. The fury and speed of this invasion were such that anyone who hesitated to flee could lose their life.

Verse 18

Jesus warns those in the field in those days of the Roman attack not to return to their home for a coat. Those moments used up to find their cloak could be fatal. Instead, they were to flee immediately to save their lives.

Verse 19

Jesus expresses a word of compassion for pregnant and nursing women in those days of enemy attack. These would be difficult days for these women. Having to leave the comfort of their homes to hide in the mountains would have been difficult for them. Jesus feels their pain. He mentions them in particular. This does not change what would happen in those days, but these women would need the special care of the Saviour to get through.

It is incredible to know the care and concern of a sovereign God in our struggle. He is not blind to our needs. He sees what we are facing and will open His heart to us.

Verse 20

Jesus encouraged those who awaited this future desecration to pray that their flight might not be in winter or on a

Sabbath. In the winter, because they had left everything behind, they would be cold and uncomfortable in their flight. If they had to flee on the Sabbath, they would be required to break the law of the Sabbath to escape the enemy's fury.

Jesus is calling these Jews to pray that they would not have to face undue hardship in their flight and that they would not be put in a situation where they had to break the law of God to save their lives.

Verse 21

Jesus warned His people that there would be great tribulation in those days of Roman occupancy. The Jews of 70 AD would face trials they had never before encountered. Their persecution would be so intense that Jesus describes it as something that had "not

been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus lived in these times and wrote about what occurred when Rome invaded Jerusalem. Listen to what he tells us about that time:

Never did any city suffer such things, nor was there ever any generation that more abounded in malice or wickedness. (Gill, John: Exposition of the Entire Bible, Notes on Matthew 24:21: Laridian: Cedar Rapids, Iowa)

While there is a partial fulfillment of these prophetic words of Jesus in the life of the Jewish nation in 70 AD, Scripture also tells us that this persecution will also reveal itself in our future. There is evidence in Jesus’ and the apostles’ teaching that there will be yet another time of great tribulation before the return of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 22

Jesus told His disciples that if these days of persecution and tribulation were not cut short, no human being would be alive. This shows us the intensity of struggle that not only the Jews faced in 70 AD but also what will come before the Lord's return. Notice, however, that those days would be cut short for the sake of the elect. The elect here refers to believers.

Jesus tells us that before He returns, evil will be rampant. Believers will suffer at the hands of the ungodly. Satan will lash out as never before, doing his utmost to destroy the kingdom of God. While Satan is allowed this moment in time, that moment will be temporary. God will not allow him to persist in his evil but will cut him short. God does this out of love for His children. Though sin is great, God will

not allow it to continue but will protect and keep those who are His.

Verse 23

Jesus tells us that as His return draws near, there will be many false prophets. Some will claim to be the Christ, gathering a following. We should not see this to mean that these individuals claim to be Christ. Notice, however, that their followers call them Christ – “Look, here is the Christ.” These false prophets have so deceived their followers that they believe them to be Christ. Jesus warns us that we should not believe them. The second coming of Christ will not be in secret. He will appear very publicly to all.

Verse 24

There will be many false christs and false prophets in the end times. Jesus

tells us that these individuals will be able to perform great signs and wonders. Because of this power, many will be led astray.

Notice the phrase "perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray." The purpose of these miracles is to deceive and draw people away from Christ.

Observe the words, "lead astray, if possible, even the elect." The elect are the children of God. These false christs and prophets intend to turn the hearts of the people of God from Him.

The words "if possible" should not be seen to mean that it is impossible to lead astray the elect. Even believers can be deceived. I have met individuals who belong to Jesus who have been caught up in things I do not believe to be from God. Peter denied the Lord three times, but he was a believer. David committed murder and adultery but was still described as a man after

God's heart. The disciples abandoned Jesus when the soldiers came to capture Him in the garden, but they were used to build the church. Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead but was a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus warns the disciples about possibly being deceived by false christs and prophets.

The words "if possible" should not give us false security. We need to be careful. We need to examine every teaching in light of the Scripture. What we do need to understand from this is that, as genuine believers, we have the knowledge of God's Word and His Spirit to guide us. It is when we do not take advantage of these resources that we are vulnerable. The words "if possible" show us that it is more difficult for Satan to mislead a believer who knows the truth of God's Word and is filled with the Spirit of Christ.

Verse 25

Jesus points out to His disciples that He had told them these things beforehand. There was a reason for this. He wanted them to be prepared and forewarned. When we know what is coming, we watch for it.

Verse 26

By warning His disciples about false christs and prophets, they would be more cautious when people told them He was in the wilderness or the inner room.

Notice that Jesus tells His disciples that when people said He was in the wilderness, they were not to “go out.” In other words, they were not to sit under the instruction and preaching of this false christ. They were not to attend his meetings. They were to

separate themselves completely from him and his message.

Verse 27

How will we know when the Lord returns? Jesus answers this by using an illustration of lightning in the sky.

When lightning flashes in the sky, it is easily recognized. It lights up the entire sky from east to west. Jesus tells us that this is how His return would be. He would come in a very public way. The sky will light up and announce His presence. People will see Him coming in a very clear and miraculous way. There will be no secret appearance this time.

Verse 28

Jesus gives a second illustration to His disciples to show how they would recognize His second coming. He

speaks here about a vulture and a corpse.

Wherever there is a corpse, the vulture will find it. They have been given an ability by God to know and spot that corpse. They are attracted to it and quickly flock to it to clean it up.

If it is in the nature of the vulture to know where there is a dead body, surely the true disciple of Christ will recognize Him when He appears. The Spirit in us will leap for joy and affirm Him as the Lord of lords and King of kings.

Verse 29

Jesus tells His disciples that there will be tribulation on the earth. Things will worsen as evil prevails and lashes out at believers. That tribulation, however, will not last forever. The day will come, according to Jesus, when the sun's light

will be darkened so that the moon no longer reflects its rays. Stars will fall from the sky, and there will be a great shaking of the heavens. Isaiah speaks of this when he writes:

4 All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. – Isa 34:4

God revealed the same thing to John when he was exiled to Patmos. Writing in Revelation 6, the apostle says:

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is

being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. – Rev 6:12-14

These horrendous events will take place before the coming of the Lord Jesus. These great and terrible signs will take place all around the world, announcing the arrival of the King of kings to judge the earth. These are signs that will be hard to ignore.

Verse 30

When these signs appear in the sky, then the Son of Man will appear. His appearance will have a dramatic impact on the earth. People from all tribes and nations will mourn when they see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven with “power and great glory.”

In those days, there will be no question about the glory and person of the Lord

Jesus. His power will be demonstrated to the whole earth. The sky will tremble. The world will fear His person. There will be no hidden corner that will not know His presence and glory. Terror will fill the hearts of the unbeliever. Holy reverence and fear will overwhelm the believer.

Verse 31

In those days, Jesus Christ will send out His holy angels with the sound of a loud trumpet. They will go throughout the earth to gather His loved ones.

Notice the reference to the four winds. The apostle John also speaks of these four winds in Revelation 7:1:

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might

blow on earth or sea or against any tree. – Rev 7:1

In John's account of these four winds, he speaks of them as winds that would blow across the earth and sea. We have all experienced the destructive power of the winds. The angels of God are holding back this force. What would happen if these angels ceased to hold them back? Would there not be destruction and chaos as we have never seen?

By gathering the elect from the four winds, these angels are protecting them. Remember that these individuals have faced great tribulation, but their time of suffering appears to be over. They will be spared this great judgement on the earth.

Verse 32

Jesus encourages His disciples to learn a lesson from the fig tree. When it began to put out its leaves they knew that summer was near. In other words, there were signs in nature that showed us what was coming. You could tell that summer was coming by looking at the fig tree.

Verse 33

Jesus applies the lesson of the fig tree from verse 32 here. Just as the fig leaves indicate that summer is near, so we will know that the day of His appearing is near when we see the fulfillment of the signs He describes for us in this section.

Verse 34

Jesus told His listeners that the words He had just spoken would come to pass. He assures them that “this

generation” will not pass away until all these things take place. How are we to understand what Jesus is telling us here?

Consider first the words “this generation.” The word Jesus uses is γενεά (geneá). It refers to a space of time, a race or a group. For example, when the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign in Matthew 12, He responded:

39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. – Mt 12:39

Notice how Jesus calls the Pharisees an evil and adulterous generation. In this case, the word generation refers to a group of “evil and adulterous” people who did not believe in Jesus.

The word generation does not always mean the time between father and son. It can refer to the time a particular

people group existed or a time in which certain events took place.

How does this help us understand what Jesus is saying in this verse? If we understand the phrase “this generation” to refer to the time between a father and a son, we have to interpret the verse to say that the events Jesus predicted had to occur within a few short years. Those who interpret the phrase “this generation” in this way would interpret the verse to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD by the Romans. This event took place about forty years after Jesus predicted it and fell within the timeframe of a single generation.

Others interpret the phrase “this generation” as the generation that saw the signs Jesus predicted come to pass. For example, Jesus speaks about a time of great tribulation, famines, earthquakes, darkness and falling stars.

That generation would not pass away until all Jesus had predicted came to pass.

Finally, because the word “generation” is not specific in terms of time, others see Jesus as referring in a general sense to the generation in which we live, the time between His coming and His return. The generation of people who live before His return would witness every event that Jesus predicted.

Verse 35

Jesus assures His listeners of the certainty of His prophetic words. According to Jesus, though heaven and earth would pass away, His words would not. His Word will remain even when everything else is destroyed. They are more enduring and certain than the earth on which we stand.

Notice here that Jesus says that "heaven and earth will pass away." He is reminding us that what we know now will one day disappear. The apostle Peter speaks of this in 2 Peter when he writes:

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. – 2Pe 3:10

The apostle John writing in Revelation 21, says:

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. – Rev 21:1

Jesus, Peter and John all speak of the same thing. This earth upon which we walk will pass away. The heavens we look up to at night will also pass away. God will replace these with a new heaven and a new earth.

Verse 36

It would be easy for those who examined the words of Jesus in this passage to attempt to predict the time at which Jesus was to return. Jesus tells us, however, that no one knows that day. The Father has determined to hide this from us. The implication is that we should not be concerned about the specific day. It is sufficient to know that it will come at a time known only to the Father.

Jesus tells us that neither He nor the angels of heaven know when He will return. There is some variation in the

original manuscripts from which this verse is translated. The Textus Receptus texts from which the King James Version is translated omit the words "neither the Son." The New King James Version notes that some Greek manuscripts include the phrase "nor the Son." The American Standard, New Living Translation, New International Version and English Standard Version translated the words "neither the Son," but in some cases, add a note to say that not all Greek manuscripts contain the phrase.

Whether or not the phrase "nor the Son" is to be added to the text does not change what Jesus is saying. If the day is known only to the Father, the implication is that the Son does not know.

This, of course, brings up a great theological question. Are there things the Father knows that He does not

reveal to the Son? While we do not have time or space to speak in great detail about this, consider the words of Jesus Himself, who said:

19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. – Jn 5:19-20

As Jesus walked on this earth, He lived in absolute submission to the will and purpose of the Father. Though He was God, he declared He could do nothing on His own accord. Though He was God, He depended on the Father to show Him all things. He relied on the Father and waited for His leading,

timing and wisdom. He continues to wait for the Father and still only does what His Father shows Him. In heaven, He awaits the timing of the Father for His return.

Verse 37

All attempts to determine the day of the Lord's return are futile, for this day is known only to the Father. It is His purpose to hide this from us. Instead, He wants us to live each day as though it could be the day He appears.

While it is not for us to know the specific day, the Lord Jesus does give us a general sense of what it will be like before His second coming. This is provided by way of warning and encouragement. It is a warning to those who do not know Him but a motivation to those who do to persevere.

Jesus tells us that the conditions before His second coming will be like Noah's day.

Verse 38

Jesus compares the flood of Noah's day to His return. In the days before the flood, people ate, drank, and married. They did this until the day Noah entered the ark. There is nothing more common than eating, drinking and getting married.

Note here that Jesus does not focus on the sin and rebellion of that day in this illustration. While it is true that elsewhere we read that the days before Jesus' return will be days of sin and rebellion against God, this is not the idea Jesus is trying to convey in this illustration. What He is telling His disciples here is that before His return, people will be doing what they normally

do. These individuals will have no sense that this would be the day of His appearance.

Verse 39

The people of Noah's day ate, drank and married. They did what they normally did, despite the fact that a great flood was going to take their lives. While they were warned of its coming, they took no heed. They ignored the warnings and went on doing what they always did. The day came, said Jesus, when that great flood came and swept them away. Though they had been warned, it took them by surprise.

The second coming of Jesus will be like this. It will take people by surprise. Though they have been warned, many people will ignore the warning and go on living as normal.

Verse 40

Jesus tells us that on the day of His appearance, two men will be in a field; one will be taken and the other left. The word παραλαμβάνω (paralambáno) speaks of bringing someone near. It is used to talk about the relationship one has with a friend or an associate. The idea is that when He returns, the Lord Jesus will draw certain individuals near to Himself.

Not everyone will be drawn near to the Lord on the day of His return. Some will be left. The word Jesus uses is ἀφίημι (aphíēmi) which means to send away. Paul uses this word in 1 Corinthians 7:11 when he says:

10 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be

reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. – 1Co 7:10-11

The word translated as “divorce” is the same word Jesus uses here in Matthew 24:40. The idea is that He will sever ties with some people.

Jesus tells us that two men will be in a field working. When He returns, He will take one of them to be with Him, but with the other He will sever all ties.

Verse 41

Men will not be the only ones to experience God’s judgement on the final day. As with the men who were working in a field, so it will be with women grinding at the mill. Jesus will draw one of those women to Himself but reject the other.

This decision to draw one to Himself and reject the other is not an arbitrary decision on Christ's part. He knows who belongs to Him and who does not.

Verse 42

Because the day of Jesus' return is unknown to anyone but the Father, He challenges us to "stay awake." The idea is that we should always be vigilant and prepared for His return. We need to make the best use of our time, for we never know when the day will come when He returns or calls us to Himself.

While not every one of us will be alive on the day of His appearance, each of us has an appointment with Him. We may be called into His presence before He returns. We only have been allotted a certain number of days. We must be faithful to what He has given and live each day as if it were our last.

Verse 43

Imagine you had information that a thief would break into your house on a certain day and time. What would you do? According to Jesus, the most natural and responsible thing for the master of the house to do was to defend the home from that invasion. The master would stay awake in preparation for the thief.

Jesus uses this illustration to show us that we, too, need to be alert and ready for His return. If we would naturally protect our earthly belongings by staying awake all night if necessary, how much more important is it for us to be ready for the return of Jesus Christ?

Understand that our great enemy Satan is always seeking to steal from us. He and his evil spirits watch for every opportunity to break and strip us of our spiritual blessing. If we want to be

ready for the return of Christ, we will never let down our guard.

Verse 44

Because we do not know when the Lord Jesus will return, we must always be ready. Notice what Jesus tells His disciples here: "You also must be ready." Let me say two things about this phrase.

First, Jesus is issuing a command here. He is telling us to be ready for when He comes. If we are not prepared, we have failed to obey His command. Second, the words "be ready" imply a state of being. We live each day ready for His return. When there is an obstacle to this readiness, we remove it, seek forgiveness and continue in our state of readiness.

It would be easy for us to presume upon the grace of Christ. We know Him as a forgiving God and assume that He will forgive all our shortcomings in the end. Jesus tells us, however, that knowing the grace of Christ should never lead us to sin. His command here is to be ready for when He returns. If we are not prepared, we will have to answer to Him. This rules out compromise in our Christian walk. It banishes laziness and complacency. We must make use of the time we have. We must honour Him by being ready, serving to our utmost capacity and having lived as He has required.

This state of readiness is to be how we live. Because we do not know the day or moment Christ will return, we live every day and every moment in light of this reality. Being prepared for His second coming is our great desire in this life.

Verse 45

Jesus illustrates the importance of being ready using a servant and master relationship. He underlines here the connection between being prepared and faithfulness.

The master sets his servant over his household affairs. One of the servant's obligations is to prepare food for the family at the proper time. Of course, as servants of God, we have various responsibilities, gifts and callings. We have only a certain amount of time to use these gifts before Jesus returns. The measure of our readiness is found in how faithful we have been with the responsibilities God has given us in the time allotted.

Verse 46

Jesus tells us that there is a blessing for every servant who is found faithful

when He returns. What would you think if an employee you hired to do a job but when you came back at the end of the day to check with them, you found that they had not done what you had asked them to do?

Jesus has called us and given us a responsibility for the kingdom. We must fulfill that role here on this earth. Will He find us faithful when He returns?

We are not told the nature of the blessing that falls to the faithful servant, but we can be assured that the smile of our Lord's approval will make every effort worthwhile.

Verse 47

Continuing with His illustration of the faithful servant, Jesus tells us that when that master sees that his servants have been carefully fulfilling all their

duties, he will give them more responsibility by setting them over his possessions.

We give greater responsibility to those who are faithful in small things. Jesus, Himself said:

10 "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? – Lk 16:10-11

We should not read too much into this illustration. It is designed to show us how on this earth, we reward faithfulness. Just as earthly masters honour faithful servants, God will honour those who have been diligent in their calling on this earth. To be ready for His return is to be faithful to our calling.

Verse 48

Not all servants are faithful. Jesus speaks here of a servant who says, "My master is delayed." This servant has other interests that take up their attention. They are not wholly devoted to the cause of the master. They certainly want to appear faithful, and when the master is present, they are busy working. Their devotion to the cause of the master, however, is not such that they will give themselves entirely to it whether anyone sees them or not. They serve when it is necessary and convenient.

Verse 49

The servant who says the master delays takes liberties. Jesus tells us that he beats his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards. These are things the servant would never do if the

master were present. Notice that Jesus accuses this ungodly servant of two things.

First, he beats his fellow servants. That is to say, he mistreats and dishonours them. When this happens, not only does the unfaithful servant shirk his responsibilities, but he also hinders brothers and sisters who want to be faithful. For the kingdom's work to advance as God intends, we must learn to work together as members of the body. The unfaithful servant cannot put aside their ideas to work with his fellow servants. Jealousy, bitterness, anger, or pride in a servant of God can hinder the work God intends us to do. Faithful servants will learn to work with their fellow workers by putting aside anything that hinders the kingdom's cause.

The second accusation of Jesus toward the unfaithful servant is that he ate and

drank with drunkards. This implies a wasting of time with those who do not have the same principles. Instead of faithful service to the master, these individuals waste their time on frivolous entertainment and ungodly companionship. True and faithful servants will be disciplined in the use of time and the company they keep. Their great priority is to advance the kingdom of God and to be faithful to Him. They manage their time and company well to accomplish what God calls them to do.

Verse 50

Jesus reminds us in this parable that the day will come when the master returns. He would return when that unfaithful servant did not expect him. This is true for us all. We do not know the day or time of the Lord's coming. The question, however, is whether He

will find us faithfully doing what He has called us to do.

Verse 51

The response of the master who returned to find his servant unfaithful and hindering the work of his kingdom is very harsh. Jesus tells us that he cut that unfaithful servant to pieces for his hypocrisy and cast him into the place where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This servant hindered the work of the kingdom of God. He was not faithful to do what God had called him to do.

The response of the master shows us just how seriously he took the work. The seriousness of the Lord Jesus about the work of the kingdom is such that He willingly died to make it possible. Shall we take this work any

less seriously? There are grave
consequences for unfaithfulness.

MATTHEW 25

Verse 1

In this section, the Lord Jesus takes a moment to compare the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom. It appears that the groom would go to the bride's home to claim his bride. When he arrived, there would be a ceremony followed by a procession through the streets where the groom would meet the bridesmaids, who would then accompany him and his wife to his home, where there would be a great feast. This procession generally took place in the evening.

At this point in the parable, the ten virgin bridesmaids await the completion of the wedding ceremony to join the groom with his bride on the way to his home and the great feast.

Verse 2

The parable focuses not on the bridegroom or bride but on the ten virgins who waited for the bridegroom to show up on the way to his home for the wedding feast.

Verse 2 tells us that of the ten virgins, five were wise, and five were foolish. This wisdom and foolishness was not so much a reflection on their character as it was on a particular decision they had made.

Verse 3

The foolishness Jesus speaks about is related to a decision these young ladies

had made regarding their lamps. Understand that the wedding feast took place in the evening. It was important, therefore, that these women had lamps with them. The foolish virgins brought their lamp but did not bring any extra oil.

Verse 4

The five wise virgins brought their lamp and flasks with extra oil in case what was in their lamp burned out. They prepared for running out of oil. The wisdom of these young women is seen in how they thought ahead.

Verse 5

These ten virgins waited for the bridegroom's arrival when they would accompany him and his bride to the feast at his home. Notice, however, that the bridegroom was delayed, and the

young ladies became very tired and fell asleep. Notice that all of them fell asleep. No distinction is made here between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins.

Verse 6

We see here the reason the young virgins fell asleep. It was at midnight that a cry rang out: "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." It would be at this point that these ten chosen virgins would have to rise from their sleep to fulfill their responsibility to the bridegroom and his bride.

Verse 7

Rising from their sleep, the young virgins reached for their lamps and trimmed the wick so the light would be clean and bright. Notice here that all of the ladies trimmed their lamps and

prepared themselves to greet the bridegroom. All lamps were still burning at this time.

Verse 8

It was at this point that the five foolish virgins recognized their error. They saw that their lamps were running low on oil and, speaking to their friends, said: "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." While their lamps were still lit to greet the bridegroom, they would run out before the celebrations were over.

Understand from verse 5 that the bridegroom is delayed. To be fair, these five foolish virgins likely had not anticipated such a delay. Possibly under normal circumstances, they would have had sufficient oil, but this was not the case here. That delay meant that they were going to run out of oil.

Verse 9

Notice the response of the wise virgins.

"Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves."

At first glance, this response may seem to be hard. Consider the words of the wise virgins more carefully, however. Notice the phrase: "Since there will not be enough for us and for you." The wise virgins had thought ahead and brought extra oil. Once again, as they think ahead, they realize that if they gave the oil they had to the foolish virgins, all of them would run out. In other words, the remaining oil would not keep all the lamps lit until their obligations were fulfilled. Better to have five lamps lit, fulfilling their role, than no lamps lit at all. There is great wisdom in these words.

Instead, the wise virgins tell the foolish ones to go to the merchant and buy more oil so that all the lamps remained lit for the bridegroom.

Verse 10

The foolish virgins, with no other alternative, took the advice of their wise friends and went off to the merchant to buy more oil. While they were buying oil, however, the bridegroom arrived. The five wise virgins greeted the bridegroom as was expected and accompanied him to the marriage feast. When they arrived at the home, the door was shut, and the feast began.

The foolish virgins had failed in their obligations by not preparing ahead. They were not there to greet the bridegroom when he arrived. They did

not accompany him with joy and celebration as they had been called to do.

Verse 11

It was after the door was shut that the foolish virgins came to the home and knocked, pleading with the lord of the house to let them in. Understand that these foolish virgins dress up for the occasion like their friends. They had waited until midnight in the cold night air for him to arrive. The only difference was that they had not anticipated such a late night and had not brought sufficient oil. It was that lack of anticipation, however, that shut them out. They were not prepared when that moment finally arrived. They fell short of their obligations and were not present to greet the bridegroom when he drew near.

Anticipation is a very important quality in every believer. Anticipating the Lord's return at any moment will drive us to be faithful. Understanding that He could come today or take us to be with Him changes how we live.

Verse 12

The words of the lord of the house are somewhat surprising. "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." We should not see this in the sense that the lord of the house did not know who these foolish virgins were. They would have likely explained this to him. The idea here is that he was telling them that by their actions they had insulted the bridegroom and were no longer considered part of the assembly that had gathered that day. Their unfaithfulness and severed all ties with the bridegroom and the celebration of that day.

Verse 13

Jesus comes now to the whole point of the parable. "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." The one clear truth we must take from this parable is that we must always live in readiness for Christ's return. One of the key principles for interpreting a parable is not to go beyond the intention of the one who tells it. We can quickly misinterpret the parable if we try to find symbolism in every aspect. Jesus tells us that the whole purpose of the parable is to warn us to be ready for His return. Because we do not know the day or hour He will return, we must always be prepared.

Jesus tells many parables about the master returning to find his servants not being faithful to the tasks he had given them. There is never a time for us to slack off our duty as servants of God. We are to live each day

anticipating His return or our going to Him. Not one of us knows what time is left for us. The day is coming, however, when we will stand before our Master to give an account of our actions. Luke puts it this way:

8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" – Lk 18:8

Verse 14

Jesus has been speaking about the kingdom of God and the importance of being ready for His return. He illustrated this in the first part of the chapter by the parable of the ten virgins. In this verse, Jesus uses a second parable to teach the importance of preparing for His second coming.

The verse begins with the words: "For it will be like." This refers to what He said in verse 1 about the kingdom of God. He continues on this same theme here.

The illustration Jesus uses is of a man going away on a journey. Before leaving, he entrusts his property to his servants. They were to care for His business and belongings in his absence.

Verse 15

Notice something about this master. He knew his servants and what they were able to handle. He does not distribute the responsibility evenly. He gives one servant five talents, another two and only one to the third. The verse tells us that he did this according to each servant's ability. He left, knowing he had not given anyone anything beyond his means.

Understand here that this did not mean that the responsibility would be easy. There are many times when I feel the weight of responsibility God has given me. There would be discipline and hard work ahead for these servants, but the master knew their ability and entrusted these talents to them.

Verse 16

Notice what the servant responsible for five talents did with his talents. Jesus tells us that he traded with them and made five more talents. He doubled the master's investment.

There is an important lesson for us here. God does not give us gifts, so we can sit on them and return them exactly as He gave them to us. He expects to profit from what He has given us. He expects that we will use these gifts to expand his investment for

the sake of His kingdom. If we are not bearing fruit and increasing the master's investment in us, then we are misusing the gifts God has given us.

Verse 17

The servant, given two talents, also used them to double the master's investment. Notice that the first and second servants both doubled what the master had given them. While the amount given them was different both proved to be faithful.

It is all too easy for us to look at the one who had five talents and see him as being more faithful because he made five talents compared to the second servant's two. God does not look at things this way. While God does not give us all the same responsibility, it is for us to use whatever He gives to honour Him.

Verse 18

Finally, we have the record of what the third servant did with his one talent. Jesus tells us that he dug a hole in the ground and hid it there for safekeeping. This third servant did not lose the master's talent. He would return it to him just as he had left it. He protected that talent and kept it safe until his master returned. Unlike the others, however, he did not use that talent or double the master's investment.

Verse 19

Jesus tells us that after a long period, the master returned to "settle his accounts" with each servant. The word used here is συναίρω (sunaíró) which refers to speaking to someone about a debt or resolving a debt. This word shows us that when the master gave his talents to the servants, he expected

something in return. These servants were hired to increase the master's wealth. He sits down now with each of the servants to see what they have accomplished with what he had given them.

The principle Jesus is teaching is that the spiritual gifts He has given to us are for one purpose alone. That is to increase the master's benefit. If we are not using these gifts for the expansion of His kingdom and glory, we are failing to use them as intended.

Verse 20

The master sits down first with the servant to whom he had entrusted five talents. This servant brought five more talents, showing he had doubled the master's initial investment.

Verse 21

The master responds favourably to the first servant, telling him he has done well. He assured him he was pleased with his work and called him a good and faithful servant. As a reward for his excellent service, the master promotes him and gives him even greater responsibility.

Notice the phrase: "Enter into the joy of your master." Some interpret this to mean that the faithful believer will be given a place in heaven. While this is certainly true, the same is true for the believer who is not so reliable. Consider what Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:15:

15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. – 1Co 3:15

It is not the faithful use of our spiritual gifts that will guarantee us a place in

heaven but the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

The phrase “enter into the joy of your master” may best be understood differently. What was the joy of the master in this parable? It was in the faithfulness of the servant who had doubled his investment. Consider the gardener who plants his field with wheat and returns to see it has produced an abundant harvest. Listen to what Jesus Himself said in John 15:8:

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. – Jn 15:8

The Father rejoices in the faithfulness of His servants who lift His name and bear an abundant harvest for His glory. When the master says, “Enter into the joy of your master,” he approves their work. He is calling them to experience

his joy and delight in them. Could there be any greater reward than to know that our efforts have delighted the heart of the Father?

Verse 22

The servant, entrusted with two talents, reports that he has made another two. Though the amount assigned to him differed, he also doubled his master's income.

Verse 23

The master's response to the second servant is identical to the first. He called him a good and faithful servant and promoted him, giving him greater responsibility. As with the first servant, the master tells him to "Enter into the joy of his master" (see notes on verse 22). That is to say; he was to

experience the delight and happiness of the master in him and his work.

Verse 24

We come now to the third servant. Standing before the master, he told him how he knew him to be a hard man reaping what he had not sown and gathering what he had not scattered.

This master hired servants to do the work for him. These men were paid to sow the field with grain or to plant the garden with vegetables. The master paid them for this and harvested for himself what they had sown and cared for during the planting season. It was the concern of the master that he got what he paid for. He wanted an abundant crop each year.

What do the words of this servant tell us? They tell us that he knew why he

was hired. He was hired to sow and gather an abundant crop for his master. He knew that the master would return at harvest time to claim what they had worked so hard to achieve.

Are you willing to work under these terms? Will you work for His glory alone? Will you surrender all you have achieved to Him? Will you be content to rejoice His heart?

Verse 25

The third servant continues his conversation with the master. He tells him that he is afraid. The cause of this fear was that the master demanded an increase in what he had given him. He feared not being able to meet up to His standard. He feared failure and didn't feel qualified to do the task the Lord had given him to do.

Because he was afraid, this third servant hid his talent in the ground. He kept it safe but did not invest it or take any risks with it. Standing there before the master, he returned the one unused talent he had been given.

I am afraid that there are many believers like this today. They do not feel their gifts could be useful to the master, so instead of using them, they bury and never use them. Sometimes they compare their gifts to those of others around them. This may be why Jesus speaks here about three servants instead of one. Each servant was given a different number of talents. Every servant, however, whether he had five, three or just one talent, was given that talent to invest for the master. It is not a matter of how many gifts you have but whether you use the gifts you have.

Verse 26

Notice the response of the master to this third servant. He calls him “wicked and slothful.” These are strong words. Jesus tells us that it is wicked not to use the gifts He has given us. In other words, to hide our gifts and not use them for His glory is a sin for which we will one day have to answer to Him. Not only is it a sin to bury our talent, but it is also slothful. In other words, we could not be bothered to work for the Lord and His benefit.

Notice second that this servant had already confessed that he knew the master would demand an accounting from him, but he chose not to do anything about it. This, according to the master, was open rebellion, laziness and evil.

Verse 27

The master counsels the third servant in what he already knows. He told him that he should have invested this money with the bankers so that it could be returned with interest.

By using the illustration of investing in a bank, Jesus is making an important statement. It is the investor who owns the money invested. Though these investors may give the money to the bank, the money does not belong to the bank and may be withdrawn upon demand. Similarly, the gifts Jesus has given us are His investment in us. These gifts are given to us to use, but they belong to God. They are given to us to make a profit on behalf of their owner.

Your gifts are not yours to claim. They are an investment in your life by God. He expects to receive a return on this investment.

Verse 28

Notice the response of the master to the unfaithful servant. He took the talent he had given him and gave it to the one who had ten talents. He had proven his faithfulness in using five talents, so the master knew he could entrust him with one more.

If you entrust your finances to someone, would you not give them to someone with a reputation for honesty, hard work and loyalty? Why should the Lord assign His resources to those who will misuse them or not use them at all?

Verse 29

Jesus reveals the parable's lesson here: Everyone who has will be given more. But those who do not have, even what they do have, will be stripped from them. What is Jesus teaching here?

Initially, the words of Jesus seem to be unfair. He will give to those who already have but take from those who do not have. The context, however, reveals Jesus' intent.

To have, in this sense, is to be entrusted with something. That trust is merited by faithful service. The master, in this parable, gives to those who have proven to be devoted to what he entrusted them. Those who have been charged with much and have proven faithful to that responsibility will be given even more responsibility.

On the other hand, those who have not proven to be faithful will find that the responsibilities they have been given will be taken from them and given to someone else who will use them for the glory of the Lord. Why should God increase your ministry when you have not been faithful in what He has already given you?

Verse 30

Jesus tells us that those who have not been faithful will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Outer darkness is a place far from the light of God's glory. It is a metaphor for hell and separation from God and His blessing and presence.

This outer darkness is also described as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. This description reveals the pain and suffering in this place of darkness and separation from God's light.

We should not take this to mean that if we don't use our spiritual gifts, we are going to hell. The intention of Jesus here is to reveal the evil heart that does not live for the glory of God. It is a rebellious heart that knows its obligation but finds no time or energy

to obey. It is a heart that ultimately cares nothing for the kingdom of God, invests nothing in it and focuses instead on its own passions and desires. If this is your heart, you must examine whether you belong to Jesus and know His life in you.

Verse 31

Jesus begins a section related to what will happen at his second coming. Notice three details here.

First, the Son of Man will come in His glory. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth for the first time, He came as a baby, humble and unnoticed by many. This will not be the case when He returns. He will come very publicly in all His glory. He will come as the Lord of lords, and every knee will bow before Him.

Second, when the Lord Jesus returns, He will appear with all the angels. While the angels did announce His first coming, Jesus was born in a stable with only Mary and Joseph present. This will not be the case when He returns. There will be a whole host of angels accompanying Him on that occasion. Finally, Jesus tells us that when he returns, He will sit on His glorious throne. The throne Jesus speaks of here is a throne of authority and judgment. While there may be a physical throne, it is more important here to understand what this throne represents. It represents the reign of Jesus Christ and his judgement of evil and sin. When Jesus comes the second time, He comes to judge the world and to take His rightful place as Lord of lords and King of kings in a glorious and eternal reign.

Verse 32

When Jesus returns He will gather the nations before Him. In other words, people from every nation will stand before Him. We are not told how this will happen and what that will look like.

Notice the purpose of this gathering. Jesus will “separate people one from another.” Jesus illustrates this principle by speaking about the separation of sheep and goats. Both sheep and goats fed in the same pasture but it appears they were not kept in the same fold at night, so the shepherd would separate them at night and send them to their separate quarters.

Sheep seem to represent the children of God in Scripture. The Lord is pictured as a great Shepherd for His sheep. Unbelievers, on the other hand were often seen as goats. Jesus separates those who belong to Him from those who don't.

Verse 33

Notice what happens to the sheep and the goats. Jesus places the sheep on His right but the goats on His left. If a king wanted to honour someone, he would place them on his right hand side. The right hand was the side of favour.

Verse 34

Turning to those on his right, the Lord Jesus will say: 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Notice several details here in these words.

First, those who stood at the right had been blessed by the Father. The sheep belonged to the Good Shepherd, and He cared for them. There is no reference here to the goodness,

wisdom or efforts of the sheep. All glory goes to the Father, who was the source of all their blessing.

Second, those on the right hand would inherit the kingdom. The kingdom did not belong to the goats. Only the sheep would inherit the kingdom of God. An inheritance is not based so much on merit but on position. It is not a reward for faithful service but a privilege given to children of the Father.

Finally, the kingdom was prepared for these sheep from the foundation of the world. In other words, it was the purpose of God to have a family and to bless that family with an inheritance and kingdom. He worked to that end from creation, calling out a people and providing for their salvation.

Verse 35

In this context, Jesus describes the separation of the sheep and the goats. He shows us here that there was indeed a difference between these two groups. He illustrates this here by telling the sheep that when He was hungry, they gave Him food. When he was thirsty, they gave him a drink. When He was a stranger, they welcomed Him. The sheep cared for the hungry, thirsty and strangers. There was something in their nature that made them do this. Those who belong to Jesus Christ shared His heart for the needy and afflicted.

Verse 36

Jesus continues here by telling the sheep that when He was naked, they clothed him. When he was sick, they visited him, and when he was in prison, they came to see Him. Once again, we see the heart of compassion in these

sheep. Their father's blood flows in them. They look like their Father, who demonstrates the same qualities.

Verse 37

The response of the sheep is quite interesting. They are baffled by the fact that Jesus tells them that when He was hungry, they fed Him, and when He was thirsty, they gave Him to drink. They have no recollection of ever doing so. It is as if what they did was so natural they did not know they were doing anything special. They just served from a heart of compassion and mercy.

Verse 38

The sheep question the Lord about when they saw Him as a stranger and welcomed Him. They ask for further clarification on when they saw Him

naked and clothed Him. They had no sense they were serving God. They just demonstrated compassion for their fellow human being in need. They did not serve their fellow human to be rewarded, they did so because it was the right thing to do.

Verse 39

Again, the sheep have no recollection of ever ministering to the Lord when he was sick or in prison. Their heart was moved by the plight of their brother and sister, and they responded in loving kindness. There is a quality of humility, gentleness and kindness to these sheep. They are not self-seeking but willing to sacrifice for those in need. They reflect the heart of the Father whose children they are.

Verse 40

Notice the response of the King to the sheep's queries. He tells them that as they did it to one of the least of his brother, they did it for him.

The king speaks particularly here about the "least" of his brothers. These brothers were hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick and imprisoned. The sheep, however, cared nothing for their status in society. They treated them with respect and dignity and provided for their needs.

Jesus teaches the sheep here that by caring for His creation, they were caring for Him. By ministering to a brother in need, they also touched His heart.

While Jesus is not sick, hungry, thirsty, a stranger, imprisoned, or needy in any way, He experiences our pain and empathizes with us in these needs. His heart grieves for our pain and suffering. He feels our affliction. By ministering to

a brother or sister in need, we minister to His affliction on their behalf. What mother is not relieved when her child is healed from a disease? There have been times as a pastor when I have wished that I could reach down into the very core of a member of my church and take away their pain and grief. My heart rejoices when they have victory and overcome. The heart of Christ rejoices with those who rejoice and grieves with those who suffer. To minister to those for whom the heart of God grieves is to minister to Himself.

Verse 41

Turning to the goats on his left, the King will tell them to “depart from him.” The idea is that he had nothing to do with them. They were to leave Him for the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Their inheritance was with their their father, the devil, and

they would be with him throughout all eternity in the eternal fire. While the heart of God is compassionate and kind, it is also just and fair. Some will experience His wrath and judgement.

Verse 42

The king shows us why he sent these goats into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and His angels. He was hungry, and the goats did not give him food. He was thirsty, and they did not give him anything to drink. In contrast to the sheep, the nature of the goats was very different. They neglected the needs around them, demonstrating a lack of compassion. They kept everything for themselves, revealing a selfish and unfeeling heart. People suffered all around them, but they took no notice.

Verse 43

The goats did not welcome strangers. The naked were left in their shame. The sick continued to suffer, and the prisoner was ignored. Such was life among the goats. Their nature was to be uncaring and unconcerned. They did not pity the afflicted, nor did they hear the cries of those who suffered. They did not have the heart of God. They lived for themselves. They demonstrated by their actions and attitudes that they did not belong to God.

Verse 44

The goats ask the Lord when they saw him hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison and did not minister to Him. The goats have no awareness of the presence of God nor the suffering of His people.

Verse 45

The Lord responds by telling the goats that when they ignored those in need, they ignored Him. When they rejected the cries of the helpless, they rejected Him. The goats were deaf to the call of God on their lives. They were blind to the pain and suffering He revealed to them. They had a selfish and uncaring nature and did not reflect the heart of God.

Verse 46

Jesus tells us that the goats would go away into eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life. Some teach that punishment in hell is not forever. Note, however, that Jesus speaks of eternal life and eternal punishment here in this verse. Just as life in the presence of Christ has no end, so will the punishment of the wicked.

MATTHEW 26

Verse 1

Jesus knew that His time on earth was coming to an end. In the last chapter, He spent time warning His listeners of the coming judgement. Having completed this discussion, He speaks privately to His disciples.

Verse 2

Speaking to His disciples, the Lord Jesus reminds them that the Passover was in two days. This was a celebration of the time the angel of death passed over the children of Israel who had the blood of a lamb painted on their

doorposts but destroyed every firstborn of the Egyptians.

Jesus tells His disciples here that it would be during this celebration that the Son of Man would be delivered over to be crucified. We need to see the significance of Jesus being crucified at this time. Just as a lamb was slain in Egypt to save the people of God from the angel of death, so Jesus, the Lamb of God would be slain, to save His people from the judgement of God. He would be the Passover lamb.

Verse 3

Matthew tells us that the event Jesus predicted was even at that moment being set in place. The chief priests and elders gathered in the palace of the high priest Caiaphas.

The elders of the people were civil authorities. The group that gathered,

therefore, was comprised of both religious and political leaders. By gathering in the home of Caiaphas, these leaders were meeting out of public view. They may have wanted to keep their intentions secret and away from the people's attention.

Verse 4

The goal of the meeting of these civil and religious authorities was very clear. They were plotting together about how to arrest Jesus "by stealth" to kill Him.

Their objective was to "arrest Jesus by stealth. They wanted to arrest Him in a way that would not draw attention to themselves or reveal their intentions.

The verse tells us that their predetermined intention was to kill Jesus. This was their purpose even before Jesus was tried. They had

already decided on this matter and were determined to find any way possible to have Him killed.

Verse 5

One of the decisions at that meeting was that they would not arrest Jesus during the Passover. This was because they knew He had a following, and with all the people in Jerusalem at that time, Jesus' arrest might cause an uproar among the people. They could not afford to cause such a commotion as this would place them at odds with the Roman authorities and draw too much attention to what they were doing. The matter would be done quietly and with as much discretion as possible.

Verse 6

As the Jewish religious and civil leaders plotted to kill Him, Jesus was at the

home of Simon, the leper in Bethany. John's gospel tells us that Bethany was near Jerusalem:

18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, – Jn 11:18

The identity of Simon, the leper, is somewhat of a mystery. He may have been a man Jesus had healed. It is not likely that Simon had leprosy when Jesus was staying with him; otherwise, he would not have been free to offer hospitality to Him.

Verse 7

While Jesus was at Simon's home, a woman entered with an alabaster flask. Alabaster is a soft rock that can be carved into different shapes. In this case, it had been carved into a stone flask that contained ointment.

Matthew tells us that the ointment in the alabaster flask was very expensive. The fact that this woman had such ointment shows she was not poor.

As Jesus was seated at the table, this woman came in and poured in on His head. While we are not told what her intention was in doing this, we see that she placed great value on Jesus and was willing to sacrifice something of such importance to anoint His head.

Verse 8

The disciples' reaction to this woman's act was to be "indignant." The Greek word used here is ἀγανακτέω (aganaktéō), which comes from the words ágan, meaning very much and áchthos meaning pain, grief or oppression. In other words, the disciples experienced deep sorrow and

hurt when they saw what this woman had done.

Matthew tells us the reason for this grief. They saw what she did as a waste. Her act was extravagant.

Verse 9

It was the disciples' opinion that the ointment could have been better used by selling it and giving it to the poor among them.

While their burden for the poor is commendable, this woman intended to honour the Lord Jesus with this gift. She wanted to express her deep love and devotion to Him by anointing Him with this ointment.

Verse 10

Notice Jesus' response to the disciples' indignation. He rebuked His disciples

for troubling the woman.

We can only imagine what this woman felt when the disciples complained about her wasting such a precious gift by pouring it on Jesus' head. She likely did not expect such a negative response.

Jesus told the disciples that day, however, that what the woman did was a "beautiful thing." Jesus received her extravagant gift with joy. He saw her heart and the devotion with which she gave her gift and accepted it with delight.

Jesus does not diminish the importance of giving to the poor here. He recognizes the woman's intention as a beautiful thing. It is easy for us to judge the actions and intent of another. This judgement, however, is best left to God.

Verse 11

Jesus reminded the disciples that they would always have the poor in their midst, but He would not always be with them. Jesus tells His disciples that while He would continue to be with them in spirit, He would soon die and be with His Father in heaven. He would no longer be with them in body.

Verse 12

Jesus informed His disciples that this woman was preparing his physical body for burial by anointing His head. It was the custom of the Jews to anoint the bodies of their dead as they were prepared for burial. Such an anointing was not considered wasteful but a means of showing respect.

It is uncertain if the woman knew that Jesus would shortly die. What is clear is

that she seems to be led to perform this act of respect for Jesus in the presence of His followers. This was a confirmation from the Spirit of what Jesus had told the disciples about His death.

Verse 13

It is hard to say what the disciples' response was to Jesus' declaration that the woman had anointed Him for his burial. Jesus told them, however, that their anger toward her was unjustified and that not only was her act a "beautiful thing," but she would be remembered worldwide for what she had done for Him.

This woman gave the best she had. God led her to confirm the truth Jesus declared about His death. By anointing Jesus, she expressed the Father's love for His Son. I am also convinced she

encouraged our Saviour as He faced what was ahead.

Verse 14

While the woman with the alabaster flask anointed Jesus for His burial, one of His disciples went to the chief priests who had been plotting to kill Jesus. There may be a connection here between the betrayal of Judas Iscariot and the anointing of Jesus. Remember that this waste of expensive ointment angered the disciples.

We have a record in John 12 of an incident in Bethany where Jesus was at a dinner in Bethany six days before the Passover. Mary took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. John tells us that Judas Iscariot expressed his disapproval of this waste, saying it

could have been sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor. John adds a note to this story telling us that Judas Iscariot's real concern was not for the poor but because he was in charge of the money and would help himself occasionally (see John 12:1-6).

Was it because of this that Judas determined to break with Jesus and the disciples? What is clear is that the act of the woman who anointed Jesus with her expensive perfume set into motion the final events leading up to His arrest.

Verse 15

Going to the chief priests, Judas Iscariot asked them what they would give him to deliver Jesus over to them. His intention here was to profit from his betrayal. He loved money more than he loved his Master. Satan was behind this

and provided the chief priests and the elders of the people the opportunity they needed to arrest Jesus.

The chief priests offered Judas thirty pieces of silver if he would help them capture Jesus. The Law of Moses required that this amount be paid by the owner of an ox that gored another man's slave. In reality, it was not very much for the Saviour of the world. It was an indication of what the chief priest thought of Jesus.

Verse 16

Accepting the price of thirty pieces of silver, Judas began to watch for opportunities to betray Jesus. He walked among the disciples as a friend but secretly waited for this moment to release them into the hands of their enemy.

It has often been a subject of interest for me that the Lord Jesus would work alongside a man like Judas, a thief and betrayer. The reality of the matter, however, is that as long as we live in this world, we will walk side by side with people like Judas. In some cases, they are legitimately interested in the cause of Christ though they do not truly know Him. In other cases, they are instruments of Satan sent to cause division. We need the wisdom and discernment of God as we seek to advance His kingdom. Not everyone who calls himself a disciple walks faithfully with our Lord.

Verse 17

Verse 17 recounts what took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover celebrated the day that the angel of death passed over the Israelite homes in Egypt but killed the

firstborn of all the inhabitants of the land who did not paint the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. Immediately following the Passover, the Jews celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This occurred on the day after the Passover and commemorated when the children of Israel were released from bondage and went out into the wilderness with unleavened bread.

17 And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. 18 In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.

19 For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person

will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. – Ex 12:17-19

By the time of Jesus, the celebration of Passover included the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The disciples, asking Jesus where He wanted to eat the Passover, understood this Feast to be part of the Passover celebration.

Verse 18

In response to the disciples' question, Jesus tells them to go into the city "to a certain man." Matthew does not explain this further. In Mark's record of this event, however, Jesus gave them the means to recognize this man:

13 And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water

*will meet you. Follow him, – Mk
14:13*

According to Mark, the disciples would recognize this man by the fact that he was carrying a jar of water. The disciples were to approach him and tell him that the Teacher wanted to keep the Passover with His disciples at His house.

Verse 19

The disciples did what Jesus told them to do and found the man just as He had said. The man agreed to have Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Passover at his home, so the disciples prepared the meal and waited for the arrival of Jesus and the other disciples.

Verse 20

Jesus and the disciples arrived at the home and reclined at the table to eat. It was the custom of the day for the Jews to eat in a reclined position.

Verse 21

It was during this meal that the Lord Jesus said: "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

The word translated as "betray" in the original language is παραδίδωμι (paradídōmi) which comes from two words. The word pará means to the side of or over to. The word dídōmi means to give. The idea is that one of the disciples would give Jesus over to the enemy. It would have been extremely difficult to understand what Jesus said that day. This group had ministered with Him for three years, and it would have been quite a shock to hear that one of them would turn on

them and betray the Lord Jesus to the enemy to be killed. In their minds, nothing could have been worse than this.

Verse 22

Notice the disciples' response to the news that one of them would betray Jesus.

First, they were "very sorrowful." The word "very" is σφόδρα (sphódra), which means greatly or very much. The King James translators tried to capture this using the word "extremely." The idea is that this word from Jesus brought great grief to their hearts. To think that one of them would betray the Lord was more than they could bear.

Second, the disciples began to ask "one after another, 'Is it I, Lord?'" It is striking that they do not begin to point

fingers at each other. Instead, each wanted to know that it was not them.

Do we realize how frail we are as human beings? Do we understand that even the great fall sometimes flat on their faces? No matter how mature we are in the Lord, we are often one decision away from a great fall. We must constantly be on our guard, lest we fail our Lord.

Verse 23

Jesus told His disciples that it was the one who had dipped his hand in the dish with him who would betray Him. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jews would eat bitter herbs. To lessen the bitterness of these herbs, they would dip them in a mixture of fruit, nuts and vinegar. Because having a single bowl for dipping was not convenient, several smaller bowls with

the dip were placed around the table and shared by people sitting close to each other. Judas Iscariot was close to Jesus and had been dipping in the same bowl.

The picture before us is one of sharing a common meal and dipping one's food in the same bowl. It revealed that these men were close and had many things in common. Yet the person who dipped in the same bowl as Jesus had murderous intents. This was the worst form of betrayal. It was the betrayal of a trusted friend and co-worker. The disciples would have immediately known the betrayer's identity by these words of Jesus.

Verse 24

Notice two details here in this verse. First, the Lord Jesus accepted the role the Father had given Him to play in the

salvation of His people. Observe what he says:

24 The Son of Man goes as it is written of him,

From the beginning of time, prophets proclaimed that the Messiah would lay down His life for the salvation of His people. This was the purpose of God. Jesus came to this earth to accomplish that purpose. He was going to go to the cross because it was in the plan of Father that He do so. Jesus accepted this reality and faced it willingly.

While it was the purpose of God that the Son of Man go to the cross and die for the sins of His people, notice second the warning Jesus issues to Judas, who would betray Him:

"but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would

have been better for that man if he had not been born."

The fact that the prophets predicted Jesus' crucifixion did not remove the guilt from the one who betrayed Him. He could not say, "I was destined to do this, so I am without guilt." The betrayal of Judas was an evil act. By handing Jesus over to the enemy, Judas made himself a betrayer. He would answer to God for this sin. I have met individuals who excuse their sins by saying, "This is how God made me." There is no doubt that we may be born with certain tendencies, but that does not mean that God wants you to live accordingly. He expects us to overcome the sin that is natural to us in the strength of His Spirit and live in victory over it.

Judas surrendered to Satan and betrayed the Lord. The Old Testament prophesied that this would happen. He

could not blame Satan or the prophecies of Scripture. He surrendered to evil and would answer for it.

The seriousness of Judas' betrayal is seen in the words of Jesus: "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas would obtain thirty pieces of silver for handing Jesus over, but it would cost him his soul. He would stand before the Father as the one who delivered His Son to be killed.

Verse 25

There is a brief interaction here between Jesus and Judas, the betrayer. Judas asked Jesus if it was he who would betray him. Notice that he called him Rabbi. The Greek word ῥαββί (rabbí) refers to a teacher or master. Though he confessed him as his teacher, those words meant very little in light of his betrayal. You can confess

Jesus as Master and betray Him. You can call Him Lord and not walk in submission to Him. Such is the case for Judas.

The question, "Is it I, Rabbi?" is one to which Judas needed no answer. He had already spoken to the chief priests about handing Jesus over and was now waiting for the appropriate moment. By asking the question, Judas confirmed that Jesus knew what He was doing. His purpose was no longer hidden. At that moment, Judas had one of two options. He could have confessed his sin and repented. Or he could determine to proceed with the deed and betray the Lord. Judas decided to go ahead with his plan. We can imagine that the relationship between Judas and the other disciples would not be the same from that moment on.

Verse 26

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus took a piece of bread, blessed it and handed it to the disciples. Matthew does not give us the specifics of how this bread was broken. John Gill, in his commentary on this verse, cites the following:

"He that broke the bread, put a piece before everyone, and the other takes it in his hand; and he that breaks, does not give it into the hand of the eater, unless he is a mourner; and he that breaks, stretches out his hand first and eats, and they that sit, or lie at the table, are not allowed to taste, until he that blesses, has tasted; and he that breaks, is not allowed to taste, until the Amen is finished out of the mouth of the majority of those that sit at table." (Gill, John; Exposition of the Entire Bible: "Matthew 26:26," 2013, Laridian: Cedar Rapids Iowa)

The bread was blessed by prayer and broken by Jesus. He told His disciples that the bread represented His body that would be broken through the betrayal of Judas and the wrath of the enemy. The disciples were to eat this bread as a symbol of their acceptance of this death and their willingness to follow Him to death.

Verse 27

Jesus took a cup and gave thanks. He handed this cup to each of the disciples and asked them to drink from it. The word cup is singular and seems to indicate that it was a single cup from which all of them drank.

Verse 28

Jesus explains here what this cup represents. Notice several details here.

First, Jesus told His disciples that the cup represented His blood: "This is my blood," He told them. By telling them that this was His blood, Jesus was not speaking literally. The cup of wine they drank represented His blood and was a picture of what He would do for them.

Second, Jesus tells us here that the blood represented by the wine in the cup was the blood "of the covenant." In the Old Testament, a covenant agreement was sealed by the blood of a sacrificial animal. Jesus tells His disciples that the death of His body and the blood shed was no ordinary death. It was to seal a covenant agreement between God and humankind.

Third, Jesus tells us the nature of that covenant and what it was about in the words: "Which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Through the death of Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood, God was

establishing a covenant with all who would enter that He would pardon their sins. He sealed that covenant at the cost of His Son's life. The blood of Jesus Christ guaranteed the reliability and trustworthiness of this covenant agreement.

Verse 29

According to Jesus, this would be the last time He would drink the fruit of the vine until the day He drank it with the disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven. These words of Jesus pose a problem for us in light of what we read in John 19:29-30:

29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and

he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. – Jn 19:29-30

We have a record of Jesus receiving “sour wine” just before He died on the cross. How do we reconcile these two passages?

First, some interpret Matthew 26:29 to mean that Jesus would not drink wine with His disciples until they joined Him in the kingdom of Heaven.

It is also important to note the words used here in these passages. The term used for wine is οἶνος (oínos) and refers to the fermented fruit of the grape.

The word used in John 19:29 is ὄξος óxos. This word refers to a vinegar mixed with water, herbs and spices. In the case of a criminal, it was given to help relieve the pain they were suffering. It would hardly be considered the same drink as the fruit of the vine Jesus refers to in this verse.

What is important for us to note here is that the Lord Jesus made a promise to His disciples. He told them that while He would die and go to be with His Father, the day was coming when they would join Him and celebrate that reunion at the table in the Father's kingdom.

Verse 30

Part of the celebration of the first Lord's Supper included the singing of a hymn. Remember that it was at this time that the Lord had told His disciples that one of them would betray Him and that He would be crucified. This was difficult news for these men to hear. We can only imagine what it would have been like for them to sing a hymn together. By nature, a hymn recognizes God and lifts His name. This would have been a reminder to them that no matter what

took place that their God was still worthy of praise and confidence.

From this supper, the Lord and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives, where things would be shortly put in place for His being handed over to the enemy.

Verse 31

It was likely on the Mount of Olives that the Lord Jesus spoke these sobering words to His disciples. Already it had been a very difficult day for these men. They had heard that Judas was going to betray Jesus. The words that Jesus told them that day would have been even more difficult to imagine.

Jesus told His disciples that all would fall away because of Him that night. As the disciples stood with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, this would have been

very difficult to envision. They were committed to Him and had been faithful for the last few years. Jesus pointed them to the words of the prophet Zechariah when He quoted:

*31 ... "I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be
scattered."*

These prophetic words would be fulfilled that very night. Jesus knew what would happen to Him and how the disciples would respond. While the disciples had likely heard these words read to them many times, they could never have imagined that the prophet Zechariah spoke of them when he wrote them.

Verse 32

The sad news Jesus announced that day was somewhat softened by the fact

that He would be raised and go before them to Galilee. Jesus knew that the horrors of the cross and death could not hold Him. He would rise victorious over them. He found comfort in this understanding.

Notice also that after telling the disciples that they would abandon Him, Jesus also tells them that He would go before them to Galilee. Not only was this a reassurance to the disciples that He would conquer the grave, but it was also an invitation for them to be with Him again. Even though they would fail Him, their Master would not abandon them. He would meet them again, and they would again fellowship in His presence.

Verse 33

Jesus' statement that all of them would fall away struck Peter hard. He could

not believe that he would ever fall away from Jesus. He declares that even though the other fell away, this would not be the case for him. In his mind, nothing on earth could induce him to fall away from Jesus. He commits himself to be true to the very end. Peter is quite confident in his relationship with Jesus and his ability to face whatever came and remain true. What is interesting about this statement is that Peter is telling the One in whom he has complete confidence that He was wrong. Jesus told him that they would “all” fall. The word “all” included Peter. Peter, however, did not believe what Jesus said that day. He trusted his understanding more than the Word of the Lord. This should have been a warning to Peter and a sign that he was in danger.

Verse 34

Jesus heard Peter's bold declaration. He informed him, however, that he would not be able to live up to what he had proclaimed. That night, before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Jesus three times. That is to say, before the break of dawn, when the rooster typically crowed, Peter would break His promise to the Lord, not once but three times. Jesus sets His word against Peter's.

Verse 35

Notice that even when Jesus told Peter he would deny him that night, Peter refused to believe. He digs in his heels and tells the Lord Jesus that He was wrong: "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"

Not only does Peter demonstrate great confidence in his ability to remain true, but in the process, he denies the

prophetic word of Jesus. This is a recipe for a great fall. The combination of confidence in the flesh and denial of the Word of Christ has only one destination –failure. Peter would shortly find this out.

Notice also that while Peter seems to be the most outspoken of the disciples, they all joined Peter in assuring the Lord that they would be true to Him that evening.

Verse 36

As the night unfolded, Jesus and His disciples moved down the Mount of Olives to Gethsemane, located at its foot. Here Jesus told His disciples to sit down and wait for Him while He prayed.

Jesus knew that the time for his capture was drawing near. While His disciples had reassured Him that they

would be faithful unto death, Jesus knew how weak they were and how they would not be able to keep those promises. He takes the time here to spend with His Father, who alone understood the nature of what was ahead.

Verse 37

Matthew tells us that Jesus took Peter, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, with him, and they found a quiet place to pray. What is striking here is that even though Jesus told Peter he would deny Him three times, Jesus still invited Him into His inner circle.

Matthew tells us that in this place of solitude, Jesus became very sorrowful and troubled. The word for sorrowful in Greek is λυπέω (lupéō). It speaks of affliction, sadness and grief. The word for troubled is ἀδημονέω (adēmonéō)

speaks of being depressed and overwhelmed with a burden. What is clear from this is that what Jesus experienced that day as he spent time with the Father was intense emotional agony. The context indicates this sorrow was related to what was ahead for Him as He faced the cross. The cross was not only physically painful but brought deep emotional turmoil to the mind and spirit of Jesus. This pain was not a lack of confidence in the Father and His purpose.

Emotional trauma is the natural response of the body to hardship and difficulty. Like our bodies, our minds are only able to tolerate so much stress before they begin to become overwhelmed. This lead to depression, grief, and sorrow. Jesus felt these emotions. He is fully able to identify with the feelings of sorrow and grief. He felt what we felt as He looked ahead to the cross. The key here is that while

He felt this emotional pain, He still committed Himself to the purpose of God and faced what was ahead with confidence in His Father.

Verse 38

Notice what Jesus does with His troubled spirit.

First, He speaks to His disciples and informs them of His trouble. We see this in the words:

My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

We see in these words just how deep the sorrow of the Lord was on that occasion. He was so sorrowful he could have died from His grief and suffering. Jesus informs His disciples of this grief. He took these particular disciples aside because they were close to Him. When they were alone, He confided in them

the depth of His sorrow. In doing this, the Lord shows us that when we find ourselves in a similar situation, we should also find someone with whom we can confide. Our pain and sorrow were not intended for us to bear alone. God has given us brothers and sisters to share this with us.

Notice secondly that not only does Jesus confide in these three disciples, but He asked them to “remain here, and watch with me.” In saying this, Jesus is asking for two things.

Jesus wanted his disciples to remain with Him in this deep emotional grief. He calls them first to come to His side and stand with Him in His pain. More than this, however, He also calls them to “watch” with Him.

The word watch is γρηγορέω (grēgoreúō). The term is derived from egeír?, meaning to arise or to

refrain from sleep. Imagine a watchman standing at the gate. He was to refrain from sleep and distraction to watch for any sign of the enemy. The watchfulness Jesus required here came in the context of his deep emotional sorrow and grief. How were these disciples to watch? They were to do so in prayer. Paul describes this kind of watchfulness when he writes to the Colossians and says:

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— — Col 4:2-3

As Jesus faces his sorrow and grief, He calls His closest disciples to stand with Him and watch by means of prayer. He asked them to cry out with Him to the

Father for strength and defeat the enemy's attack and for strength to do the will of the Father.

We would do well in our suffering to follow His example. When we find ourselves overwhelmed, it is time to enlist the support of trusted friends to stand with us and petition the Father for strength and victory.

Verse 39

Having enlisted the support of His three disciples, Jesus found a place by Himself where He could speak with His Father. As important as it was to have these men pray, there were some very personal matters that Jesus wanted to address between Himself and the Father alone. Notice two details here in the prayer of Jesus.

First, Jesus asked for what He wanted:

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"

Jesus is honest before the Father here. He did not look forward to the pain that was before Him. It brought Him no great delight to suffer and die. His heart was heavy in this matter. There was a part of Him that seemed to wish there was another way, but there wasn't. Nevertheless, praying to the Father, he asked that the cup would pass from Him. In other words, He is praying: Lord, if there is some way that Your purpose can be accomplished without this deep and unbearable pain, may it be so.

I have often stood before someone whose body was filled with pain, praying for them. I wondered as I prayed what the purpose of the Lord was for them. Did He want to heal them of their sickness? Did He want to use this sickness for a deeper purpose

in their lives? I find comfort in the fact that Jesus does not hesitate to be honest with the Father here. He tells Him that something inside Him just wanted the pain and suffering to end. Don't hesitate to tell God what You want.

Notice second, however, that there was a desire greater than the desire to be free from pain and suffering. This is found in the words:

"Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Ultimately, the passion for the will of God to be accomplished was greater than any grief about the suffering ahead. While there was a part of Jesus that did not enjoy the suffering, He was willing to endure that agony if the will of God could be accomplished through it. He would submit even to death so that the purpose of God would be

achieved. His greatest passion was for the will of God. God would ultimately use the suffering of Christ to redeem His people and save them from their sins.

Jesus demonstrates that it is legitimate to tell God what we want in prayer as long as we are willing to submit to His greater purpose.

Verse 40

After praying, Jesus returned to His disciples, whom He asked to remain with Him and watch. Notice that He found them sleeping. Waking them up, Jesus speaks particularly to Peter and says:

"So, could you not watch with me one hour?"

It was Peter who had publicly made such a bold declaration that though

everyone else might fall, he would not. Jesus reminds him of his weakness. He who had been called to remain and watch with Jesus had failed in his responsibility.

While Jesus may indicate how much time had passed while He prayed, the term “one hour” could also refer to a short time.

Verse 41

Notice that Jesus, speaking to Peter, tells him to watch and pray. The word Jesus uses here for watch is γρηγορέω (grēgoreúō) which means to arise and refrain from sleeping. This implication was not just to remain alert physically but also spiritually. Remember that the enemy would shortly be upon them. Peter needed to be alert and ready to face that enemy. When this enemy fell upon them, Peter’s faith would be

greatly tried. In particular, Peter spoke boldly of how he would stand firm, but Jesus knew that his flesh was weak and he would fall. Jesus encouraged Peter, therefore, to pray that he would not enter into temptation. Peter was to gather his strength and wisdom from the Father through prayer. I am convinced that had Peter known what would happen to him, he would have taken these words of Jesus more seriously.

Verse 42

After waking the disciples from their sleep and reminding them to watch, Jesus returned to prayer a second time. Jesus does not give up praying to the Father. The subject of His prayer is the same as the first prayer. He prays about the will of the Father in this matter of His suffering. Notice His words in this second prayer:

"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

The first prayer of Jesus was that the cup pass, but He wanted the will of God to be done. This time He prayed that if the will of God could not be accomplished unless He drank that cup, He was willing to accept the pain it brought Him. There is a subtle difference between these prayers. While both passionately desire that the will of God be done, the second prayer appears to be more focused on the inevitable suffering God requires of Him.

I don't pretend to understand what Jesus was going through at that moment. What I do understand, however, is that as a believer in Jesus Christ, I find there are times when my human nature does not easily comply with the purpose of God. It resists pain and struggle. Like the disciples who fell

asleep, my flesh is weak. I am not always as disciplined as I should be. Paul understood this when he said:

27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. – 1Co 9:27

There is a great spiritual battle taking place in our lives. The flesh resists the work of the Spirit of God. The will of God is sometimes only accomplished when we declare war on our flesh and bring it under control. This may mean calling for reinforcements and going a second time to petition the Father.

While I do not know the exact struggle that was taking place in the life of Jesus here, I understand what is happening from the perspective of my flesh and the battle that rages in my spiritual walk. I do not venture here into a theological argument about the

nature of Christ and the struggle He endured at that moment. I can understand my struggle and how this passage challenges me never to give up until my heart is in complete submission to Christ and His purpose.

Verse 43

After praying for the second time, Jesus again returned to the disciples, Peter, James and John. As with the first time, these men had again fallen asleep and could not stand with Jesus in prayer and watching, for they were very tired.

Verse 44

We have no record of Jesus waking up the disciples this second time. He had asked them to remain and watch with him in prayer. He needed this support as He wrestled with what was ahead. It appears that He accepts this inability of

the disciples to pray with Him now. Jesus returned for the final time and prayed using the same words as He had used in the last prayer:

"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."
– Mt 26:42

There seems to be a commitment here to the purpose of the Father that Jesus drink the cup of crucifixion. This cup, however, was not an easy one to swallow. He wrestled with the Father over this matter. This battle, however, was with the agony ahead and not with the will of the Father. From the beginning, the Lord Jesus prayed that the Father's will be done. He was committed to this. As a human being, however, the thought of the pain, the separation, the sin He would bear weighed heavily on His mind and emotions bringing him deep agony of soul.

Verse 45

After praying for the third time, Jesus returned to His disciples. Waking them, He said: "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand."

Strengthened by His time with the Father, Jesus now boldly faces His betrayal. He knew that this was the time when He would be delivered over to sinners.

Sinful creatures would now judge the Son of God. The perfect Saviour would be condemned and face the cruel cross. The Father watches as His son is betrayed, mistreated and abused for the salvation of His people. We cannot help but see the injustice of the Saviour being handed over to sinners to be tried, condemned and killed.

Verse 46

The Lord calls His disciples to rise from their sleep, for His betrayer was coming. Jesus could have allowed His disciples to sleep and faced this betrayal alone. Notice, however, that he desired that His disciples be with Him on that occasion. He wanted them to witness what took place. Could it be that just as he needed Peter, James and John to remain and watch with Him, so He needed his disciples to stand with Him as He faced this trial? Understand that while He was the Son of God, Jesus was also fully man with all our needs. Who among us has not been blessed by the support and presence of brothers and sisters in a time of trial?

Verse 47

It was not long before the betrayer Jesus spoke of arrived. Judas came with a "great crowd." This crowd was armed with swords and clubs. The chief priests and elders had sent them.

We are not told how many people arrived on the scene. Matthew describes it as a "great crowd," so clearly, there was a large number of people sent to capture Jesus.

Notice also that these people were armed with swords and clubs. They were ready for a fight. The only ones present to offer any resistance were the sleepy disciples.

Finally, observe that this event took place at night. The disciples had to be woken from their sleep to face the crowd. The night would be the best time to arrest Jesus, for very few people were awake to see what was happening. Jesus could be arrested

without causing a stir among the people.

Verse 48

Matthew tells us that Judas had arranged a sign to identify Jesus among the disciples for arrest. It is quite possible that many of those present in the crowd may not have been able to recognize Jesus by sight. Notice the words of Judas here:

*"The one I will kiss is the man;
seize him."*

The kiss was a common greeting between friends and associates. In this case, it was a deep betrayal. Judas would greet Jesus as a friend, but the intention was that those who saw this kiss would seize Jesus and bring Him to His enemies for judgment.

Verse 49

When the armed crowd arrived in Gethsemane, Judas separated himself from them and approaching Jesus greeted him with a kiss saying, "Greetings, Rabbi!" He recognized Jesus here as a teacher and religious leader. The term is relatively neutral. He does not call Him Lord as the disciples often did but simply Rabbi or teacher.

Verse 50

Jesus received the kiss of betrayal from Judas. Notice that He calls Judas friend. The word Jesus used here is ἑταῖρος (hetaíros). This word denotes an association but not necessarily a close one. For example, the feminine form of the term was used to speak of a mistress who was a "friend" but not a legal wife. It could also describe someone as part of a group but not

necessarily a close companion. The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament says this about the word Jesus used here:

The study of the word hetaíros causes us to conclude that it could not be used as syn. with phílos, a true friend who seeks the other's good. Hetaíros is one who only projects his own interest. The inference, therefore, is that hetaíros means a selfish acquaintance, one who seeks his own interests above the interests of others. He is a partner in a company, not necessarily for the good of others but primarily for his own advantage. The good of others is acceptable only when it promotes his own well-being. AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament". Cedar Rapids, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2019. © 1992 by

*Spiros Zodhiates and AMG
International, Inc.*

By using the word ἑταῖρος (hetaíros), Jesus is telling Judas that He knows exactly why he had come and kissed him. Judas is identified as an associate who is only interested in his own purposes and not the group.

Notice how Jesus submits to the purpose Judas had in mind – “Do what you came to do.” He permits Judas to betray Him because this would accomplish the greater will of God. When Jesus spoke those words, the crowd came and seized him.

Verse 51

When the crowd approached and seized Jesus, Matthew tells us that one of those with Jesus drew his sword and struck the High Priest’s servant, cutting

off His ear. Matthew does not identify the individual who did this. John, however, tells us that it was Peter who took this bold step.

10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) – Jn 18:10

While Jesus told Judas to do what he needed to do, Peter was not ready to accept this. He stands up for Jesus by drawing his sword, not understanding that by standing up for Him at this time, he was standing against the purpose of the Father.

Verse 52

Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away in response to his bold and aggressive stance. Peter was acting on his own accord and not in the purpose of Christ by taking up His sword.

Jesus tells Peter that those who take up the sword will perish by the sword. Aggression begets aggression. Harsh and bitter words will produce the same in response. It was not the purpose of Jesus to stir up violence. Jesus chose to submit to the purpose of the Father, and so He surrendered to the crowd who had come to arrest Him.

Verse 53

Speaking directly to Peter, Jesus tells Him to put away his sword. His human effort to defend Christ was futile. Jesus reminded Peter that He did not need his sword. If He needed support in this hour of need, He could appeal to the Father, and He would send more than twelve legions of angels to come to His defence. One legion contained 6,000 soldiers. The twelve legions Jesus refers to here represent about 72,000

angels. Jesus is comparing the sword of Peter to the 72,000 angels He could call to His defence. In doing this, he reminds Peter of the foolishness of thinking that Jesus needed His protection.

While these legions of angels were at His disposal, Jesus refused to call them. He chose instead to submit to the angry mob and be tried, condemned and killed.

I often think of Peter's attempt to defend Jesus and realize how often I find myself, like him, fighting with sword in hand to battle something God has never called me to battle. How much farther ahead would we be if, instead, we allowed Him to lead us to where His legions are waiting for His word?

Verse 54

Jesus told Peter that what was happening that day was in fulfillment of Scripture. Peter pulled out his sword because he did not understand the Scriptures. Peter stood up boldly to defend his Lord. He thought this was the right thing to do. Onlookers may have praised Him for His effort. The problem was that Peter acted out of ignorance of the Scriptures. How often have we seen this happen in the churches of our day? People do what they think is best, but the truth of Scripture is not leading them. Jesus' words to Peter challenge us to study the Scriptures so we do not stand in opposition to the purpose of God, thinking we are doing so for His glory and defence.

Verse 55

Turning His attention to the crowd that had gathered to arrest Him, Jesus said:

"Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?"

These words come directly after Jesus reprimanded Peter for drawing His sword. It was not the intention of Jesus to resist this crowd or fight them. His confidence was in the purpose of the Father, whom He knew was fully able to defend Him.

Jesus also reminded the crowd of how they had seen Him day after day in the temple teaching, but they had not seized Him there. Instead, they came at night in a private place where no one could see them and what they were doing.

By reminding them that they did not arrest Him in public, Jesus was showing the crowd that what they did, they felt compelled to hide from people. They arrested Him at night when no one

could see them. They knew deep down that what they were doing was wrong. Acting on what they knew was wrong made them guilty of sin. All of this was legitimized by the chief priests and elders who blinded the crowd to its sin.

Peter sinned by not understanding the Scriptures. The crowd sinned by going against what they knew to be wrong.

Verse 56

Jesus tells the crowd that what was taking place that day was in fulfillment of the Scriptural prophecies about Him. In saying this, He challenged those with religious sensitivities to examine these scriptures to see what they taught.

Here was a group commissioned by the religious leaders to arrest Jesus. They came prepared to do so as they would have arrested a terrorist who would

lead his followers to resist. Instead, they find a man of peace who pointed them to the Scriptures and put up no resistance.

As for His disciples, they left Jesus alone to face the crowd and fled the scene. Remember here that Jesus had just told them that He could call twelve legions of angels if He wanted to. He also reminded them that what was taking place was in fulfillment of Scripture. In other words, none of this was outside God's purpose and control. Despite this, the disciples fled and left Jesus alone. For some reason, the knowledge of Jesus' authority and the fulfillment of Scripture was insufficient to embolden these men to face the enemy. Those who so boldly declared their allegiance to Jesus now fail miserably to keep their promise of faithfulness.

Verse 57

After arresting Jesus, those who had captured him brought him to Caiaphas, the high priest. Notice here that there was a group gathered with the high priest. Included in that group were the scribes and elders. It appears that they had been anticipating Jesus' arrival and had gathered for that purpose. It was late at night that Jesus was arrested. Jesus had awoken them just before He was arrested. A meeting of scribes, elders and the high priest would not normally have been held at this time, so it was very likely that they had convened this meeting, especially for Jesus.

Verse 58

Notice that Peter, who had drawn his sword to defend Jesus, followed a distance behind those who had arrested

Jesus. This was likely because he did not want to get caught but wanted to know what would happen to his Lord.

The mob took Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest's palace. Peter went inside and sat down to see what would happen.

There is a strange combination of fear and boldness in Peter. He draws his sword to defend his master but flees when Jesus tells him to put it away. He follows after Jesus but does so at a distance so that he is not caught. He goes into the very courtyard of the High Priest but does not want anyone to know He is Jesus' disciple. There seems to be an intense battle raging here in Peter's heart.

Verse 59

This verse is quite shocking. Matthew tells us that the chief priest and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus. There was no concern for justice or integrity. This council already knew the outcome they were striving to attain. They wanted to put Jesus to death. They needed to justify this killing before the people so they could be perceived as defenders of the faith and not murderers. It didn't particularly matter to this council whether the accusation against Jesus was true as long as they were perceived as being just in passing a sentence of death.

Verse 60

The council that met to try Jesus had more trouble than anticipated trying to find an accusation worthy of death. Matthew tells us that it was not for lack of false witnesses. According to him,

“many” false witnesses came forward to bring an accusation against the Lord.

Verse 61

Finally, two individuals came forward and said that Jesus had claimed that He would destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. Jesus, of course, was referring to His body as the temple of God. He was alluding to the fact that He would shortly die, but death would not hold Him for long. Within three days, he would rise from the dead, and his body would be restored.

Verse 62

At least two witnesses testified that Jesus said He would destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. Hearing this, the High Priest demanded an explanation. His question: “Have you

no answer to make?” Implies that Jesus had not responded to this accusation. He feels no need to defend Himself against false accusations before a group who had already determined to kill Him.

Verse 63

The Lord Jesus remained silent, even after the High Priest demanded his response to the witnesses’ accusations. Any response would only be used to convict Him.

Notice, finally, how the high priest “adjures” Jesus by the living God to tell him if he was the Christ, the Son of God. The word adjure is a legal term. In essence, the high priest was demanding Jesus swear or testify in the presence of God that He was the Christ, the Son of God. This act of swearing before God was a very serious matter.

To declare any falsehood before God was a sin worthy of death.

The high priest demands that Jesus swear in the presence of God that he was Christ, the Son of God. The term "Christ" in this context indicated that Jesus was the Messiah to come, the one anointed by God to bring salvation to His people. In the minds of these religious leaders, anyone who claimed to be Christ, the Son of God, was blasphemous.

Verse 64

Having been sworn before God to answer the High Priest, Jesus opens His mouth and says: "You have said so." It is generally understood that Jesus is saying, "You said so yourself," or "Just as you said." In other words, He is affirming before God that He was the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus goes beyond this statement to proclaim that He would sit at the right hand of Power. True almighty power is from God. Jesus refers to God as Power here and tells the High Priest that the day was coming when He would sit in a place of honour at the right hand of God Almighty.

He also adds that He would come from that place of honour in heaven to earth in the clouds of heaven. In other words, the day was coming when the tables would be turned, and He would sit and judge on God's behalf. Those who sat in judgment of Him now would one day stand before Him to be judged.

Verse 65

The declaration of Jesus that He was the Christ the Son of God was too much for the high priest to accept. It

was unthinkable, in his mind, that Jesus should make such a claim. Notice how the high priest responds to Jesus' claim: "Then the high priest tore his robes."

We must consider this response of Caiaphas in light of the Law of Moses. First, consider the words of Moses to Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 10:6:

6 And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. – Lev 10:6

Moses forbade Aaron, as high priest, to tear his clothes on pain of death.

This is confirmed again in Leviticus 21:10:

10 "The priest who is chief among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes. – Lev 21:10

According to the Law of Moses, Caiaphas is breaking the law of Moses here by his actions.

That day, Caiaphas disregards the Law of Moses, tears his clothes, and pronounces Jesus guilty of blasphemy by declaring Himself to be the Son of God. In the Jewish mind, blasphemy was a crime punishable by death.

Verse 66

Because the high priest could not judge such a case on his own, he presented it to the Jewish ruling council for their

vote. After hearing the case against Jesus, the council responded: "He deserves death." His crime was blasphemy. There appears to be no opposition to this.

Verse 67

The death sentence for Jesus was declared, but it required approval by the Roman authorities. In the meantime, with an accusation of blasphemy pronounced by the Jewish council, the crowd was free to mistreat Him as a criminal. They spat in his face, struck and slapped Him while the council looked the other way.

Verse 68

Not only did the crowd spit in Jesus' face, beat Him and slap Him, but according to Matthew, they also mocked Him by slapping Him and

asking Jesus to tell Him who did so. Jesus endured this mocking without any retaliation on His part.

Verse 69

While the Jewish ruling council was trying Jesus, Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest's palace. A servant girl recognized him and said: "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." We do not know what her motivation was in making this statement. Was she seeking to expose him, or was she initiating a conversation? We do not have an answer to this. This girl, however, knew that Jesus was being tried at that very moment.

Verse 70

While we do not know the motivation for the servant girl's statement to Peter, we do see Peter's response. He denied

being a follower of Jesus the Galilean. Not only does he deny being a follower of Jesus, he lies to the servant girl, saying: "I do not know what you mean."

Peter did not want to be exposed as a follower of Jesus. He wanted to know what would happen to Jesus but did not want to be arrested.

Verse 71

The servant girl's statement made Peter aware that people could recognize him. This made him uncomfortable in the courtyard. Matthew tells us that after the conversation with that servant girl, Peter went out to the entrance. Likely this was to keep from being noticed by anyone else.

When Peter left the courtyard for the entrance, he encountered a second

servant girl. She, too, recognized him and said: "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." We can only imagine what Peter felt when he was identified again.

Verse 72

Notice the response of Peter to the second servant girl – "He denied it with an oath." The idea here is that He called God as his witness. He swore an oath of truth invoking the name of God to back up what He said: "I do not know the man."

Verse 73

Finally, one of the bystanders came up to Peter that evening and said: "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Now we have two servant girls who recognized Peter's face and a bystander who recognized his accent as

being from Galilee. Things were closing in on Peter.

Verse 74

As things began to close in on Peter, he became more aggressive in his response. Matthew tells us he invokes a curse on himself and swears, "I do not know the man."

Understand that the cursing and swearing here do not relate to vain and vulgar words. Peter swears in a legal sense. He does so by invoking a curse on his being if what he said was untrue. Peter was saying something like this: May God curse me if what I say about not knowing this man Jesus is untrue.

When he spoke those final words, the rooster crowed. Notice particularly the word "immediately." Jesus had told

Peter that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. It was as if that rooster was waiting for that third denial before crowing. Peter would not have missed the significance of this.

Verse 75

When that rooster crowed, Peter remembered what Jesus had told him. The reality of what he had done struck home. He had made bold statements of faithfulness to Jesus. He drew His sword to defend his Lord when that great crowd had come to arrest Him. He stood in the high priest's courtyard to see what would happen to Jesus. But in the presence of those present, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. He swore this with God as His witness. He declared a curse on his being if his statement about not knowing Jesus

was untrue. When that rooster crowed, and the words of Jesus flooded back to his remembrance, Peter was crushed and broken. His great confidence in his ability was shattered. Matthew tells us that he left that courtyard and wept bitterly, ashamed of his actions. As strong as he felt he was, Peter fell. How we need to learn this lesson as well.

MATTHEW 27

Verse 1

It was the morning after Peter's denial. The chief priests and elders of the people had gathered together with a single intention. They were seeking how they could put Jesus to death. They needed to do this legally, so the Roman authorities needed to be convinced. These authorities were not particularly concerned about their religious motivations, so we can imagine that on that morning, these priests and elders were trying to figure out how to accuse Jesus so that the authorities would allow them to kill Him.

Verse 2

The first step to the death sentence was to see the Roman governor. Notice here how they treated Jesus as a guilty criminal. Matthew tells us that they bound him. The idea is that they were keeping Him restrained so that He would not escape. By binding Jesus, they were declaring that He was in their control. The binding was also intended to humble a criminal. In this case, by restraining Jesus and bringing Him to Pilate, they would have made an impression on the governor. In reality, none of these restraints would have been necessary.

Having bound our Lord as a common criminal, the priests and elders led Jesus away to Pilate. They needed his approval for the sentence of death.

Verse 3

We are not told where Judas was at this time. He seemed to follow the events, however. Like Peter, he wanted to know what would happen to Jesus.

Matthew tells us that when Judas saw that the authorities had accused Jesus and were seeking His death, “he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.”

The word Matthew uses here for “changed his mind” is μεταμέλομαι (metamélomai). Metamélomai is derived from *metá* meaning, change, and *mélomai* meaning concern. The idea is to have our concerns changed. That is to say, there is a change of one’s mind or purpose.

It should be noted that the word used in the New Testament for repentance is *metanoéō*. This is a different word from what Matthew uses to speak of

Judas. Judas seems to have a change of purpose or idea (metamélomai), but it does not seem to go as far as repentance (metanoéō).

What Judas experienced here was regret for what he had done. He likely feared the consequences of his actions. His conscience may have deeply bothered him. He was so concerned that he does not want this guilt money on his hands, so he brings it back to the priests and elders. While all these actions were admirable, there is no indication in the word used by Matthew nor by the actions of Judas that his heart felt anything more than regret or fear.

Verse 4

Notice the words of Judas as he approaches the chief priests and elders.

"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

Notice first that Judas recognized that he had sinned. That is to say, he had fallen short of the standard of God and grieved His heart. While He had made money on this venture, he understood that he had done so in a way that brought great dishonour to the Lord God. He experienced guilt and shame over what he had done.

Second, Judas confessed that he was guilty of betrayal. The word here speaks of delivering someone over to someone else's power. Judas does not say he made a mistake or a bad decision here. He tells the chief priests and elders that he had been guilty of betrayal. He had not only let down his former master but also delivered Him to His enemies. Judas recognized the seriousness of his deceit and disloyalty.

Finally, Judas confessed that he had betrayed "innocent blood." He knew that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. He watched these Jewish leaders push to have Jesus killed and maybe saw their hypocrisy and deceit. Perhaps he wanted nothing more to do with this evil, and so he rebuked them and washed his hands of the situation by returning and renouncing the dirty money he had obtained by deceit and betrayal.

Imagine what Judas was feeling at this moment in time. He knew his guilt and shame. He stands now crushed and broken before the religious and political leaders. Notice their response:

"What is that to us? See to it yourself."

The chief priests who had been charged with the care of the people passed Judas off. They have no

compassion or concern for him in his great need. He stands before them, a broken man on the verge of suicide. Their response was, "What is that to us?" They did not care what Judas was going through. They had what they wanted, and that was all that mattered. "Deal with it yourself," they told him.

Verse 5

Judas took the words of advice given to him by his leaders. He did see to the matter himself. In response, Judas did two things.

First, he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple. In doing so, Judas declared the money to be dirty blood money. By throwing the money down in the temple, he also proclaimed the chief priests and elders guilty of the same crime as him.

Second, Judas, then in despair, went out of the temple and hung himself. His blood was on these chief priests and elders. He renounced his association with them and their evil plan to kill Jesus. We cannot know what was going through Judas' mind at the time of his suicide. He had given up hope. There would be no effort to correct the wrong he had done. He would not devote the rest of His life to declaring the innocence of Jesus. Unlike Peter, he would not persevere and make things right. He would take his life in a sense of absolute defeat and hopelessness. Only eternity will tell his destiny.

Verse 6

Judas left the money he had received from the chief priests and the elders on the temple floor and hung himself. This meant it was up to these leaders to determine what they should do with the

money. Notice the response of the chief priests here.

Gathering up the money, they said:

"It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money."

First, these religious leaders recognized that the money was blood money. That is to say, they paid Judas to betray the Lord Jesus into their hands to secure his death.

Second, notice the concern of the chief priests not to put this money in the temple treasury. According to them, it was not lawful for this money to be put into the treasury. While there is no reference to this particular law in the Old Testament, it may have been assumed from the law of Deuteronomy 23:18, which says:

18 You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. – Dt 23:18

Here in Deuteronomy 23:18, we have a law stating that some money was not permitted in the house of the Lord. So, for example, the wages of a prostitute were defiled and not allowed in the temple. It may be that blood money used for evil purposes was in that category.

What is interesting to note here is that these priests have two standards. The first was to keep the temple and its offerings pure. On the other hand, however, they do not hesitate to pay money for ungodly deeds as long as they do not remain in the temple. This double standard allowed them to do

right in the temple but as they pleased when off duty.

Verse 7

Having determined that they could not use the money Judas had returned for the temple ministry, the chief priests convened a meeting to decide how to use the money returned for the betrayal of Jesus. It was determined that they would use the funds to purchase the "potter's field." We are not told why the field was so named. Some suggest a potter had used it to dig up clay for his pottery, but it was now useless to him. This, however, is just conjecture.

What is clear is the purpose of the field. It would be used to bury strangers, criminals or those who had no money.

Verse 8

The blood money returned by Judas purchased the potter's field. As that story began circulating, the area became known as the "Field of Blood." It was a reminder of the betrayal of Judas and the complicity of the chief priests in the murder of innocent blood.

The field, however, would be used to care for men and women that Jesus had ministered to in his lifetime, the outcasts, strangers and poor.

Verse 9

Matthew tells us that the incident between Judas and the chief priest was a fulfilment of words spoken by both Jeremiah and Zechariah.

Notice first that Matthew attributes the purchase of a field for the burial of strangers to Jeremiah. He does not give

us the specific prophecy here but consider what is recorded for us in Jeremiah 19.

In Jeremiah 19, the Lord told the prophet to buy a potter's flask and take some of the elders and priests to Topeth or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, at the entrance to the Potsherd Gate. Consider what the Tyndale Bible Dictionary tells us about the Potsherd Gate:

Gate in the south section of the pre-exilic Jerusalem wall. It led to the valley of Hinnom and to the Potter's Field. Potters could dispose of sherds there, hence its name. The KJV (relating the term to the Hebrew word for sun) renders it "east gate" (Je 19:2). (Tyndale Bible Dictionary (TBD)"Tyndale Bible Dictionary." Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2020. © 2001 by

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If this is the case, then Jeremiah was asked to go to the region of the potter's field to break his potter's flask. God told Jeremiah then to warn the people that because they had "filled this place with the blood of innocents" (Jeremiah 19:6), the day was coming when the place would no longer be called Topheth, but the "Valley of Slaughter" (Jeremiah 19:7) and "men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury."

Matthew also quotes the words of Zechariah 11:1,3, which spoke directly to the cost of the property.

"And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel."

We have here in this verse and the action of the chief priests, the fulfillment of both Jeremiah and Zechariah's prophecy.

Verse 10

Continuing to quote from Zechariah, Matthew shows us how the prophet predicted not only the cost of the field but also its location and the circumstances of the day. Way before the events of this chapter, the Lord spoke to Zechariah and predicted what would happen. In Zechariah 11, the Lord speaks about a shepherd that would be doomed to slaughter (Zechariah 11:7), how the favour of God would come to an end (Zechariah 11:10), and the covenant broken (Zechariah 11:11). All of these things took place at the time of Judas, Jesus and the chief priests.

None of these events took God by surprise. The Old Testament prophets predicted how these events would occur way before they happened.

Verse 11

Jesus now stands before Governor Pilate. Notice the question Pilate asked Jesus here: "Are you the King of the Jews?" This appears to be the accusation brought against Jesus before Pilate. Pilate would not have been particularly interested in their religious debates, and so the words of accusation are political. As a conquering nation, Rome always had to be watching for any sign of political rebellion. A charge worded in this way would have caught Pilate's attention. The governor wasted no time addressing this matter and asked Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus responded: "You have said so."
Jesus appears to be saying something like: "It is just as you said." He is stating that He was indeed the King of the Jews.

Verse 12

While Jesus freely answered Pilate's question, when the chief priests and elders continued to accuse Him, Jesus gave no response to their charges. He allowed the Jews to bring their accusation without any defence. We are not told the reason for this. It may be that Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that no matter what He said, they were committed to killing Him.

Verse 13

The silence of Jesus before His accusers surprised Pilate. This was not the normal procedure. Those who were

accused before him attempted to defend themselves. This was not the case for Jesus. He stood silent while the Jews brought “many things” against Him.

Verse 14

Matthew tells us that Jesus did not answer a single charge labelled against Him by the Jews. Pilate’s response was to be “greatly amazed.” The idea here is that He had never seen this kind of response before. This would have made the governor think about Jesus and the peace with which he stood before His accusers. The silence of Jesus testified to who He was. Pilate’s opinion on the matter was formed by what He saw that day.

Verse 15

It appears that it was at the time of the Passover that Jesus was being tried. Part of the celebration of the Passover was a feast. Matthew tells us that it was at this time of the year that the governor would grant the release of a prisoner. It is uncertain when this tradition began, but it was intended to appease the Jews on this important occasion.

Verse 16

Matthew tells us that a criminal by the name of Barabbas was in prison. From the verse, we understand that he was “notorious.” The word translated “notorious” is ἐπίσημος (epíσημος). This word means to have a mark upon. In other words, Barabbas was well known for his rebellion and criminal activity.

Verse 17

Pilate is somewhat confused about what to do with Jesus. Bringing out Barabbas, the notorious criminal, he placed him beside Jesus and asked the Jews which of the two he should release.

The Jews accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews. In the mind of Pilate, if true, this would have been a serious crime and one he could not ignore. The governor saw no evidence of any political threat in the person of Jesus. On the other hand, Barabbas was noted for his criminal activity and would be a threat if released.

Pilate throws the decision back at the people. In doing this, however, the governor accepts their decision.

Verse 18

Matthew makes it clear that Pilate saw through the accusations of the Jews. He understood that the Jews were envious of Jesus. They did not like the attention He was getting. They did not like how Jesus was exposing their hypocrisy. According to Pilate, it was for this reason that the Jews had been throwing one accusation after another at him. He found nothing in Jesus worthy of death.

Verse 19

We discover here that Pilate's wife suffered much because of a dream she had about Jesus. As a result of this dream, she spoke to her husband and told him to "have nothing to do with" Jesus.

The phrase "have nothing to do with" comes in the context of Pilate sitting on the judgment seat. The idea here is that Pilate was not to pronounce a

sentence against Jesus, despite the many accusations against Him.

Notice also that she describes Jesus as a "righteous man." It had been revealed to her in a dream that there was no sin in this man. He did not deserve to die.

From the tone of the verse, it is apparent that Pilate's wife was in great turmoil because of Jesus and the trial her husband was involved in on his behalf.

It is likely, then, because of this dream and the fact that he understood the true intentions of the Jews, that Pilate attempted to release Jesus by offering to set Him free instead of Barabbas.

Verse 20

When Pilate asked the people who he should release, it was the chief priests

and elders who persuaded them to ask for Barabbas. There are two points we need to underline here.

Notice that chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd. The implication is that the group needed persuasion. That is to say, they could go either way on this matter. Some may have chosen to release Jesus and keep Barabbas in prison. It was the chief priests and elders, however, that took it upon themselves to convince the crowd. They were intent on the accusation of Jesus and did whatever they could to influence the group in that direction. This added to their guilt as leaders of the nation.

Second, notice the word destroy. The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to kill Jesus. This is a strong word. The implication is that they would stop short at nothing but the death of Jesus Christ. They wanted Him

destroyed and in the grave. There is an intense hatred for Jesus in this word.

Verse 21

When Governor Pilate asked for their decision about who he was to release, the crowd chose to release Barabbas. Notice here that they seem to speak with one voice. There is no record of any discord among them. They followed the counsel of their leaders and called for the release of the notorious criminal Barabbas, condemning Jesus to death.

Verse 22

When Pilate asked the crowd what he was to do with Jesus, again with one voice, the response came back, "Let him be crucified." This was in obedience to their leaders who wanted the Lord "destroyed."

Notice here what Pilate said about Jesus. "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" While Pilate does not say that Jesus is the Christ here, he does bring this matter to the people's attention. This is the one who is called the Christ, Pilate said. The word Christ, refers to the anointed one who was promised as the Messiah. By bringing this matter to their attention, Pilate is challenging the people to consider whether Jesus was the Christ or not. He reminds them that if He was the Christ, they were doing a great injustice to Him. Pilate also expresses by this statement that he has no fear of the Christ politically.

Notice finally the words, "They all said, "Let Him be crucified." Matthew tells us plainly that the crowd spoke with one voice. All of them who spoke said the same thing. They wanted Jesus crucified.

Verse 23

Notice the response of Pilate to the crowd that day. When they called out with one voice for the crucifixion of Jesus, he asked: "Why? What evil has he done?"

These words show us that Pilate has not found anything worthy of death in the Lord Jesus. The governor had tried to set Jesus free by making the crowd choose between a notorious criminal and Jesus, but they decided to set the criminal free. He reminded them that Jesus was called Christ and that by killing Him, they risked the wrath of God. This argument did not move the crowd. Finally, here Pilate tells the people that he found no crime in Him worthy of death and demands that they show him something before he handed Him over.

The people gathered before Pilate that day had proof of no such crime. Instead, they cried repeatedly, "Let Him be crucified." This created an uproar that Pilate had to address.

Verse 24

The crowd gathered before Pilate that day was determined to have Jesus crucified. Noting Pilate could say would influence them to be reasonable. While Jesus had done nothing wrong, those present were becoming increasingly riled, and the governor could see the beginning of a riot. He could not risk that such an event break out in his jurisdiction.

Killing Jesus would be a great injustice. Keeping Him alive would cause a great riot and the potential of many lives being lost. Pilate felt his hand was being forced.

Standing before the people that day, Pilate took water and washed his hands, saying: "I am innocent of this man's blood." That day Pilate declared that he would not take the life of Jesus. He washed his hands of this and reported that he found nothing worthy of death in Him. He would not be guilty of such a miscarriage of justice.

Notice four words here. These words were all the crowd needed to hear: "See to it yourselves." These words released Jesus into their custody and gave them the authority to deal with Him as they pleased. They were spoken when Pilate understood that the crowd would not listen to reason and had closed their hearts and minds to any other solution. Pilate hands Jesus over to the sinful passions and desires of the multitude.

Verse 25

When Pilate washed his hands of the blood of an innocent man, the people willingly took that guilt on themselves. They chose to bear the responsibility for the death of Jesus. Notice what they said to Pilate that day when he divested any responsibility for the death of Christ onto the people: "His blood be on us and on our children!" With one accord, the crowd takes on the guilt and shame of what they were about to do. Not only do they place the full weight of responsibility on themselves but on their children as well. They chose to bear the guilt of this act for generations to come.

Verse 26

That day, the notorious criminal Barabbas was released from prison instead of Jesus. Pilate had Jesus whipped and released to the crowd to be crucified.

It was customary for a criminal to be whipped before his crucifixion. This was part of the sentence. It included a time of mocking and beating and culminated at the cross. There was also an act of mercy in this beating as it shortened the time a criminal would have to suffer publically hanging on the cross.

Verse 27

As part of the crucifixion, the governor's soldiers took Jesus into Pilate's headquarters, where the whole battalion gathered around Him in preparation for His crucifixion. The gathering of an entire battalion would have shown the force of Roman authority, and in many cases, it would have humbled a criminal and brought him to a place of absolute defeat.

Verse 28

In the case of our Lord, the Roman battalion stripped him of his clothes and put a scarlet robe on him. The Roman soldiers wore this colour, so it would have been relatively easy to find a cape of some kind that they would have dressed the naked body of Jesus. The context indicates that they dressed him like a king to mock Him.

Verse 29

Part of the crucifixion involved mocking and beating the criminal. Notice how this took place in Jesus' case. He had been accused of being the king of the Jews. When Pilate handed Jesus over to his soldiers, they dressed Him in a robe and twisted thorns together to form a mock crown. They placed that thorn on his head and fixed it firmly in place, likely pushing the thorns into his scalp. Finding a reed, they put it in his hand as a mock sceptre. When He was

dressed in this way, the soldiers then knelt before him and mockingly said: "Hail, King of the Jews!" The purpose of this was to humiliate Jesus.

Verse 30

Matthew tells us that as the soldiers mocked Jesus, they spat on Him and, taking his mock reed sceptre from His hands, they struck him on the head. Remember here that Jesus was wearing a crown of thorns. By hitting Him on the head, they drove those thorns into his scalp, causing great pain and agony. Blood and spit ran down His face as they mocked Him.

Verse 31

When the soldiers finished mocking Jesus, they stripped the robe off Him, put on his clothes and led him away to be crucified. A criminal led to the cross

had already suffered much. Such was the case for Jesus. He had been tortured, beaten and humiliated and was now being led onto the streets into public view with spit and blood adorning his frame.

Verse 32

As they led Jesus to the cross, Matthew tells us that they found a man named Simon from Cyrene passing by. They compelled him to carry the cross of Jesus.

The fact that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross shows that this was not an act of goodwill on Simon's part. He was forced to do so at the point of a sword. It also shows us that no stripe was spared on Jesus. Though Pilate did not find any cause for death in Him, Jesus was still beaten and mocked as though He were guilty. It appears from the fact that Simon was

enlisted to carry the cross that this beating had seriously weakened Jesus' physical body.

Verse 33

Jesus was taken to Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull). This was outside the city where such crucifixions would take place. There are conflicting ideas about how this location received its name. Some feel it was because the site had the shape of a skull. Others because an important skull had been found there. Still, others believe it was because it was a place of death. While there are many opinions about the location, it is clear that it was a place of death and suffering. This is where Jesus was taken to die.

Verse 34

While Jesus hung on the cross he was offered something to drink. This drink was a mixture of wine and gall. There is some debate about gall and what it was. It may be helpful to examine Mark's account of this incident. We read in Mark 15:23:

23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. – Mk 15:23

Note here that Mark describes the drink given to Jesus as a mixture of wine and myrrh. It is believed therefore that the gall spoken of here was made from myrrh. Its intention was to dull the pain suffered by the criminal on the cross. Tasting the wine, Jesus refused to take it. The idea here is that He would not seek to lessen the pain he suffered. He would suffer the full burden of sin. There would be no shortcuts or drugs used to ease His suffering. He would

suffer the full weight to our sins on Himself.

Verse 35

As Jesus hung on the cross, His clothes were divided among the soldiers. Matthew tells us they cast lots for these clothes while Jesus hung on the cross. We can only imagine what this would have done for any dying criminal. There is a deep insensitivity here in this act. You can see the soldiers at the foot of the cross playing a game to see who would win Jesus' clothes. Then there would be the shout of joy as one of them won those clothes for himself. Also at the foot of the cross were individuals such as Matthew, who watched this happen. They would have been hurt by what was taking place. The family of Jesus, already grieving over His death, had to watch soldiers take these clothes and divide them

among themselves and walk away with them. The lack of sensitivity was incredible.

Verse 36

When they had divided Jesus' clothes among themselves, the soldiers sat down to watch over him. It was quite evident that Jesus would not come down from the cross, but this watch was designed to keep anyone from interfering with the sentence and to ensure that Jesus did die. They would also watch over the removal of the body from the scene. These soldiers were a guarantee that the full sentence was carried out.

Verse 37

As Jesus hung on the cross, the soldiers put a sign over his head. This sign was likely nailed to the top of the cross. It

read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." From John 19:19, we discover that Pilate wrote this inscription. While the Jews wanted to change it to read that Jesus said He was King of the Jews, Pilate refused to change what he had written. The Father saw to it that the world knew that His Son was indeed King of the Jews.

Verse 38

Jesus was not the only one to be crucified that day. Matthew tells us that two robbers were crucified, one on each side of Him. We can only guess why Jesus was crucified with these two criminals. What we can understand here is that the crucifixions were at the same time. Jesus was lifted with these other sinners. He was not placed in a separate location but right in the middle of these two men. He was identified with them and their crimes. It

is hard to say if there was an intention to humiliate Jesus even more by placing Him with such horrible men in His death.

Verse 39

Matthew notes that people passed by the cross as Jesus hung there. Notice how they responded to His crucifixion:

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads

The word translated “derided” here is the Greek word βλασφημέω (blasphēméō), meaning to blaspheme. That is to say, they spoke evil of Jesus by slanderous and irreverent words.

Notice also that these individuals “wagged their head.” The Psalmist

prophesied that this would take place when he wrote:

7 All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; – Ps 22:7 (ESV)

This wagging of the head was a sign of contempt. We see this in the words of Isaiah when he says:

22 this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: "She despises you, she scorns you— the virgin daughter of Zion; she wags her head behind you— the daughter of Jerusalem. – Isa 37:22 (ESV)

In both passages quoted above, the wagging of the head was connected with mocking, scorn and despising. Those who passed by the cross blasphemed the name of Jesus and mocked, scorned and despised Him.

Verse 40

Notice the nature of the blasphemous and slanderous remarks of those who passed by the foot of the cross.

First, they mock His words. They had heard Him declare that He would destroy and rebuild the temple in three days. Jesus referred to His body as the temple when He said this, but the Jews interpreted it to mean the temple building. They declared their disbelief in His words and mocked His great promises.

Second, they mocked his power. Notice the phrase: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Those who passed by the foot of the cross believed Jesus to be powerless and defeated. They mocked His bold claim to be the Son of God, but they also ridiculed his seeming inability to do anything to prevent His death. They did not

understand that the Son of God needed to die.

Verse 41

It was not just the Roman soldiers and people who mocked and blasphemed the name of Jesus as He hung on the cross. Notice also that the chief priests, scribes and elders also mocked Him. As the religious and political leaders of the Jews, they publically declared their approval of the crucifixion. By “mocking” Jesus, they showed no fear of God or belief in what He had said. The sign above the cross meant nothing to them.

Verse 42

The spiritual and political leaders of the Jews openly mocked Jesus as he hung on the cross. Notice what they say here.

First, they declare: "He saved others." These leaders certainly could not deny the many miracles that Jesus had performed. They had been present when he rose Lazarus from the dead. By saying, "He saved others," the leaders are casting doubt on the divinity of Jesus and the fact that He acted in the name of God. In their mind, if Jesus acted in the name of the Father, he would not have to suffer such a painful and humiliating death. The point they were making is that the power of Jesus was not the unlimited power of God. God had abandoned Him in His hour of need. They felt justified in their condemnation.

Second, the Jewish leaders declared: "He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross." The chief priests, scribes and elders point to the sign above Jesus' head. They demand that He prove that

he was the King of the Jews by coming down from the cross. You can hear the voice of Satan in these words. Jesus could have come down from that cross, but he didn't. The proof that He was the King of the Jews was not in His coming down from the cross but in His remaining on the cross. This is what all the prophets spoke about. The Messiah would have to die for the salvation of His people.

Finally, observe the words: "and we will believe in him." The leaders of the people declare that they would believe if Jesus came down from the cross. In what kind of king would they believe, however, if Jesus did what they suggested? They would believe in a king who failed to be the Saviour. This kind of king would have been unfaithful to the heavenly Father. This was not the kind of king Jesus was. He was willing to face the agony and suffering for you and me. He remained faithful to

the purpose of the Father. It is because He remained on the cross that we have hope.

Verse 43

Notice here that the chief priest, scribes and elders are not speaking to Jesus but to themselves or to all who will listen at the foot of the cross: "He trusts in God," they declare. They speak mockingly here. Here is a man who trusts in God, and look where it got Him, is the sense of their words. If He trusts God and is in such a wonderful relationship with Him, then let God deliver Him from this cruel death. Take note of the phrase "if he desires him." Emphasis is placed on the fact that Jesus had declared Himself to be God's Son. If this were the case, the Father would come to His aid. If God desired His Son, He would deliver Him. In their mind, if God did not rescue

Jesus, this was proof that He had no use for Him. God's deliverance of His Son was not as these religious leaders understood. He would die but would take His place at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He would be given a name above every other name and declared Lord of lords and King of kings. He was indeed the Son in whom the Father was well pleased.

Verse 44

The soldiers disrespected Jesus when they cast lots for His clothes. He was blasphemed by those who stood at the cross. The religious leaders ridiculed His life and words as they spoke to all who would listen. Notice finally that, according to Matthew, the robbers crucified with Jesus "reviled him in the same way." It appears that Jesus was the centre of attention that day. While we know that some did love and

honour Him, the attitude on that hill was one of mockery and blasphemy.

It is of note here that Matthew tells us that the “robbers” who were crucified with Jesus reviled Him. There were two robbers beside Jesus, and Matthew’s wording seems to lead us to believe both reviled Jesus. Luke 23:39-40, however, tells us that one of those criminals defended Jesus against the accusations of the other:

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

40 But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”

41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” – Lk 23:39-41

What is happening here? It would appear that something happened to one of the criminals on the cross. We may not have the full record of the conversation between Jesus and these men. Matthew seems to indicate that they both reviled Jesus initially, but Luke tells us that one of those men came to see Jesus for who He was, understood His innocence, and asked Him to receive Him in paradise.

Verse 45

Many mocked Jesus on the cross. They blasphemed His name and declared that God had abandoned Him. When Jesus died, however, the tables turned. Matthew tells us that from the sixth hour until the ninth, darkness filled the land. The sixth hour of the day was noon. This means that from noon to three in the afternoon, the skies turned dark. The Jews told Jesus to show

them He was the Son of God by coming down from the cross. Jesus demonstrated who He was, however, by remaining on the cross and dying.

Creation responded to the crucifixion of Jesus. Jerusalem was plunged into darkness as He hung on the cross. God displayed His displeasure with what His people had done. Those present that day would be given cause to reflect on what was happening. God demonstrated His displeasure by blocking the sun's light for the time His Son hung on that tree. We can only imagine what was going through people's minds that day as they reflected on this incident.

Verse 46

The death of Jesus took place in darkness. There were no rays of the sun to warm His body. There was only

darkness. At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out and said: "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" The words are a mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew. The meaning, however, is clear. Matthew translates them for us: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Let's consider these words briefly.

Notice first the words, "My God, my God." The words are repeated twice for emphasis. The words "My God, my God" are words of submission. As Jesus' life ebbed from Him, He lifted His voice to declare that His Father was God. That is to say, He willingly bowed the knee to Him. He chose to submit to His purpose and walk in obedience, even if that required His death. Notice also that Jesus declared the Father to be His God. The words "My God" show us that there was a very personal relationship between Jesus and the Father. Jesus did not just recognize the

Father as God but personalized that by declaring that He was "my God."

Second, observe that Jesus poses a question using the "why?" Jesus shows us that it is not wrong to ask questions of God. What is important to note, however, is how the question is prefaced by the declaration "my God." That is to say, Jesus first recognized that the Father was His God. As God, He had every right to do as He pleased. He had infinite wisdom and did all things according to His purpose. Jesus does not challenge the purpose of God here.

Nor does the question, "Why?" come from a lack of understanding? Jesus taught His disciples that He needed to die for the forgiveness of His people. Jesus is not ignorant of the Father's design in His death.

The word, why, used here is *íva tí* (*hína tí*). It comes from two words. The first, *hína*, refers to a purpose or end. The second word, *tí*, is translated by the words who, which or what. In other words, *íva tí* means to what end or to what purpose. In other words, the phrase might be translated as, to what have you left me? If this is the sense, then Jesus is not so much questioning the Father as He is looking to what was ahead. Where is this death leading me? What will the absence of Your presence bring into my life? What must I face next as I lay my life down in death?

Finally, notice that the Father forsook the Lord Jesus. We can only guess at that meant for Jesus and what the implications of that were for Him over the next few days. Scripture remains relatively silent on this. What we do know is that the death of Jesus was to pay the penalty for our sins. From what Jesus says here, we understand that

the Father “forsook” His Son on the cross and left Him to die. What caused the Father to forsake His Son? There is only one thing that could cause this – sin. It was not the sin of Jesus, however, but our sin. Somehow, Jesus identified with our sin and rebellion. That identification caused the Father to turn His back on His beloved Son. By turning His back, the Father sentences His Son to death. He also accepts His death as sufficient payment for the world’s sins. This is our hope.

Verse 47

People standing near the cross heard Jesus cry: “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” These individuals misunderstood Jesus here and assumed that He was calling for Elijah, the prophet. The intention of the individuals who said Jesus called for Elijah is unclear. Were they mocking

Jesus? Did they believe He was hallucinating and in need of help? We cannot be sure.

Verse 48

When word came that Jesus was supposedly calling for Elijah, one of the individuals present ran to find a sponge, filled it with sour wine and gave it to Jesus to drink. The intention here appears to be to ease His thirst and relieve some of His pain and suffering.

Verse 49

While one who heard Jesus cry out felt pity and ran for sour wine, the others responded very differently: "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

The word “wait” is somewhat perplexing. The context indicates that these individuals were speaking to the one raising the sponge dipped in sour wine to Jesus. Is it possible that they felt that by easing Jesus’ pain, he would no longer call out to Elijah? Did they want to see Jesus continue to call out to Elijah so they could witness a miracle?

How are we to understand this request? Did these individuals have questions about Jesus? Did they still wonder if He was the Messiah? Were they holding out for another miracle to prove He was who He said He was? Remember that the sun had already stopped shining, and the region was plunged into darkness. Were these individuals asking for yet another sign? What would it take for them to truly believe?

There is one other detail we need to see here. Their waiting for Elijah was

based on a misunderstanding of what Jesus said. Jesus had never called out for Elijah that day. Someone thought He did and spread the news. Those who waited for Elijah waited in vain because they were trusting in a misinterpretation of what He said.

Verse 50

As the individuals at the cross waited for Elijah to come, Jesus cried out one last time and surrendered to death. Elijah would not come. Jesus would die.

Verse 51

While Elijah did not come to spare Jesus from death, there were, nonetheless, many other signs that took place in those days. We have already seen that the region was plunged into darkness. Matthew tells us

that when Jesus died, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. That curtain separated the temple proper from the holy of holies where the presence of God dwelt. No one but the priest could go into that region only once a year. God was showing His people that this barrier was now broken by the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. It was a clear sign that God had accepted the death of Jesus as sufficient to pay the penalty of sin. The fact that the curtain was ripped from top to bottom indicates who initiated the process. It was God who ripped that curtain. God was telling His people that with the death of Jesus, there no longer needed to be any separation between Him and His people. Jesus' death paid their penalty in full.

Second, Matthew tells us that there was a great earthquake at the death of Jesus. The earth shook, and rocks were

split with the force of that quake. The ground responded to the impact of what had just taken place. This was testimony to the fact that the death of Jesus was no ordinary death.

Verse 52

Matthew goes on to tell us that tombs were opened by the earthquake that took place in those days. More than this, however, the bodies of those who had died were raised from the dead. The power of death was broken that day. God revealed this to all who were willing to see. He showed us that His Son Jesus broke the power of death.

Verse 53

The bodies of those who were raised at the death of Jesus came out of their tombs and went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people. God used

these individuals to testify to the work of His Son Jesus. We do not know whether these individuals spoke or declared the power of Christ, but we can be certain that their presence would have been very powerful evidence of the work of Jesus through His death. News of these encounters would have caused many to reflect on the person of Jesus Christ. These were exceptional days.

Verse 54

We have here the response of the centurion and his men who were watching the body of Jesus. When they saw the earthquake at the time of Jesus' death, they were filled with awe. The natural response was fear. Fear was certainly part of those men's feelings, but it went beyond fear. The word awe implies a deep admiration and reverence for the person of Jesus

Christ that would cause the earth to respond in such a way to His death. Their only response was to declare: "Truly this was the Son of God!" These men did not question Jesus- He was everything He claimed to be. God was moving in a very special way in those days. We can only imagine the impact of these events and the stories that circulated in those days on those who lived in the region.

Verse 55

Matthew tells us here that there were many women present that day who were watching everything that took place from a distance. These women had followed Jesus, ministering to Him as he travelled from place to place. They were not able to be close to Jesus in those days. There was much happening at the foot of that cross. Soldiers were guarding His body and

dividing His clothes. People were hurling insults at Jesus. The religious leaders were blaspheming His name. At a distance, however, were those who truly loved Him. They watched, with close attention, to everything that was taking place. I am sure that what they saw deeply grieved their hearts.

Verse 56

Matthew lists the names of three of these women watching at a distance.

First, there was Mary Magdalene. Luke tells us that Mary had been delivered from seven demons.

2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, – Lk 8:2

The second woman watching from a distance was Mary, the mother of James and Joseph. Compare this with Matthew 13:55:

*55 Is not this the carpenter's son?
Is not his mother called Mary? And
are not his brothers James and
Joseph and Simon and Judas? – Mt
13:55*

Matthew 13 is a discussion about Jesus. Here they call His mother Mary and his brothers James and Joseph. This second Mary is likely the mother of Jesus.

The next mother present in this group is the wife of Zebedee and mother to his sons. Matthew 4:21 tells us that the sons of Zebedee were James and John.

*21 And going on from there he
saw two other brothers, James the
son of Zebedee and John his*

*brother, in the boat with Zebedee
their father, mending their nets,
and he called them. – Mt 4:21*

Verse 57

On the evening of Jesus' death, a man named Joseph came to the place of the crucifixion. We learn three things here about Joseph.

First, he was a rich man. Jesus taught that it was difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, but in Joseph, we have a man who did not allow his riches to interfere with his spiritual walk.

Second, Joseph was from Arimathea. The location of this town is uncertain, although it was very likely in the nation of Israel.

Finally, Joseph was a disciple of Jesus. While not one of the twelve, Joseph

was a rich man who had come to believe in Jesus and His message.

Verse 58

Joseph of Arimathea had gone to Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus. As a disciple of Jesus, he would have wanted to see that His body was respectfully buried. As a rich man, He had the means to make this happen and the influence with Pilate. Pilate permitted Joseph to take Jesus' body. You can be sure that Jesus' family would have been very grateful to Joseph for such an act of compassion on his part.

Verse 59

After taking the body of Jesus down from the cross, Joseph wrapped it in a clean linen shroud. Ordinarily, the body would also be prepared with spices for

burial. Matthew does not mention anything about these spices here. Mark tells us that it was only the next day that the women would go to the tomb to anoint his body with these spices.

1 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. – Mk 16:1

It is quite likely that because the Sabbath was fast approaching when they would not be able to make this effort, they were in a hurry to get Jesus' body down from the cross and into the tomb.

Verse 60

Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and put it in his own tomb. We are not told if he had carved this out of

the rock for himself, but it was certainly for his family's use. His willingness to give his site to Jesus shows us what Joseph thought about Jesus.

Matthew makes it clear that when Jesus' body was placed in the tomb, a great stone was rolled to the entrance to seal it. The Greek word used for great here is μέγας (mégas), from which we get the English word mega. The idea is that the stone was large in size and quite heavy. It would not be easily moved.

Verse 61

Matthew tells us that when Jesus was placed in the tomb, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sat opposite. Matthew 27:56 tells us that the other Mary was the mother of James and Joseph.

56 among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee – Mt 27:56

These two women watched what they did with the body of Jesus and were able to identify the place where they laid His body. They would return later to properly anoint his body for burial.

Verse 62

Jesus was crucified and buried on the day before the Sabbath. This was the day when preparations were made for the Sabbath. Matthew tells us that after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered before Pilate. That is to say, these religious leaders met with Pilate on the Sabbath day. This would not normally be a day of business for them, but they considered the matter they had to discuss, and

they were willing to break their Sabbath to find a resolution.

Verse 63

What was so important that the religious leaders would call a meeting with the governor on the Sabbath? They remembered that Jesus had prophesied that He would rise on the third day.

Notice here that they called Jesus an imposter or deceiver. This word is quite incredible, understanding all that had occurred on the day of Jesus' death. The region was plunged into darkness, the earth quaked, and the dead were raised and walked in the city. They stand now before Pilate accusing Jesus of deceiving them by these signs from the cross. This shows us just how hard their hearts were and how nothing would change their mind about Jesus.

Verse 64

The religious leaders requested that Pilate make the tomb where Jesus was buried secure until after the third day. They told Pilate they feared the disciples might steal His body and tell the people that he had risen from the dead. While this shows the disbelief of the religious leaders, what they did that day would confirm the truth of Jesus' resurrection. These precautions ensured that no disciple could take the body of Jesus away. When Jesus rose, nonetheless, it was proof that something truly miraculous had taken place.

Verse 65

Pilate consented to the religious leaders' request, giving them a guard and permission to secure the site. It was in the governor's interest to do so,

as he could not afford to have any riots or misunderstandings surrounding the person of Jesus. Pilate ordered that the tomb site be made as secure as possible. Both Rome and the Jewish authorities cooperated in this endeavour.

Verse 66

With the governor's approval, the Jewish officials and Roman soldiers sealed the stone and set a guard at the site for three days. Notice that the stone was sealed. Matthew does not tell us how this was done, but we do have an example of this in the book of Daniel when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den.

17 And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his

*lords, that nothing might be
changed concerning Daniel. – Da
6:17*

In the case of Daniel, the stone that was laid at the mouth of the den was sealed with the king's seal. It made it an offence to pass that point or to tamper with that stone. It is possible that Pilate set his mark on that stone, making it a crime punishable by death to interfere with anything in that tomb. Everything humanly possible was done to prevent the removal of the body of Jesus.

MATTHEW 28

Verse 1

It was the day after the Sabbath, very early in the morning, when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. Mark tells us that the other Mary was Mary, the mother of James.

1 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. – Mk 16:1

Mark also tells us that these women went to anoint the body of Jesus with spices.

Verse 2

This was no ordinary morning. Matthew tells us that there was a great earthquake. We can only imagine what it would have been like for these two women to venture out after such an event.

Notice the connection between this earthquake and the angel of the Lord that descended from heaven in the phrase: "There was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven." The earth shook at what was about to take place.

The angel that descended from heaven rolled the stone from the tomb and sat on it. There is in this a declaration of victory. That stone no longer held the Lord Jesus. He had been set free from its bondage.

Verse 3

Matthew describes the appearance of this angel to be like lightning, with clothing as white as snow. In other words, there was a mysterious brightness to this being. The whiteness represented purity. This was not something one could take for granted. It would have caused tremendous fear for those who saw him.

Verse 4

Upon seeing this angel, the guards assigned to the site became very afraid. Matthew tells us that this fear was evident in two ways.

First, they trembled. There was a physical response to the sighting of this angel. Their body shook with terror. Second, Matthew tells us that the guards became like dead men. That is

to say, they either fainted or were paralyzed with fear. In any case, they were helpless before the presence of this celestial being.

Verse 5

While the guards were paralyzed with fear, the angel spoke to the women. These women were also afraid, but the angel spoke to them and calmed their anxiety.

Notice the words of the angel to the women. He told them not to be afraid because he knew they were seeking Jesus, who had been crucified. Let's consider this for a moment.

The angel connects the fear these women experienced with their seeking of Jesus. There are two ways of understanding this.

First, the women did not need to be afraid because, like the angel, they sought after Jesus. That is to say, they were on the same team. The angel loved the Lord just as these women did.

Second, it may be that seeing the stone rolled away, the women were fearful of what might have happened to the body of Jesus. That is to say, someone may have stolen his body. The angel assured them they had no cause for fear on this account.

Verse 6

The angel told the women that the Lord Jesus was no longer in the tomb but that He had risen. To confirm this, he invited them to come with him to see the place where he had lain. The angel understood that these women needed more than his word on this. They

needed to see this for themselves. When the women returned to the disciples, they would not just be able to tell them what they had heard but also what they had seen and experienced.

Verse 7

Having shown them where Jesus had laid, the angel told the women to go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. He also told them where they could find Him. He was on His way to Galilee.

The fact that these women were to go quickly seems to indicate that there was a sense of urgency to this command. The insinuation seems to be that they were to meet Jesus on the way to Galilee.

Verse 8

Notice the response of the women to the words of the angel and what they saw that day.

First, they departed quickly from the tomb. That is to say, they obeyed the angel's command and ran back to the disciples to inform them of what they had seen and heard.

Second, they departed with fear. The experience had left these women with a certain anxiety. This fear was not the type of fear that had paralyzed the guards but a holy fear and reverence for a Saviour who had conquered death.

Third, the women also experienced great joy. This joy came from the fact that they believed what the angel had told them. Jesus was alive. They believed this. They recognized that He had been faithful to His word and conquered death. I don't think they grasped the full significance of this, but

just knowing their Lord was alive was joyful news for them.

Verse 9

As the women returned to report this news to the disciples, they met Jesus on the way. The women had arrived at the tomb very shortly after He had risen and started for Galilee.

Notice the response of these women to Jesus. They took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. That is to say, they bowed to the ground before Him.

There was no question in their minds about the person and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They returned to their brothers and sisters with first-hand experience. Their testimony was backed up and witnessed by each other.

Verse 10

Notice what Jesus told the women when He met them.

First, He recognized their fear. What these women experienced that day was a fearful and awesome thing. Their Lord, who was dead, was now alive. He had broken the chains of death. This in itself was beyond their ability to imagine. Like the angel, Jesus calms the fears of the woman who likely stood trembling before Him that day. Secondly, the Lord told these women to share their experiences with the disciples. They were to tell them what they had seen and heard and point them to where they could find Him. He told them that He would be on the road to Galilee.

This is the call of Jesus to each of us. We are to share what we have seen of Jesus and point those who will listen to where we can find Him.

Verse 11

Jesus commanded the women who had met Him to tell His disciples that He was alive and headed to Galilee. As these women raced to obey, the guards who had been at the site of the tomb went into the city to meet with the chief priests. Remember that it was the chief priests who had asked permission from Pilate to secure the tomb. These guards would have been responsible to them as well as to Pilate.

Matthew clarifies that only “some of the guards” went to see the chief priests. This may mean that the remainder of the guards still guarded the tomb.

Verse 12

Upon hearing the guards’ report, the chief priests and elders gathered to discuss what their response to this

news was to be. It was decided to pay them a sum of money. The idea was to keep them silent about what they had seen.

The great concern of these leaders was to maintain the status quo. In other words, they did not want anything to change. They were happy with their faith and didn't want to deal with Jesus and His challenges. Even the resurrection of Jesus would not change their minds.

Verse 13

After giving the soldiers money, the chief priests and elders instructed them to tell the people that the disciples had stolen the body when they were asleep. Not only were these religious leaders willing to bribe the guards, but they encouraged them to be dishonest. We

see in this the state of their faith and the hardness of their heart.

Verse 14

A guard risked serious consequences if he was to fall asleep on the job. The chief priests and elders offered to pay these guards, however, to say just that. Not many guards would have accepted to admit their failure to be vigilant for money. What good would that money be if they were killed for falling asleep?

The chief priests and elders, however, not only offered these guards money but also promised to keep them out of trouble with the governor. Essentially, they assured them they would do everything possible to see that they were not punished for “falling asleep.”

Verse 15

With the assurance of protection if they lied, the guards took the money and followed the advice of the chief priests and elders. As a result, this was the official story spread throughout the region.

What was important to these chief priests and elders was not the truth but peace and the continuance of things as they had always been. They were willing to deceive the people if, by doing so, they could maintain their hold of power. The guards were willing to benefit from dishonesty if they were assured they would not suffer for it.

Verse 16

The women who had seen Jesus after His resurrection told the disciples that He was going to Galilee. The eleven disciples wasted no time going to Galilee to meet Him. Remember that

Judas was no longer with these men as He had killed himself after betraying Jesus.

Notice also that Jesus told these eleven men where they could meet Him. He directed them to a mountain. This mountain would have provided them with a quiet place to speak without interruption.

Verse 17

Going up into that mountain, the eleven disciples found Jesus. Notice the response of the disciples to the presence of Jesus that day.

First, some worshipped Him. That is to say, seeing Him alive proved to them, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that He was the Son of God. They fell at His feet in worship.

Not every one of those eleven disciples, however, was convinced that this was Jesus in the flesh. Matthew tells us that among those who had gathered to meet Jesus were some who doubted. These individuals would need further convincing.

Verse 18

Matthew concludes his gospel with Jesus' commission to the eleven disciples. Remember that this commission was given to both those who worshipped Him in verse 17 and those who doubted.

Jesus begins with a word about His authority. The Greek word used here is ἐξουσία (exousía). It is translated by permission, right or the power to do something. In other words, there is no hindrance or obstacle to Jesus doing as He pleases.

Notice the phrase “all authority in heaven and earth.” We might be given authority in a certain area or responsibility. Jesus’ authority is different. There is no limit to His authority, right or ability. He has all authority in heaven and all authority on earth. In other words, all heaven and earth must submit to His command. He can do as He pleases with everything in heaven and earth. No one has the right to question what He does.

This authority had been given to Jesus. That authority had been given to Him by the Father:

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. – Jn 13:3-4

Jesus' authority also comes from His perfect life and death. He alone is worthy to unseal the purpose of God for this world. Because He died and rose from the dead, He alone is worthy to open the scroll of heaven to unfold the purpose of God:

5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." – Rev 5:5

The Father has given Jesus authority because of who He is and what He has done.

Verse 19

It is in the name of Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given, that these disciples were called

to go. We also have His authority behind us as we go. Some of those to whom Jesus spoke this command indeed doubted at the time. None of the disciples were perfect in their understanding or experience. They still had a long way to go in their walk with God, but they were still called to go in His name.

Because Jesus has all authority, we are to go. We can understand this authority in many ways.

First, He has authority over us as believers, so when He calls us to go, we do not have the right to refuse. If we do not go in His name, we are disobeying His command. We must go, therefore, because He commands it.

Second, Jesus has authority over the nations. This authority overrules the unwillingness of these nations to hear. It is His purpose that every nation and

people hear, and so we are to go in the authority of Jesus to declare it. Third, Jesus' authority is over sin and death. The world as we know it has been held in bondage to sin and its consequences. Jesus alone has authority over this evil. This is a message we cannot keep to ourselves. We must share it with those who would listen. Jesus has broken the chain of sin and death. There is hope and victory over these great foes. We must declare this message, for it is a message that is too good to keep to ourselves.

Notice what Jesus tells His disciples to do as they go.

First, the disciples were to make disciples of all nations. The word Jesus uses here is μαθητεύω (mathēteúō). It comes from the word μαθητής (mathētēs) which means disciple. A disciple is a follower of a master. The word μαθητεύω (mathēteúō) implies not only learning about the teaching of another but also

becoming a follower of that master. The Lord calls His disciples here to bring people of all nations under His Lordship and purpose for their lives. They were to declare Him Lord of lords and King of kings to whom every knee and nation must bow.

Second, the disciples were to baptize those brought under His Lordship. They were to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This baptism was a sign of their covenantal commitment to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was a renunciation of their sin and a vow to walk in the purpose of this triune God.

Verse 20

The final charge of Jesus to the disciples who went to the nations was that they were to teach them. Notice that they were to teach them what He

had commanded them. The word command here in the original language is ἐντέλλομαι (entéllomai) which refers to a command or order. The commands of the Lord to His disciples most often related to how they were to live. A command requires action. The implication is that the disciples were to teach how Jesus had commanded them to live. The focus is not just on doctrine but on applying that doctrine to life. Jesus wanted disciples who not only understood the truth but also lived that truth in real life.

As Matthew concludes his book, He does so with a promise of Jesus to all who go in His name to make disciples, baptize them and teach them what Jesus commands. Jesus told His disciples that as they went in His name, they would not be alone. He would be with them always to the end of the age. He who had authority over heaven and earth promised to walk with them

step by step as they went out in His name. They would have confidence not only in His authority but also in His presence to comfort, keep and guide.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their



ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

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