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**THE SON  
HAS  
AUTHORITY**

COMMENTARY



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

ADULTS



SUMMER | 2026

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# GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

## A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But on the third day, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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# THE EDITOR

Jesus, there is no one like Him. He graced the paths of Israel two thousand years ago, and He graces the pages of our Bibles today. But even better, He graces us with His presence in our hearts.

If you have been a Christian for many years, it might be easy to read the stories of Jesus in this volume with pride, thinking you already know these passages. But I pray that the Spirit would enlighten your mind and revive your heart to see something new or learn something different about who Jesus is—His heart, His character, His purpose. There is much that we already know about Him, but being God, there is still much for us to learn.

Like the crowds, let us be in awe as if seeing Him heal or cast out demons for the first time. But even more, let us be like Peter’s mother-in-law, who served Jesus after being healed. Or like the man with leprosy who proclaimed about Him because of his joy. Or the friends of the man with paralysis who brought him to Jesus knowing He could do anything. Or like the disciples who obeyed when He called. Or the woman who was a sinner who gave Jesus her all.

There is something to learn from all these people who were changed because they encountered Jesus. This should make us reflect on our story of our encounter with Jesus. Whether we have chosen to trust in Him or not, our encounter with Jesus will forever change us. If you have not placed your faith in Him, know that He beckons to you now. Choosing to follow Jesus will change your trajectory. He did that for the people in these passages, and He continues to do that in people’s lives today.

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# HOW TO USE THE COMMENTARY

The Commentary is a vital tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here are different ways on how to make the most of your time with it:

## 1) AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE LEADER GUIDE

**Context:** After Jesus met with the woman at the well in Samaria, she believed Jesus was the Messiah and told the people in her town. Many people in Samaria believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Two days later, Jesus resumed His travels in Galilee. While in Cana, He was stopped by an official who was in great distress because his son was at death's door. Yet His son was in Capernaum, roughly two-hundred miles away. Jesus revealed His authority over sickness in a way that showed His messianicship.

**Key Concept:** Faith includes believing in Jesus's authority and power.

**DAILY READINGS**

Day 4: John 4:43-54	Day 4: John 4:21
Day 5: John 5:1-9	Day 5: John 4:25-27
Day 5: John 5:24-47	Day 6: Psalm 142

The Leader Guide takes you through the same Personal Preparation your group members will follow in their Personal Study Guide so you can experience that with them during the week. And then the Leader Guide provides you with step-by-step instructions for the weekly Group Experience, including the learning activity and application questions.

You can use the Commentary to supplement your learning and personal preparation. The context, key concept, and daily readings as well as the Scripture breakdowns and discussion questions in the Commentary will be the same as in the Personal Study Guide and the Leader Guide. But the bulk of the content is unique, so read through the Commentary to gain additional insight for your group's questions and discussions during the Group Experience.

## 2) AS A PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

**Key Concept:** Faith includes believing in Jesus's authority and power.

**Faith Understands the Signs**

After traveling through Samaria, Jesus returned to Cana in Galilee. John reminded us in verse 46 that Cana was the city where Jesus "turned the water into wine." As portrayed in the *Scripture Connection*—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—most of Jesus's ministry happened in the region of Galilee, but John's Gospel shows us Jesus's wider travels. After turning water into wine in 2:1-11, Jesus went down to Judea for Passover (2:12-22), where He drew out from the temple the tables of the vendors and drove them away with the same-eyebrow-raiser. After Jesus spent some time in Judea, the people in Galilee welcomed Him back to their region because of everything He had done at the Passover festival (2:23).

While some Galileans, especially those in Nazareth, rejected Jesus's message that He was the Messiah, John described Jesus's turning water into wine as "the

The signs themselves were not the point. Signs are meant to point to something, and it was good to wonder at the sign and marvel now on to where it leads you. Jesus contrasted the sign offered with the need to trust Jesus for who He is, not just look at the glow of what He could do.

**Key Concept:** Faith includes believing in Jesus's authority and power.

**Faith Protests and Got Deeper**

The man was not deterred by Jesus's correction. He responded in faith even after this initial rebuke: "Sir, the official said to him, 'Come down before my boy dies' (v.46). This reaction, of course, was what Jesus wanted. The man knew that Jesus could heal, and he was anxious for his son to be healed, yet he knew that Jesus was called for belief before the healing. So he believed.

**Is what you hear you had and your expectations in your prayers from the Lord?**

What do you do when your prayers initially seem to meet opposition? Do you just keep bargaining with God, saying that you will believe in Him only if He does what you ask, only if He comes through this next time? While God is gracious and often does answer such prayers, this posture should give us caution. A faith that only seeks signs is not the faith that Jesus demands. Rather, we give to trust Him even when the cause has not responded in measure like we hoped, and when the job often was being prayed for down the piper, and when Jesus's answer to our most heartfelt request is no. Faith is trusting in Jesus, come what may.

**How does the reality of Jesus's authority and power affect how you approach Him in prayer?**

Leaders may also choose to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for their group because it is easier to read with a larger font than the Personal Study Guide.

If used in this way, the Commentary is designed to be used before the group time and then during the group time. Read through the session to be prepared for your group time. The context, key concept, and daily readings will give you the background and focus you need to study. The various headings and subheadings give you the bullet points that connect to the key concept. Answer the questions provided to prepare beforehand to discuss during the group time together. The Head, Heart, and Hands questions help you apply what you have learned. Use the margins for whatever notes you might need to jot down.

### 3) AS A LEADER GUIDE

the Commentary as a leader guide. For the best learning experience, having the Leader Guide along with the Commentary will be beneficial as the Leader Guide has a guided path to lead the group time, a group activity to foster discussion and group interaction, and further details about the Head, Heart, and Hands application section.

But if you choose not to use the Leader Guide, you can use the Commentary as a leader guide by following the pages in order with your group, highlighting important ideas and concepts along with the headings and subheadings to add further insight to the key concept. Ask your group what was interesting to them, and use the questions provided to further your group discussion. And as you wrap up with the Head, Heart, and Hands questions, allow the group to discuss how to apply what they've learned. End with prayer requests and praises that you can jot down in the margins.

If your group chooses to use the Commentary as their personal study guide, then you as the leader can also use

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 22

# RESPONSES

# TO JESUS



MARK; LUKE; JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

—Luke 4:18-19





# THE OFFICIAL BELIEVED

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 4:46-54

**Context:** After Jesus met with the woman at the well in Samaria, she believed Jesus was the Messiah and told the people in her town. Many people in Samaria believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Two days later, Jesus resumed His travels in Galilee. While in Cana, He was stopped by an official who was in great distress because his son was at death's door. Yet his son was in Capernaum, roughly twenty-five miles away. Jesus revealed His authority over sickness in a way that showed His messiahship.

**Key Concept:** Faith includes believing in Jesus's authority and power.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** John 4:43-54
- Day 2:** John 5:1-23
- Day 3:** John 5:24-47
- Day 4:** John 6:1-21
- Day 5:** John 6:22-71
- Day 6:** Psalm 142

**Jesus's word is powerful and able to heal**  
(John 4:46-50).

**<sup>46</sup> He went again to Cana of Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to him and pleaded with him to come down and heal his son, since he was about to die. <sup>48</sup> Jesus told him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” <sup>49</sup> “Sir,” the official said to him, “come down before my boy dies.” <sup>50</sup> “Go,” Jesus told him, “your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.**

**Faith Understands the Signs**

After traveling through Samaria, Jesus returned to Cana in Galilee. John reminded us in verse 46 that Cana was the city where Jesus “turned the water into wine.” As portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—most of Jesus’s ministry happened in the region of Galilee, but John’s Gospel shows us Jesus’s wider travels. After turning water into wine in 2:1-11, Jesus went down to Judea for Passover (2:13-23), where He drove out from the temple the sellers of sheep and cows and doves along with the money-changers. After Jesus spent some time in Judea, the people in Galilee welcomed Him back to their region because of everything He had done at the Passover festival (4:45).

While some Galileans, especially those in Nazareth, rejected Jesus’s message that He preached (4:44; cf. Luke 4:16-30), they were eager to see His miracles. John described Jesus’s turning water into wine as “the



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

## THEOLOGY Connection

**FAITH:** Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

first of his signs” (John 2:11) and mentioned that His first miracle helped convince the disciples of Jesus’s messiahship (2:11). Indeed, in His nighttime meeting with Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel admitted that he and other Pharisees knew that Jesus came from God because no one could do the “signs” He did “unless God were with him” (3:2).

However, it is not enough to see the signs that Jesus performed. Merely seeing wonders or believing that Jesus could perform miracles is not the same as believing in Him. Salvation comes when we believe in Jesus (3:16,36), and John stressed the importance of accepting Jesus’s testimony (3:33). The Samaritan woman and her whole village believed that Jesus “really is the Savior of the world” (4:42) without any miraculous signs at all.

So when Jesus returned to Cana, John was hinting for us what to expect with Jesus’s interactions with the people in Galilee. John showed that the miracles, the signs of Jesus, and the words of Jesus must be accepted together. We will see how one who seeks the miracles of Jesus needs also to submit to the words of Jesus in faith.

With this idea in mind, we are introduced to a new character who was not in Cana but miles away: “There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum” (4:46). Cana and Capernaum were not neighboring towns. We are not exactly sure where ancient Cana was, but the closest option is more than a seven-hour walk from Capernaum. This would be an easy drive for us today, but not so for the official. This father did not just happen to run into Jesus but came looking for Him in his desperation.

Perhaps the official had heard of what Jesus had done in Cana previously. Or maybe he had heard of the signs that Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover. Regardless, this royal official, likely someone attached to the service of Herod Antipas, had heard that Jesus could heal. This official's son was sick and near death (4:47), and he believed that the only chance he had for his son to live was through the power of God. And for this, he knew he needed Jesus.

When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he left his home to go meet this miracle-worker. He did not let the distance deter him. He did not delay. He left his son's side at what could have been his death-bed because he believed that Jesus alone could heal him. This was an immense act of faith and should be praised as such. He knew that only Jesus could rescue his son, so he did not let anything get in the way—not distance, not inconvenience, not even the fears that would have come along with leaving his son behind in Capernaum.

How do we act when we are in urgent need? It can be all too easy to focus on the next thing in front of us or to be paralyzed and unable to act in an emergency. This official's actions show us a faithful path that is neither self-reliance nor inactivity. The most important question is whether or not you go to Jesus with your needs. This doesn't mean doing nothing; giving our concerns to Jesus is never "doing nothing." It does mean acting and working in such a way that asks Jesus for help. Like the official leaving his sick son at home, living by faith means living in a way that only makes sense if Jesus is who He says He is and can do what He says He will do.

The interaction between Jesus and the official, however, did not go the way the official had expected. The man pleaded with Jesus to come down and heal his son, yet Jesus responded with what sounds like a callous statement about the nature of belief: “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe” (4:48). Ouch. That certainly was not the answer this desperate father wanted to hear. What was going on here?

It may be that something in the official’s understanding of Jesus needed to be corrected. John Calvin interpreted Jesus’s response this way:

Christ did not tell him off in such a way that he intended to totally reject him or refuse his prayers, but he told him off in order to correct his mistaken idea which was blocking his way to true faith. . . . Similarly, whatever is wrong, distorted, or superfluous in our prayers must be corrected and removed so that harmful obstructions can be taken out of the way.<sup>1</sup>

For the official, and by extension the crowd, Jesus may have been leading him to trust not just in Jesus’s physical presence but in the power of His word.

Jesus’s statement was not directed only to the official but to the crowd as a whole. “You people” in the CSB is a translation of the plural “you” in Greek (think “y’all”). The crowds that came to Jesus often wanted signs more than anything else. This was going to come to a head in John 6:22-71, where Jesus and the crowds who followed Him disputed over His miracles and who Jesus claimed to be.

The signs themselves were not the point. Signs are meant to point to something, and it is no good to wonder at the sign and never move on to where it leads you. Jesus confronted the royal official with the need to trust Jesus for who He is, not just bask in the glow of what He could do.

### **Faith Persists and Go Deeper**

The man was not deterred by Jesus's correction. He responded in faith even after this initial setback: "‘Sir,’ the official said to him, ‘come down before my boy dies’" (4:49). This reaction, of course, was what Jesus wanted. The man knew that Jesus could heal, and he was anxious for his son to be healed, yet he knew that Jesus was calling for belief before the healing. So he believed.

#### ***In what ways have you had anxious expectations in your requests from the Lord?***

What do you do when your prayers initially seem to meet opposition? Do you find yourself bargaining with God, saying that you will believe in Him only if He does what you ask, only if He comes through this next time? While God is gracious and often does answer such prayers, this passage should give us caution. A faith that only seeks signs is not the faith that Jesus demands. Rather, we are to trust Him even when the cancer has not responded to treatment like we hoped, when the job offer we were praying for doesn't happen, and when Jesus's answer to our most heartfelt request is no. Faith is trusting in Jesus, come what may.

#### ***How does the reality of Jesus's authority and power affect how you approach Him in prayer?***

#### **Voices from CHURCH HISTORY**

*"It often happens that while our Heavenly Father may not grant our desires in every particular, he nevertheless helps us in unexpected ways, so that we may learn not to dictate to him in anything."<sup>2</sup>*

—John Calvin  
(1509–1564)



After the official asked Jesus again to come to Capernaum before his son died, Jesus instead told him to go—his son would live (vv. 49-50). Jesus did not go with the man but healed his son in a way that called the official into deeper faith. The official twice asked Jesus to “come down” to Capernaum (vv. 47,49), but at Jesus’s command to go, he departed in faith, making the journey back to his home alone. Jesus gave the man a chance to believe in both His power and His word.

The Greek in verse 50 is somewhat ambiguous, simply saying, “Your son lives,” in the present tense. In this way, Jesus affirmed the healing had happened in that moment, but without text messages or phone calls, the man would have to ascertain the truth when he reached his house. So the official “believed what Jesus said to him and departed.” Think of how frantically he might have journeyed to Cana. What was his pace on the way home? Slower than we might expect, we will see, yet every step was an act of faith, a conscious decision to take Jesus at His word.

We often are in the same position as this royal official. Jesus is with us (Matt. 28:20), but we cannot see Him face to face. We need Him for salvation and for daily strength, but we do not have the privilege of being in His physical presence. Does this leave us alone? Does this leave us without His strength, without His power, or without His guidance? By no means! He is with us now, and in key ways, He is nearer to us now than He was while He walked on earth. Jesus said in John 16:7: “It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.” The Holy Spirit—the Counselor—is always with us and within us, nearer to us than we are near to one another.

The whole of John's Gospel moves us toward this concept of faith in the absence of sight. We've already seen in John 2–4 how we need Jesus's words, not just His signs, to have true faith. Similarly, at the end of the Gospel, when the resurrected Jesus showed His wounds to Thomas, He said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (20:29). This is possible because while we do not have His physical presence, we do have His Spirit and His Word. We have the Scriptures to speak to us, counsel us, and direct us, even though we did not witness the miracles Jesus performed firsthand. Therefore, based on the truthfulness of Scripture, like the father in this passage, we are called forth into deeper faith in response.

**Jesus's power and authority realized leads to faith** (John 4:51-54).

<sup>51</sup> While he was still going down, his servants met him saying that his boy was alive. <sup>52</sup> He asked them at what time he got better. "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him," they answered. <sup>53</sup> The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. <sup>54</sup> Now this was also the second sign Jesus performed after he came from Judea to Galilee.

**Faith Endures with Patience**

As we've already said, Cana and Capernaum were not neighboring towns. It likely would have taken a large part of his day for the official to walk from one town to the other. As we move to verse 51, a day had passed, and the royal official was nearing Capernaum.

**Voices from  
CHURCH HISTORY**

*"The way to increase faith is to exercise faith. And the true parent of perfect faith is the experience of the blessings that come from the crudest, rudest, narrowest, blindest, feeblest faith that a man can exercise."<sup>3</sup>*

—MacLaren of Manchester (1826–1910)

Somewhere along the road (we are not told where), his servants met him with great news—his boy was alive and well, completely healed. This, however, was not a surprise to the official. Jesus had declared the same thing to him the day before. But it was certainly delightful to receive proof that his faith was well-placed.

In his journey, we may already see his faith shaping his life. If he were anxious, if he had been uncertain that Jesus’s words would become reality, he could have left the moment Jesus spoke and made it back a little while after nightfall, in theory. Or gathering supplies, he could have rushed home through the night. Traveling through the night, though, would have been an unsafe journey, but he could have done so if he were rushing back to his son on what he feared was his child’s deathbed.

Yet this is not what we find. Rather, a full day later, we find him still on the road. This was a man of means, a royal official; he could have commandeered or purchased a horse, a mule, or anything to speed him along. Instead, at what seems to be a leisurely pace, he was walking home as he was met by his servants on the road. We could say quite literally that this official was walking by faith. Because he trusted in Jesus’s words, he was not anxious or hurried.

When he met the servants and they told him that his boy was well, he was curious. Maybe this was all a coincidence. Maybe his son got better right after he left, and nothing after mattered. So he inquired and found that his son became well the moment Jesus had said, “Your son will live” (v. 53). Here he understood fully the power of Jesus’s word. As Jesus spoke the day before, His words became reality. While on a smaller scale, this was the same power with which Jesus—the

Word—created the universe (see 1:1-3). As God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen. 1:3), here Jesus said, “Your son will live,” and he lived. Jesus, being God in the flesh, can speak and declare things to be so, to come into existence, and to occur.

This is how salvation comes to us as well. When we believe in Jesus, we are justified, that is to say, God declares us to be righteous. To believe in Jesus is to be changed, made new, made alive, made righteous, and made holy. It must be so because Jesus says so. He declares us His and new in Him, and as He speaks, He creates this reality in us.

The royal official responded to this revelation with renewed faith. He already had believed, but his faith deepened and grew. As one commentator put it:

The mention of a multistage believing pattern on the part of the man (‘believed,’ 4:50, and then ‘believed,’ after confirmation of the time, 4:53) should not trouble western readers because the evangelist was fully aware of stages within the believing pattern of persons related to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, each Christian has had a moment when we believed the gospel, trusted in Jesus, and received salvation. Yet over the years, as we walk with Christ, our faith and belief deepens and grows as we experience His goodness and faithfulness to His promises.

***Why do you think we feel we need to see to believe? How has God shown you grace to deepen your faith in Him?***

## Faith Spreads to Others

We are also told that the official believed “along with his whole household” (v. 53). There is only one way this could have happened: he told them what Jesus had done. He did not keep the words and works of Jesus to himself but declared them to his family. This is the natural response of someone who has met Jesus and who has experienced His power—we tell other people what He has done.

The story of this royal official and his son is a wonderful testimony of the power of Jesus and His word. It points us to the need for faith and the confidence that Jesus’s word is true and mighty and that He will do what He says. It also moves us to tell other people about Jesus. As wonderful as it is that this boy was spared from death, it is yet more wonderful that he and the rest of his family came to believe in Jesus and were spared from sin and death eternally. And so with us, every blessing we receive from God is an opportunity to tell others about His faithfulness.


The passage ends with a structural note: “Now this was also the second sign Jesus performed after he came from Judea to Galilee” (v. 54). John counted the first signs in Galilee to teach us to keep track of them throughout the Gospel and, more importantly, to look to that which the signs point to: the glory of Jesus. As we reflect on the two miracles in Cana of Galilee, we see how Jesus provides abundant joy in turning water into wine and how He healed the official’s son. The life He gives is joyful and the joy He gives is full of life since both come through being united to Him in faith.

***In what ways does your life bear witness to the authority and power of Jesus?***


### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus’s power to heal from afar points to His authority over all. That authority reveals itself in His victory over sin and death through His crucifixion and resurrection. We merely need to have faith in Him.

**Key Concept:** Faith includes believing in Jesus's authority and power.

 **HEAD**

How do the accounts of Jesus's ministry draw you closer to Him?

 **HEART**

In what ways can you cast your burdens upon the Lord?

 **HANDS**

How can you be a faithful witness who proclaims Christ's authority, identity, and grace to others this week?

Notes



**References**

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# THE HOMETOWN REJECTED

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 4:16-30

**Context:** Luke 4 contains a couple of well-known milestones in Jesus's ministry, such as Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. Then Jesus began His ministry in Galilee. Based upon the parallels from the other Gospel accounts, Jesus had already called His disciples and performed miracles at this time. His reputation and authority were spreading amongst the Jewish people. The people in Jesus's hometown of Nazareth, however, would have their own opinion on this matter.

**Key Concept:** Jesus's identity and the gospel message can lead to rejection.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Luke 4:14-30
- Day 2:** Luke 4:31-44
- Day 3:** Luke 5:12-16
- Day 4:** Luke 5:17-26
- Day 5:** Luke 5:27-39
- Day 6:** Psalm 31

## Jesus fulfilled Scripture as the Messiah, the Anointed One (Luke 4:16-21).

**<sup>16</sup> He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: <sup>18</sup> The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. <sup>20</sup> He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled."**

### Jesus Regularly Taught in the Synagogue

When we think of the earthly ministry of Jesus, we usually focus on the miracles. We think of the ways in which Jesus healed the sick, provided food for thousands, walked on water, and commanded a storm to be still. But when we pay closer attention to the Gospels, we see that Jesus was far more interested in teaching than in the miracles. He would even leave a place where He could still perform miracles because He needed to preach somewhere else (Mark 1:38; Luke 4:43). And His preaching was not some message entirely disconnected from God's previous revelation. Rather, when Jesus taught in the towns of Galilee and Judea, He preached from the Scriptures.

In Luke 4, Jesus went into the synagogue and stood up to read "as usual" (v. 16). Going to the synagogue was Jesus's habit, His usual practice. In synagogues



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Notes

in Jesus's day, traveling teachers would sometimes be invited to read a portion of the Scriptures and to give a short talk commenting on it, somewhat like a sermon in churches today. Something similar happened in Acts 13, where after reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue told Paul and his companions, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, you can speak" (Acts 13:15). Jesus was immediately recognized as a teacher in the synagogues He visited Sabbath after Sabbath, and so, He normally would read a portion of Scripture and speak about it.

***What does Jesus's habit of attending the synagogue teach us?***

### **Jesus Rooted His Ministry in Scripture**

Jesus chose Nazareth, His hometown, as the starting place of a new stage of His ministry. In the Gospel of Luke, this is the first recorded time that Jesus taught, though it was His habit. Now the question is this: As Jesus taught in front of the people who knew Him and had watched Him grow up, what would He say about Himself?

As Jesus unrolled the scroll of Isaiah, He read Isaiah 61:1-2, a vision given to Isaiah concerning the salvation the Messiah would bring. If we pay close attention to the words in Isaiah, we can see from the outset how fitting a passage this was for Jesus. He declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18). Jesus's title is the Christ, the Anointed One, and in this passage, He revealed that God anointed Him. In the Old Testament, anointing was usually reserved for those who had been specially called by

God, whether a priest, prophet, or king. While Jesus is all those things, Jesus's anointing was for a purpose: "to preach good news" (v. 18). This phrase is the same in Greek as "to proclaim the gospel." As part of His spreading the good news, the Holy Spirit sent Jesus "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed." This all culminated in a ministry of proclamation of "the year of the Lord's favor" (v. 19). Through this passage from Isaiah, Jesus proclaimed both the content and the priorities of His own ministry.

In Isaiah 61:1-2, the year of the Lord's favor referred to a Jubilee year, when slaves were freed and debts were canceled (see Lev. 25). The Dead Sea Scrolls indicate there may have been a Jubilee year that would have been fresh in the memories of Jesus's audience, but some scholars are unsure if the Jubilee year was still in practice in Jesus's day.<sup>1</sup>

In a dramatic flourish, after Jesus read these words, "he then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down" (Luke 4:20). Luke stressed that every eye was fixed on Him as He began expounding on what He had read. Often Jesus's ministry frustrated what the people expected. He offered resistance when people expected immediate answers and immediate help in situations where people expected Him to stay back. He would certainly amaze the gathering this day.

Into that air of expectation, Jesus said, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled" (v. 21). We know Jesus said more than this, but Luke emphasized this as Jesus's key point. The prophecy of Isaiah was coming true. The people no longer needed to wait for the promised Messiah because He was sitting there in that Nazareth synagogue.

**THEOLOGY**  
Connection

**CHRIST AS PROPHET:** As one of His offices, Jesus fulfills the role of prophet: He alone is the ultimate teacher and has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Jesus is also God's ultimate revelation of Himself, the very Word of God (John 1:1).

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”<sup>2</sup>*

–C. S. Lewis  
(1898–1963)

We too should look toward Jesus with eager expectation. It may have been more of a shock to those gathered in Nazareth roughly 2,000 years ago, but it should be no less significant to us. Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. He is the One whom the prophet Isaiah and the whole Old Testament pointed forward to. We can look to the books of the Old Testament written hundreds of years before Jesus’s incarnation and see the ways they predicted His ministry and the salvation that He would bring. Many of their prophecies were not vague and open to interpretation but detailed and specific. This should give us confidence in who Jesus is and should spur us to trust Him more.

We should also find ourselves receiving the blessings the Scriptures said Jesus would bring. Jesus proclaimed the year of the Lord’s favor, and it is through faith in Him that we receive the gracious favor of God. Jesus came to set free the captives, and those whom He has set free from sin and death are truly free (John 8:36; Gal. 5:1). He came to open the eyes of the blind, and when we look to Jesus, our eyes are opened to behold the glory of God (John 1:14; Rom. 9:23; 2 Cor. 3:18). Jesus is the Anointed One of the Lord, the promised Messiah who came to bring salvation to all who would believe in His name. We, as witnesses of that glorious gospel, are to proclaim this good news wherever we go.

***How does Jesus’s claim from Isaiah and His miraculous works affect how you see your mission?***

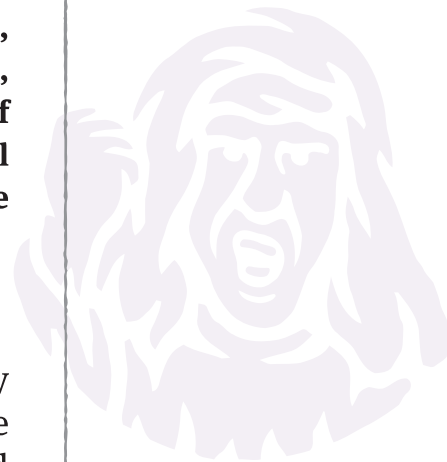
**Jesus was rejected when He preached a message of grace to all** (Luke 4:22-30).

Notes

**<sup>22</sup> They were all speaking well of him and were amazed by the gracious words that came from his mouth; yet they said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” <sup>23</sup> Then he said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Doctor, heal yourself. What we’ve heard that took place in Capernaum, do here in your hometown also.’” <sup>24</sup> He also said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah’s days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. <sup>26</sup> Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them except a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup> And in the prophet Elisha’s time, there were many in Israel who had leprosy, and yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” <sup>28</sup> When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. <sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of town, and brought him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl him over the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.**

**Admiring Jesus Is Not Believing in Him**

Throughout His ministry, Jesus encountered many different reactions to Him. Sometimes the people flocked to Him, while others walked away. He had deeply devoted followers who followed Him wherever He went, crowds who followed Him for a free lunch, and opponents who followed Him to try and catch Him in sin. Jesus told His followers in a parable to expect varied responses to the gospel, but He also experienced this in the course of His earthly ministry.



In Nazareth, as Jesus declared that He was the fulfillment of their long anticipation for the Messiah, the response was not what you'd think His hometown would give. At first, they were “amazed by the gracious words” that He had spoken (v. 22). This may seem like a positive thing; they were speaking well of Him after all. But Jesus did not see it that way. Their praise was tempered with disbelief: “Isn't this Joseph's son?” (v. 22). They enjoyed Jesus's message, and they might have been proud of the success of a local boy, but they didn't see Jesus as He truly is. We tend to do the same:

Familiarity is why a lot of people don't recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They've had just enough Bible to make them think they know, so they're not looking any deeper. They're familiar with Sunday School Bible stories. They've come to church at Easter and Christmas. . . . So they've become familiar, and they don't see. Don't be too familiar with Jesus. Look hard. Listen long. Be certain you recognize him for who he is. He is someone who gets deeper the deeper you look.<sup>3</sup>

Perceiving that His words were getting obscured by what they believed they knew about Him, Jesus confronted them saying that no doubt they would recite a proverb of His day, “Doctor, heal yourself” (v. 23). Both the Greeks (Euripides) and the Jewish rabbis had similar proverbs.<sup>4</sup> Jesus knew that although they were impressed with His preaching, they did not believe in Him. They saw Him as a novelty, as entertainment. He spoke well, and they wanted Him to go on to perform miracles for them. They thought He was skilled, but they did not trust Him as Savior.

That makes all the difference. It is not enough merely to be impressed with Jesus. You can admire His teaching, aspire to His morals, and appreciate His example and still be completely alienated from Him and apart from God. What matters is faith, a living trust in the living Jesus. Nothing else will do. Christianity is not simply a series of principles or a philosophical trend with an important founder. Christianity is God's plan to save humanity through faith in Christ. Jesus is the center of the gospel, and it is only through believing in Him, in the saving power of His life, death, and resurrection, that we can come to be forgiven of sins and come to know God.

In this passage, Jesus pressed His audience to see that their admiration was not enough. They ended up rejecting Him, but at least they knew where they stood. It is a dangerous thing to be impressed with Jesus yet not believe in Him as Lord and Savior.

***How can you find assurance of Christ's identity, sufficiency, and grace?***

### **Jesus Affirmed the Gospel Is for All**

To make it clear that His hearers did not understand what He said, Jesus mentioned two stories from the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha. He said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown" (v. 24). Jesus alluded to the fact that during the time of Elijah and Elisha, the people of Israel rejected God's covenant in order to worship Baal. In the first story, Jesus emphasized that during the three years of famine, there were many Israelite widows who needed the Lord's provision, but God sent Elijah to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon (1 Kings 17:8-24), a land that had

### CHRIST Connection

Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophetic words as One who would come to preach good news and release the captives, not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. The gospel is for all people, and salvation is for anyone who chooses to believe.

a history of enmity with the Israelites (Judg. 10:6-12; 1 Kings 11:33; Ezek. 28:21-22). The second story concerned Naaman the Syrian, one of the enemies of God's people, who had leprosy. A young Israelite girl that he had carted away during one of his raids against Israel mentioned that the man of God could heal him, so he went to Elisha and was healed (2 Kings 5). Jesus's allusions to the widow and Naaman infuriated His audience, and with good reason.

First, these were stories in which Gentiles received blessings that were denied to Israelites. This was a sign both of God's right to show miraculous mercy wherever He wanted and of God's plan to bless the Gentiles along with the people of Israel. Not only that, the widow and Naaman—foreigners, and not God's chosen people—responded to their encounters with the Lord with saving faith (1 Kings 17:24; 2 Kings 5:15-19). The people of Israel, on the other hand, were ambivalent to the messages of the prophets despite the miracles they had seen, ultimately resulting in their exile.

Jesus's audience was offended not at the notion that good could come to Gentiles but by the way Jesus pointed out the rejection of God's prophets on the part of the Israelites. Nazareth might have rejected the Messiah, but others would receive Him gladly—even the Gentiles. And predictably, the people flipped out.

Through these stories, Jesus also foreshadowed the Gentile mission. As the Messiah, Jesus's primary focus was on salvation for the Jews, but He would also take the gospel to the nations:

These examples showed that the Jewish people had no exclusivistic claims on Jesus, and since they rejected him, the gospel of 4:18–21 has

been offered to the Gentiles. And just as Elijah and Elisha were better received outside of Israel, so the gospel message would receive a better hearing among the Gentiles.”<sup>5</sup>

While Jesus ministered all throughout Judea and Galilee, He faced rejection and opposition. But He praised the faith of a Roman centurion (Matt. 8:10-11), a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:17-19), and a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). This account in Luke 4 points to the fact that the gospel would go out to the Gentiles and that from every nation people would be saved by faith in Jesus's name. By the power of the Holy Spirit and for the glory of God, all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:13). No nation has a privileged status in the church; no nation has a privileged status when it comes to believing the gospel. The gospel is for anyone who turns to Jesus for forgiveness of sin and salvation for their soul.

Second, the people of Nazareth were offended because Jesus pointed out that just because they were Jews did not mean they were automatically right with God. Their sins had separated them from God, as with the rest of humanity, and so, Jesus was waking them up to the reality that they could not rely on being descendants of Abraham for their salvation. Rather, they needed to heed God's appointed messenger—Jesus Christ. We too cannot trust in our pedigrees, the faithfulness of our families, or our church attendance as proof that we are right with God. Instead, we are to hear the message of Jesus and believe in it, just as He called the people of Nazareth to do.

After Jesus made it clear that He was not satisfied with an audience who merely liked to listen to His

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“There is nothing so ruinous as this presumptuous self-confidence, I pray the Lord may make you feel yourself to be undone, ruined, lost, cast away, and then there is no fear of your rejecting Christ, for he that is perfectly bankrupt is willing to accept a Savior; he that has nothing of his own, falls flat before the cross, and takes gladly the ‘all things’ which are stored up in the Lord Jesus. This is the first and perhaps the greatest reason why men reject the Savior.”<sup>6</sup>*

–Charles Spurgeon  
(1834-1892)

words, the people in the synagogue turned against Jesus. In a moment, their admiration vanished and turned to hatred: “They got up, drove him out of town, and brought him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl him over the cliff” (Luke 4:29). Far from wanting to see some sign from Him, they were now intent on killing Him!

Anger was understandable, but why did they want to kill Jesus? Well, Jesus just claimed to be the Messiah and in the same breath told them that because they rejected Him, they were going to be passed over in favor of the Gentiles. So they lashed out in violence, trying to throw Jesus off a cliff. They no longer liked His teaching; they did not like what it exposed in them, so they brought Jesus to the edge of the hill outside of Nazareth.

In less obvious ways, this is always how unbelief responds to Jesus. Unless the Holy Spirit has worked within someone and they respond in faith, they will inevitably find Jesus’s message offensive. People who are normally kind and accepting can suddenly react with vitriol against the message of the gospel that calls them to repentance from sin and faith in Jesus. And at other times, people who are gruff, coarse, and hostile can be instantly transformed from the inside out when the Holy Spirit leads them to salvation. Paul described this phenomenon this way in 2 Corinthians:

Thanks be to God, who always leads us in Christ’s triumphal procession and through us spreads the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place. For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we

are an aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life. Who is adequate for these things? (2 Cor. 2:14-16)

With this in mind, as we share the gospel, we should pray that hearts would be softened so they will gladly receive the gospel and pass from death to life.

***Why was Jesus rejected by His own people?  
How is He still rejected today?***

 **HEAD**

Why do people have a hard time accepting the facts of Jesus's identity even though He has shown Himself to be true?

 **HEART**

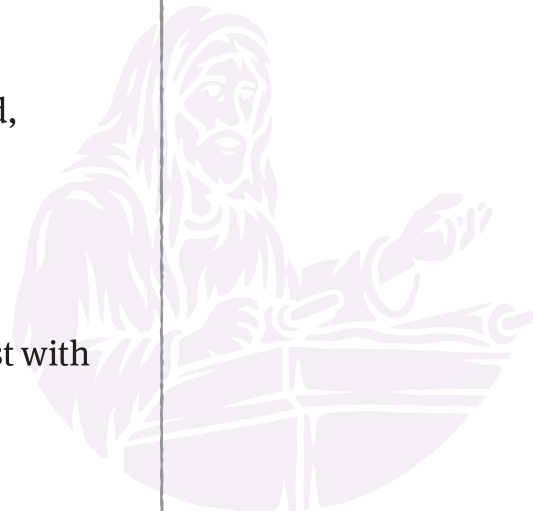
What can you do when doubts arise about God, Scripture, or your faith?

 **HANDS**

How can you be faithful in sharing Jesus Christ with a world that may be apprehensive to Him?

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# THE CROWD AMAZED

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 1:21-34

**Context:** Mark the Gospel writer was not one of the twelve apostles, but he based his account on the testimony of the apostle Peter, a close companion of his. Mark succinctly and rapidly reported the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Mark 1 begins with John the Baptist's ministry, Jesus's baptism and temptation, and Jesus's calling the disciples. Jesus was in Capernaum teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath when He encountered a man with an unclean spirit.

**Key Concept:** Jesus, as God the Son, has authority over all in the spiritual and physical realms.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Mark 1:21-28
- Day 2:** Mark 1:29-34
- Day 3:** Matthew 8:14-17
- Day 4:** Matthew 8:18-22
- Day 5:** Matthew 8:23-34
- Day 6:** Psalm 56

**Jesus has authority over all things spiritual**  
(Mark 1:21-26).

**<sup>21</sup> They went into Capernaum, and right away he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> They were astonished at his teaching because he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then a man with an unclean spirit was in their synagogue. He cried out, <sup>24</sup> “What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” <sup>25</sup> Jesus rebuked him saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit threw him into convulsions, shouted with a loud voice, and came out of him.**

**Jesus Taught with Authority as the Son of God**

In Mark 1, we have the beginning of Jesus’s earthly ministry. Mark prepared us to understand Jesus’s work through two lenses. First is the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God who brings good news. The very first words of Mark’s Gospel are “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). This tells us from the outset what we are about to see: the beginning of the spread of the good news of God’s anointed Savior, who is also the Son of God.

The coming of the Son of God was then further explained through the lens of prophecy with a combination of statements from Malachi and Isaiah: “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!” (1:2-3; cf. Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). These verses introduce John the Baptist’s role and also announce that Jesus is the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for.



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Notes

## THEOLOGY Connection

### JESUS'S DEITY:

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature.

Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). (cont.)

It is crucial that we know who Jesus is. He is God's anointed Savior and the Son of God, the Lord Himself. When Jesus came to earth and walked among us, God walked among us. When John the Baptist prepared His way, he prepared the way of the Lord. So when we see the works of Jesus in the Gospels, we are seeing the works of God. We need to keep this in the forefront of our minds as we go through the rest of this passage and whenever we read through the Gospels. This will help us understand why Jesus has the authority He has and why He is able to exercise that authority in the ways He does.

Mark went on to describe quickly Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9-11), temptation (vv. 12-13), first preaching—"Repent and believe the good news" (vv. 14-15)—and the calling of His first disciples (vv. 16-20). In a few short verses, Mark told us who Jesus is, set up His conflict with the devil, and showed His message and mission. Now as we move into the passage for today's study, we get to see in detail what Jesus can do.

The first thing we see Jesus do is teach. Jesus's great miracles will come in time, but the first thing Mark recorded that revealed Jesus's authority was His teaching. Jesus went to Capernaum, and "right away" (Mark's favorite phrase to introduce a significant action), He entered the synagogue and began to teach (v. 21). We are not given Jesus's specific message, but we know from historical practice and Jesus's other sermons in synagogues that Jesus likely read from a portion of the Scripture and taught on it (see Luke 4:16-30). This may not seem unusual to us. We go to church and hear sermons week in and week out. But something about Jesus's teaching was different, something stuck out in the minds and hearts of

the people. When Jesus taught, “they were astonished . . . because he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes” (Mark 1:22).

The authority of Jesus’s teaching particularly astonished them. When Jesus spoke about the meaning of the Scriptures, He was not guessing or passing on a traditional interpretation as other teachers might have done. Instead, He spoke as the author of the Scriptures. When He called the people in the synagogue to obedience or repentance on the basis of the Scriptures, His words were not a mere echo of a charge from long ago but an authoritative command from the Lord. When Jesus said, “Thus saith the Lord,” they heard it from the Lord’s own mouth.

But someone else in that synagogue immediately recognized Jesus’s authority: “a man with an unclean spirit” (v. 23). Mark likely referred to the type of entity possessing the man as “an unclean spirit” to make clear to his audience what he meant (“demon-afflicted” people are mentioned in 1:32, and “demons” are named later in 1:34). Mark’s Gospel was written with Gentiles, mostly Romans, in mind, so he often took the time to explain what he meant. In broader Greco-Roman culture, a demon or *daimon* was understood as a spiritual being but not necessarily bad or evil. The Greeks and Romans both believed that daimons could be threatening or beneficial. Socrates was thought to have a personal *daimon* that stopped him from doing things he should not have done.<sup>1</sup> Mark clarified to his audience that this being that afflicted this man was no neutral or beneficial spirit but was evil.

We do not know the details of this man’s possession. He seems to have been able to conduct a relatively normal life since he was present in the synagogue

### THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“Faith is mighty, but without love it profits nothing. The devils confessed Christ, but lacking charity it availed nothing. They said, ‘What have we to do with you?’ They confessed a sort of faith, but without love. Hence they were devils. Do not boast of that faith that puts you on the same level with the devils.”<sup>3</sup>*

–Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

for worship. Perhaps this unclean spirit led him to a sinful life quietly, in a way that was not yet obvious to those around him. Yet the unclean spirit could not bear sitting still under the teaching of Jesus. If it had remained hidden up to this point, it could do so no longer. It shouted in the middle of the teaching, calling Jesus out.

What the demon said was unexpected. It acknowledged truthfully who Jesus is—“the Holy One of God”—while asking if Jesus intended to destroy “us” (v. 24). The rest of the people in the synagogue must have been caught off guard by this outburst. Jesus, however, rebuked the spirit, telling it to stop talking and to leave the man, and it promptly obeyed (vv. 25-26).

***How do people view demons today, and why is it more difficult in modern Western cultures to believe in them?***

### **Jesus Did Not Need or Want Unclean Testimony**

Why did Jesus tell the unclean spirit to be silent? At least two reasons are likely within the context of Mark. First, while the unclean spirit was saying true things, it was not the type of witness Jesus needed or wanted. This man looked like he was suddenly out of his mind, raving about destruction and calling Jesus the Holy One of God. Why should the people present think this was good testimony? If the people realized a demon was present and testifying about Jesus, they could imagine that this was some deceit, some trick. Later on, the Pharisees accused Jesus of just that. They said Jesus cast out demons by being in league with the prince of demons (9:34). If the crowd thought the man was simply crazy, they would be tempted to see

his declarations as the ravings of a madman, perhaps making it less likely for them to accept who Jesus really is when a more reliable source told them.

Secondly, throughout the Gospels, and especially in Mark, Jesus told people not to say things about His miracles early on. This is sometimes called the “Messianic Secret,” which sounds more significant or mysterious than it really was. When people during His earthly ministry recognized that Jesus is the Son of God, they had the right terms, but they did not really know what those words meant yet. Peter, who was in a better position than anyone to know, thought that because Jesus is the Christ, He would not die (8:31-32). Jesus did not want people to misunderstand or to believe in a false version of Him, so He tried to prevent them from saying certain things about Him until they really knew who He was, that is, until He accomplished our salvation by dying on the cross and rising from the grave.<sup>2</sup> It is only in light of the resurrection that we can understand who Jesus truly is, when we know Him as the Son of God who died to bring forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who believe in Him.

The demon had no option but to obey Jesus. With a shriek and a shudder, it left the man (1:26). When Jesus commands, demons must flee. In our modern world, we may not think as much about demons and unclean spirits as most people from other times and places have. But it remains true that there are spiritual forces of darkness at work in the world. We may not see them as obviously as in a clearly demon-possessed person, but they are present and working behind the scenes. For some this reality can be frightening, but take heart that the demons flee at Jesus’s word. Jesus’s people are protected by the presence of the Holy Spirit



***Bonus Content***

Scan this QR code to learn why Jesus commanded people and unclean spirits not to make His identity known.



within us. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Jesus's power and authority are just as formidable now as they were when He cast out unclean spirits in Galilee.

*What parts of your spiritual life do you need to yield more fully to Jesus?*

**Jesus has authority over all things physical**  
(Mark 1:27-34).

<sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and so they began to ask each other, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup> At once the news about him spread throughout the entire vicinity of Galilee. <sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they went into Simon and Andrew's house with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she began to serve them. <sup>32</sup> When evening came, after the sun had set, they brought to him all those who were sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town was assembled at the door, <sup>34</sup> and he healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

### Jesus Has Authority Over Sickness

Understandably, the people “were all amazed” (v. 27). What is interesting is that they not only saw Jesus's authority in driving out the demon but also in His teaching. They asked: “What is this? A new teaching with authority!” (v. 27). With the same voice that

interpreted the Scriptures, Jesus commanded the unclean spirits and enforced obedience. Jesus's words are true and authoritative. When we hear the words of Jesus, we must obey, even as we must trust them. His word has the full authority of the Son of God in everything He says and in the spiritual lives of His followers. That should be a source of great comfort and encouragement for those who are His.

After publicly teaching and casting out the unclean spirit, Jesus retired to the house of His disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew. Since it was still the Sabbath, Jesus likely would have anticipated resting and eating a meal together. But Peter's mother-in-law was "in bed with a fever" (v. 30). Even today, a fever can be a serious problem, but in the first century this often was a much more distressing issue. Nothing in this passage suggests that Peter's mother-in-law was on death's door, but any illness could have taken a severe turn before antibiotics and modern treatments. So when they entered the house, "they told him about her at once" (v. 30). Notice again Mark's favorite phrase for important actions: "at once." This signals to us what will spark the action in the rest of the scene, and the next verse contains a flurry of action. Jesus went to Peter's mother-in-law, took her hand, and raised her out of bed. The fever left, and she began to serve (v. 31).

In the previous scene, when Jesus was in the synagogue, we saw Jesus's authority in the physical and spiritual realms. He spoke to the people in the synagogue, and they listened with awe. He spoke to the unclean spirit, and it obeyed and was cast out. Here again we see that Jesus's power and authority extend to the physical world, where unreasoning things like fevers and diseases still obey His commands. Jesus

wanted the fever gone, so the fever left. Jesus did not simply give her an anti-inflammatory solution, breaking the fever but leaving the illness. Peter's mother-in-law was made entirely well. In a moment, the disease was gone. This is the power of Jesus.

Jesus still has this power. Jesus heals. Jesus has authority over all the physical world. If He commands an illness gone, it goes. While it is wonderful that we live in a time with modern medicine and treatments, that does not lessen Jesus's power or make it less reasonable for us to pray to Him. If we need healing, we should ask Him. If we need something changed in the world, we should ask Him. Yes, He acts according to His will, knowing what is best far more comprehensively than we do. But we should know that He wants to answer our prayers to give us what we ask for in accordance to His will, and here He shows us how we should respond to the problems we face. Peter and Andrew wanted Peter's mother-in-law made well, so they took their concern to Jesus. When we have problems, we tell Jesus about them. He has the power and authority to act.

Having been healed, Peter's mother-in-law modeled for us how we should act when Jesus answers our prayers (v. 31). When we see how He has forgiven our sins, given us strength to live for Him, and helped us in our trials, we should respond accordingly—we start serving Jesus as His disciples. Obviously, Jesus has no needs that He has to depend on us to fill. But the lost and hurting around us and within the church do have needs. And one of the main ways we honor what Jesus has done in our lives is to serve people around us in His name.

*As you reflect on God's provision in your life, how can you respond in service?*

### Jesus Can Heal All Ills

News spread, and people flocked to Jesus. We're told that "when evening came, after the sun had set, they brought to him" the sick and demon-possessed (v. 32). Mark emphasized that this happened after sundown because it was no longer the Sabbath, and the people who carried the sick would have been able to do so without it counting as "working." The people in Capernaum wanted healing from Jesus, but they waited to abide by their understanding of the Sabbath laws.

So many people were there that the whole town "was assembled at the door" (v. 33). They had brought to Him all who were sick and demon-possessed, and He healed many. According to one commentator, "No distinction should be made between the 'all' of v. 32 and the 'many' of v. 34. The latter is a Semitism that means 'all who were many.'" <sup>4</sup> Other Gospel accounts affirm that He healed them all (Matt. 8:16-17; Luke 4:40-41). He healed the sick. He cast out demons. It did not matter which illness they had, Jesus made them well. Nor did it matter how long the person had been afflicted by demons. Jesus set them free.

And so it remains today. There is no problem that Jesus cannot help with. There is no amount of problems that Jesus cannot tackle. He is not limited in scope or in power. He does not need to prepare or to rest this side of the resurrection. His power is an ultimate power. His authority is an ultimate authority. If you are ill or troubled, if you are afflicted or exhausted, Jesus has the power you need. And He cares. We should see His care in His willingness to heal many. When still mortal

Notes

#### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus's authority over the physical world and over the spiritual world includes His authority over Satan and demons as well as over sin, guilt, shame, and death. This authority and power reveals His identity as the Son of God.

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“Rather than engaging in exorcisms, believers today are called to engage in evangelism. Whenever we bring the gospel to nonbelievers and they put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit washes them clean, takes up residence, and the demons are evicted.”<sup>5</sup>*  
 –John MacArthur  
 (1939–2025)

before His resurrection and subject to exhaustion, He cared for the ailing people of Capernaum.

He cares no less for you. You cannot take too much time from Him. You cannot tire Him with your needs. He wants to minister to you as He wanted to minister to these people in Capernaum late into the night after sunset.

While He healed their illnesses and cast out the demons, there was one thing He did not allow: “He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (v. 34). Jesus wished to avoid all appearances that His ministry was not God-sent. Further, untrustworthy witnesses saying true things could have led the people in Capernaum to doubt Jesus’s ministry and message. He did not want the people in Capernaum to get the wrong impression. Rather, Jesus wanted the people to know who He is based on His own words and actions. If they saw His miracles, heard His teaching, and watched His righteous living, they would come to a right understanding of Jesus. This was why He came. This was the point of His ministry.

We too should be concerned with getting a right understanding of Jesus. There are many inside and outside the church who say things about Jesus. We need to know Jesus as He is. We have the testimony of Scripture to bring us to the right knowledge of Him. And this is what we bring with us as we spread the good news about Him to the watching world.

***What convinced you or would convince you that Jesus is Lord and Savior?***

**Key Concept:** Jesus, as God the Son, has authority over all in the spiritual and physical realms.

 **HEAD**

In what ways should you approach the spiritual realm with a belief that Jesus is Lord?

 **HEART**

How does Jesus's authority over the physical and the spiritual help you in your relationship with Him?

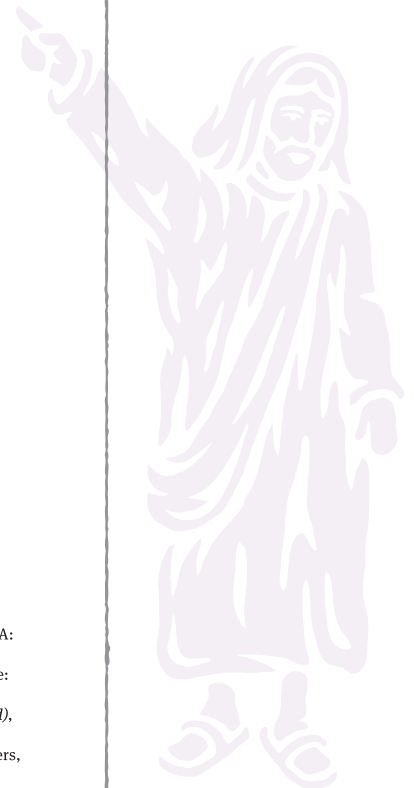
 **HANDS**

With whom can you share about Jesus's authority and work in the world this week?

Notes

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# THE LEPER PROCLAIMED

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 1:35-45

**Context:** Mark 1 quickly tells us a lot about Jesus's early ministry. Although some of the accounts are not as detailed, Mark's Gospel accurately aligns with the other Gospel accounts. Up to this point in Mark 1, Jesus had been teaching with authority, casting out demons, and miraculously healing the sick, which showed His authority over all things physical and spiritual. After this, Jesus continued His ministry by traveling throughout Galilee, preaching and healing as He went.

**Key Concept:** Jesus's commitment to His mission originated in His compassion for others.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Matthew 4:23-25
- Day 2:** Mark 1:35-38
- Day 3:** Mark 1:39-45
- Day 4:** Matthew 8:1-4
- Day 5:** Matthew 8:5-13
- Day 6:** Psalm 113

**Jesus's commitment to His mission is seen in His prayer life and His purpose** (Mark 1:35-39).

**<sup>35</sup> Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and when they found him they said, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come." <sup>39</sup> He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.**

**Jesus Communed With the Father**

In Mark 1, Jesus displayed great acts of power. He overcame temptation from the devil (vv. 12-13), cast out an unclean spirit in the synagogue (vv. 21-28), and healed Peter's mother-in-law and countless others' illnesses while casting out many demons (vv. 29-34). After the last person returned home, in the early hours of the morning before the sun rose, Jesus left the house of Peter and Andrew and set off on the next thing He had to do (v. 35).

If you had not read the rest of the passage, what would you think Jesus was going to do? He had just shown His unparalleled authority, power, and might. And now, with firm resolve, He set off before the sun rose. To do what? Maybe you would suppose He was going to find a particularly severe illness to heal. Or maybe He was heading to confront a mighty demon to cast it out. No, alone and in the dark, Jesus went off to a deserted place and began to pray (v. 35). More urgent than finding someone else to heal and more necessary than sleep, Jesus went off by Himself to pray.



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“Prayer plumes the wings of God’s young eaglets, that they may learn to mount above the clouds. Prayer girds the loins of God’s warriors, and sends them forth to combat with their sinews braced and their muscles firm.”<sup>1</sup>*

–Charles Spurgeon  
(1834–1892)

Why would Jesus go off on His own to pray? We just saw His power and authority. Mark announced to us that He is the Son of God and the Lord (vv. 1-3). What need could Jesus possibly have to pray?

While it is true that Jesus is fully God and fully man, He had not lost anything that was essential to His divine nature prior to the incarnation. In His incarnation, He fully and truly took on a human nature. This means that anything that is true of human nature is true of the incarnate Jesus, aside from our sin, of course. As a human, even as a perfect human, Jesus relied on God. This is part of what it means to be human, to be dependent, to need the strength that God supplies. And just as Jesus got tired and needed to sleep or got hungry and needed to eat, He also needed to pray. He prayed for guidance and strength. And ultimately, what Jesus wanted was to commune with God, to be in His presence, to speak to Him and hear from Him. He prayed for strength, but He prayed also simply for the joy of communion with the Father.

If this was true of Jesus, how much more is it true of us? We are weaker, beset not just by limits of our humanity but by our sinfulness. We often are adrift with no sense of direction. We often are overwhelmed with no ability to overcome the challenges we face. We often are filled with shame with no way to cleanse ourselves or motivate ourselves to righteousness the next time. We must follow Jesus’s example and pray. Even when exhausted, when at the end of our strength, as Jesus surely was after a long night of tending to the needy and broken, we should pray to find strength, guidance, and forgiveness. And even more, we pray to commune with God, to draw closer to Him, and to enjoy His presence.

Jesus's entire earthly ministry was carried out through His relationship with the Father. When He declared that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him (Luke 4:18-21), He made it clear that His miraculous ministry and teaching was done through reliance upon and communion with God. This does not mean that He did not also reveal His own divine nature through His miracles, simply that He also, as a perfect man, perfectly relied on God for His ministry.

***Why do you think Scripture mentions Jesus praying so often?***

### **Jesus Went Where the Father Willed**

Jesus's disciples could not keep up with Him. When they awoke, Jesus was not there, and they had no idea where He had gone. Even at this early stage, we see Peter taking the lead as He and the other disciples searched for Jesus (Mark 1:36). Eventually they found Him and expressed confusion. Jesus had just healed a crowd of people while the whole town watched, and now everyone wanted to see Him (v. 37). His popularity was growing. Certainly this would be the right route for His earthly ministry to reach more people. What better opportunity than to speak to a city still reeling from His miracles?

And yet, Jesus did not go back into Capernaum with them. Rather, He said, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too" (v. 38). This would go against any reasonable way of building a ministry in our modern mindset. We would say that Jesus needed to "strike while the iron is hot," continuing in the ministry that was being effective. The people in Capernaum were primed to receive more

## THEOLOGY Connection

### THE GOSPEL:

The Bible teaches that the gospel is both an event and a story. First, it is an event that took place at a specific point in history, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:21). Second, the gospel is also the story of redemption that God has planned since “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), which runs through Scripture, (cont.)

of His message. But Jesus left there to go to the small towns where people had not yet heard Him. Why?

The miracles were an important part of Jesus’s ministry, but His priority was preaching about the kingdom of God. Jesus was emphatic about this, saying, “This is why I have come” (v. 38). Jesus knew the time of His earthly ministry would be limited, and He knew His mission was to proclaim the good news throughout all of Galilee. The point was not to build a base of devoted fans or to have one city extremely dedicated to Him. Rather, His mission was to announce the gospel of repentance from sin and salvation through faith in His name to all Galilee and Judea. So He pressed on.

It would have been the easiest thing to rest a while in Capernaum and enjoy the fame, but Jesus was perfectly obedient to His Father. Jesus came to do the work of the Father (John 5:36; 6:38; 10:25-38; 14:10-11). His mission came from God, and He would never disobey His Father. He could not be deterred from His purpose because He knew who had sent Him.

Furthermore, Jesus loved the people who still needed to hear Him. Jesus’s compassion kept Him going. If He did not go on to the next village, then the people living there would not hear the good news of the salvation that He brought, and that was intolerable to Him. He loved the people in those villages too much not to preach to them, heal them, or deliver them. So, “he went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons” (Mark 1:39).

All of this is good news for us. Jesus’s love for us is no less than His love for the people He encountered while He lived on earth. Similarly, His commitment is still as strong as ever now that He is exalted at the right hand of the Father. He wants you to be saved. He

wants you to be sanctified. And if you are His, nothing can separate you from Him. He will keep you and raise you up on the last day (John 6:44,54). This also should inspire us to gospel work. Why do we let things get between us and the mission we have been given from God? Jesus told us to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). We should be moved to love others because of His love for us. We should be eager to bring the good news of Jesus to those around us because the gospel of Jesus is good news. He lived and died and rose again for us. And He showed us the path to walk. Only Jesus saves from sin. Only Jesus gives eternal life. In His earthly ministry, Jesus did not let anything stop Him from proclaiming the good news. And in our brief time on this earth as His disciples, we should not let anything stop us.

*How can you follow the Holy Spirit's guidance as you tell others the good news of Jesus?*

**Jesus heals out of compassion, leading to a desire to spread the gospel** (Mark 1:40-45).

<sup>40</sup> Then a man with leprosy came to him and, on his knees, begged him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." <sup>41</sup> Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. "I am willing," he told him. "Be made clean." <sup>42</sup> Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup> Then he sternly warned him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> telling him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." <sup>45</sup> Yet he went out and began to proclaim it widely and to spread the news, with

**THEOLOGY**  
Connection

(cont.) and which culminates in a restored and redeemed creation—a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God's people will live with Him forever (Isa. 25:8; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). The event and story do not exist apart from or in conflict with one another, but together inspire us to a life of devotion and mission.

**the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But he was out in deserted places, and they came to him from everywhere.**

### Jesus Welcomed Interruptions

As Jesus was going from town to town, a man with leprosy approached Jesus. This would have been somewhere outside of a town or city, since people with leprosy had to live outside of the community to keep leprosy from spreading. The laws for leprosy (really a collection of skin conditions, including but not limited to leprosy) are set down in Leviticus:

The person who has a case of serious skin disease is to have his clothes torn and his hair hanging loose, and he must cover his mouth and cry out, “Unclean, unclean!” He will remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He must live alone in a place outside the camp. (Lev. 13:45-46)

Jesus and His disciples would have known this man was leprosy the moment they saw him. He was ill and ceremonially unclean, a source of both physical and ritual contamination. Running into him could have derailed a day’s travel, and more. And yet, even as we see Jesus busy with ministry, He stopped and treated this man with tenderness and compassion.

In the previous scene, we saw that Jesus left what seemed like a fruitful ministry to preach somewhere else. Here we see Jesus pausing His journey to get somewhere else in order to minister to a man who was an outcast. Jesus did not leave Capernaum because He was callous but because He cared for all the surrounding towns too. And because Jesus cared for all

#### WORD Study

**LEPROSY:** A general term used to describe different skin diseases. Old Testament law gave the priests the responsibility of diagnosing leprosy. Lepers were required to stay outside the city to avoid spreading the disease. Once healed, the man needed to show himself to the priest as the law commanded to be returned to the community (Mark 1:44; cf. Lev. 13–14).

the people, He was willing to stop for this man. This man with leprosy was not an interruption to Jesus. It was for people like this that Jesus came.

The man had obviously heard of Jesus. He knew Jesus had the power to heal him. So he begged, “If you are willing, you can make me clean” (Mark 1:40).

We should notice two things about his request. First, the man said, “If you are willing.” He may have trusted Jesus’s power, but he did not know if Jesus would be willing to help him. He did not yet know the love in the heart of Jesus for sufferers just like him. Second, instead of asking to be healed, he asked to be made clean. This, of course, would have included healing, but it emphasized the hardship of this particular disease. As long as the man had leprosy, he was unclean, cut off from worship in the temple, cut off from living with his family members or other people in a town, and cut off from normal human contact. The disease itself must surely have been a trial, but it was nothing compared to the social and religious cost the man had to pay for the illness. So the man begged Jesus to restore it all—health and society and worship. He begged to be made clean.

### **Jesus Cared and Commanded**

Jesus was moved by this man’s suffering. He looked at this man and saw not an inconvenience or a source of uncleanness but a person made in the image of God, someone suffering badly because of his disease. So Jesus did the unthinkable—He reached out and touched the man, something no one would have done in that culture. Though we do not know how long the man suffered with leprosy, he most likely had not been touched since he first discovered the infection.

To understand the full significance of Jesus's action, we need to understand the meaning of uncleanness in Jewish society. To be unclean was not necessarily the same as being sinful. Certain regular activities in life would inevitably make a person unclean. Depending on the type of uncleanness, they would wash and be unclean until evening or offer a certain sacrifice. Then the person would be clean again. If they had a persistent condition that caused the uncleanness, such as a skin condition, the condition would need to be fully healed before the person could offer the sacrifices for cleansing. Anything that person touched, wore, sat upon, ate with, or drank from was also made unclean. If another person touched someone or something unclean, the uncleanness spread. For the Jews:

The entire nation was involved in manifesting the priesthood of all who believed sincerely in the covenant relationship with God that had been forged on Mount Sinai. Thus to be clean meant not merely the negative aspects of being free from disease or defilement but the positive demonstration in daily life of God's high moral and ethical qualities of absolute purity, mercy, justice, and grace.<sup>2</sup>

So, unless they couldn't help it, most law-abiding Jews avoided anything that would make them unclean.

But Jesus is different. Though He is fully man, He is also fully God. When Jesus encountered the unclean, He did not become contaminated. Quite the opposite. With this in mind, Jesus addressed the man's fears. As He touched the man, He said, "I am willing. . . . Be made clean" (Mark 1:41), and immediately, the leprosy left him (v. 42), just like the demon in the synagogue

and the fever from Peter's mother-in-law. No disease small or great can resist Jesus's command. Instantly the man was free from illness and free from ritual contamination. Jesus had completely restored him.

***What does Jesus's display of compassion tell us about His character?***

While we are not concerned with ritual contamination in the way the Jews were, it is still good news for us that Jesus can both heal disease and cleanse the unclean. In the law, uncleanness was a symbol of unholiness. We may not care whether our bodies are ritually clean, but we still have the problem of whether or not our hearts are right before God. Our sin separates us from God and makes us unable to approach Him by ourselves. When we feel our guilt, we know that we are unclean before a holy and pure God. But Jesus came to take away our sin. He died a sacrificial death and rose again to purify our consciences (Heb. 9:14; 10:22). If you believe in Jesus, He grants you full forgiveness and full cleansing. You are made as clean in your soul as this man's skin was made clean.

Jesus had more to say to this man. Instead of simply telling him he was free to go, Jesus strictly charged him to tell no one. Instead, the man was to offer the specific sacrifices set out in Leviticus 14 for when a leper was made free of his disease. We have no idea how frequently this ritual would have been carried out (some skin diseases in the category may have gone away more easily than others), but this man's obedience to the law would have been a testimony to the priest who offered the sacrifices on his behalf, giving the temple in Jerusalem an early witness to the miraculous work of Jesus.

### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus's mission was to preach the good news of salvation that would bring healing to a world in need. He accomplished this ultimately through His death and resurrection.

But as happened so often in the Gospels, the healed man ignored Jesus's first instruction and "began to proclaim it widely and to spread the news" (Mark 1:45). To an extent, this would be only natural. The man was miraculously healed and cleansed by Jesus; of course he wanted to tell people about it. But this was not what Jesus commanded, and the unintended consequence was that Jesus's ministry became more difficult. Crowds began to swamp Jesus, and He could not enter a town without being surrounded by the mob. Even this, though, needs explanation. Why did Jesus not want the crowds? Would this not be exactly what a traveling preacher should want?

Based on how Jesus responded, this crowd dynamic thwarted the type of ministry He wanted to achieve. We have already seen that He came to preach the good news (v. 38), but the crowds often were just following Him to see a show. Other times in the Gospels, Jesus clashed with crowds who only came for miracles and not to listen to Him (John 6:22-71). This unintended consequence could have been the beginning of that tension. Jesus was not interested in merely performing. He was not an entertainer but the Savior.

So, Jesus went out "in deserted places" (Mark 1:45), off the beaten path. The towns were closed to Him because of the crowds. Instead, those who wanted to hear Him would come to Him. And there in the deserted places, "they came to him from everywhere." This passage ends with Jesus ministering in the wilderness, proclaiming the good news, and caring for all those who came His way.

***How does Jesus's compassion drive you to share His goodness with others?***

**Key Concept:** Jesus's commitment to His mission originated in His compassion for others.

 **HEAD**

How can you prioritize prayer this week to deepen your relationship with God?

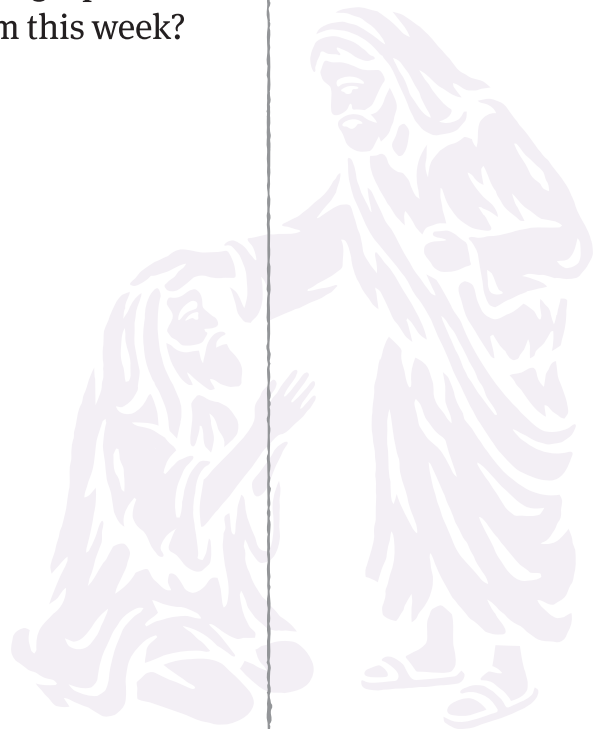
 **HEART**

What are some ways you can reflect often on the grace Jesus has extended to you?

 **HANDS**

Who do you know who needs to hear the gospel?  
How can you be a joyful witness to them this week?

Notes



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THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 23

# THE WAY OF JESUS



MATTHEW; MARK; LUKE



MEMORY VERSES

“But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies,  
do what is good to those who hate you, bless those  
who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

—Luke 6:27-28





# FAITH AND FORGIVENESS

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 2:1-12

**Context:** In his account of the life of Jesus, Mark wasted no time getting to the action. Jesus came on the scene proclaiming that the kingdom of God had come near to God’s people through Him, and it was time for people to respond. Jesus immediately began backing up His claim with power, performing miracles. In today’s passage, Jesus revealed something deeper about who He is and what He came to do. Even greater than miraculous healings, Jesus came to do something about humanity’s greatest problem—sin.

**Key Concept:** Jesus has the power to forgive, especially when He sees committed faith.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Mark 2:1-12
- Day 2:** Mark 2:13-17
- Day 3:** Mark 2:18-22
- Day 4:** Matthew 9:1-8
- Day 5:** Matthew 9:9-17
- Day 6:** Psalm 121

## Committed faith leads to forgiveness (Mark 2:1-5).

**<sup>1</sup> When he entered Capernaum again after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup> So many people gathered together that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and he was speaking the word to them. <sup>3</sup> They came to him bringing a paralytic, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup> Since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after digging through it, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying. <sup>5</sup> Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”**

### On the Move in Galilee

After Jesus’s forerunner, John the Baptist, was arrested, Jesus headed north to Galilee (Mark 1:14). At the lakeshore, He called His first four disciples to leave their fishing and to follow Him (vv. 16-20). In Capernaum, He entered the synagogue and healed a man possessed by an unclean spirit (vv. 21-27). Jesus also privately healed Peter’s mother-in-law in their home. Jesus’s miracle in the synagogue brought such fame in Galilee that people came from all over and “brought to him all those who were sick and demon possessed” (v. 32). After that, Jesus departed from Capernaum and traveled throughout Galilee, preaching, healing, and casting out demons (vv. 38-44). He did this for “some days” (2:1), an indeterminate period of time. Jesus’s actions brought even more popularity to Him, “with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly” because people “came to him from everywhere” (1:45). Because of that, Jesus quietly snuck back into Capernaum.



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Notes



Capernaum became the center of much of Jesus's Galilean ministry after He moved there from Nazareth (Matt. 4:13; Mark 2:1). Located on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was a major population and commercial center. International trade routes from Egypt to Syria and on to Mesopotamia passed through it.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the city became a customs station for the Roman government, which explains why Jesus found and then called the tax collector Levi to be His disciple there (Mark 2:13-17). Capernaum also housed a garrison of Roman troops (Matt. 8:5; Luke 7:1-2). Located on the lakeshore, the city's most successful industry was fishing; indeed, it was from such a business that Jesus had called His first disciples, Peter and Andrew and James and John (Mark 1:16-20). Capernaum also had a significant Jewish population and a synagogue, which had been built using funds donated by a Gentile Roman centurion, whose servant Jesus later healed (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:4-5). Jesus taught and healed in that synagogue (Mark 1:21-27), later giving His "Bread of Life" sermon there (John 6:22-59).

In Capernaum, Jesus not only healed the paralytic of our narrative (Mark 2:1-12) but previously also healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law in Simon and Andrew's house (1:29-31). Jesus also healed many other various sicknesses in Capernaum as well as "drove out many demons" (v. 34). Yet despite all this, Jesus condemned Capernaum along with the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, proclaiming:

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until

today. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you. (Matt. 11:23-24)

All of this goes to show that seeing Jesus heal people firsthand, witnessing His casting out demons, and hearing Him preach and teach in person did not guarantee a positive response to Jesus or His message.

Word got around that Jesus was back in Capernaum. “He was at home” might refer to His own house (see Matt. 4:13), but probably refers to the home of Simon and Andrew, where Jesus previously stayed (Mark 1:29,33,35), as the form of expression indicates a familiar location.

In his parallel account to Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26, Mark used a double negative—“no more room” and “not even in the doorway” (Mark 2:2)—to emphasize both Jesus’s immense fame as well as the size of the crowd. Jesus “was speaking the word to them.” As in 1:15, 1:21-22, 1:38, and 4:33, Jesus focused on the proclaimed message. “The word” refers to “the good news of God” (1:14), the message that “the kingdom of God has come near” (v. 15). Jesus’s message involved repentance, faith and belief, and forgiveness of sins (1:15; 2:5). “He was speaking” is in the imperfect tense, vividly picturing Jesus as sharing the word while the crowd was gathered before Him.

Jesus’s example of “speaking the word” emphasizes what Paul later wrote: “How can they believe without hearing about him? . . . Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ” (Rom. 10:14,17). If “speaking the word” was important to Jesus, we who believe in Him should do no less! But while the presence of such a

### WORD Study

**FAITH:** The Greek word for “faith” used in this passage comes from the same root as the verb translated “to believe.” The word does not just mean head knowledge or intellectual ascent as we sometimes describe faith. Faith carries the nuance of absolute confidence that leads to obedience.

## THEOLOGY Connection

### GOD IS GRACIOUS:

God's nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). (cont.)

large crowd indicated Jesus's popularity, it also stood in the way of people who needed to get to Jesus. We must also remember in our time that the popularity of a preacher, the enthusiasm of listening to his teaching, and the desire to be near him may prevent those who sincerely need Jesus from getting to Him. This also reminds us that not all who hear the Word believe and embrace Jesus's word.

*If someone who knew nothing about Christianity asked you to define "faith," what would you say?*

### First Matters First

Mark does not tell us how the man in this passage became paralyzed, whether it was a congenital condition or the result of a disease or accident. That he had to be carried by four men indicates the gravity of his situation—he could not even shuffle or crawl to Jesus on his own.

The large group of people gathered in and in front of the house (v. 2) prevented the four men from bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus. Mark labeled these people "the crowd" in verse 4, a term he used 38 times in his Gospel and all but once in the singular (see 10:1). Mark never depicted the crowd as repenting and believing in Jesus. Rather, they were passive or fickle observers at best. Here they actually hindered the man seeking to come to Jesus.

Private homes in Galilee often were small one-to-four-room dwellings that sometimes had a courtyard. Such homes had flat roofs with beams overlaid with branches and covered with mud-packed clay mixed with thatch. An outside staircase led to a roof that

could be used to dry clothes, eat meals, enjoy a cool evening breeze, or serve as a quiet place for prayers (Acts 10:9).

Their way to Jesus being blocked, the four men carried the paralytic up onto the roof and began to dismantle a section of it—not too difficult a task and one that would not have destroyed the whole roof. Mark’s expression “they removed the roof” (Mark 2:4) is literally translated “they unroofed the roof.” Obviously some debris would have fallen onto those in the house below and caused them to look up to see what was happening.

The paralytic lay on a “mat,” a word used to describe a “cot,” “mattress,” or “stretcher” of a poor person (vv. 4,12). The four men each held one corner of the mat, perhaps attached by ropes, and lowered the paralytic down in front of Jesus. One glance at the man, and it would be plain what his problem was—or was it? Seeing the paralytic, Jesus did not at once heal the man’s condition; rather, Jesus dealt with the man’s most serious problem and announced, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (v. 5).

The word “son” does not indicate the man’s age but established Jesus’s authority and superiority over him. “Your sins are forgiven” is a passive statement often called a “divine passive,” meaning “God has forgiven your sins.” However, in this case, Jesus was claiming the divine prerogative (v. 7) for Himself (v. 10), as both the scribes (vv. 6-7) and the assembled crowd (v. 12) immediately understood. Only here in all of Jesus’s healings did He explicitly link sin with the person’s infirmity (cf. John 9:2-3). Further, that Jesus used the plural “your sins” seems to indicate specific sins, not the general condition of sin. These hints may indicate

**THEOLOGY**  
Connection

(cont.) Instead of leaving people in their sins, God demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).



that the man’s paralysis was because of his own actions and Jesus was confronting him with them.

That Jesus took action because of “seeing their faith” (Mark 2:5) thus needs to include not just the faith of the four men who brought the paralytic to Jesus but the faith of the paralytic himself. The faith of others is never an acceptable substitute for the faith of the person in need of forgiveness. As the writer of Hebrews stated: “Without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). When Jesus made the pronouncement “your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5), He used an aorist tense, meaning that the forgiveness was immediate and an accomplished fact. Further, Jesus placed the verb first for added emphasis on the forgiveness: “Forgiven are your sins.”

***What deeper need do you want Christ to satisfy in your life right now?***

#### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch.”<sup>2</sup>*  
—Timothy Keller  
(1950–2023)

**Jesus has the power to heal and to forgive because He is God** (Mark 2:6-12).

<sup>6</sup> But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts:<sup>7</sup> “Why does he speak like this? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”<sup>8</sup> Right away Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?”<sup>9</sup> Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat, and walk?’<sup>10</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he told the paralytic—<sup>11</sup> “I tell

**you: get up, take your mat, and go home.”<sup>12</sup> Immediately he got up, took the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”**

### **Perceiving in His Spirit**

Mark already introduced “the scribes” in 1:22 in a comment related to Jesus’s teaching authority. They were not merely copyists but a professional class whose job was to pass down and provide the proper interpretations and applications of Jewish law, much of which was in oral form at the time and later codified in the Mishnah and then in the Talmud. These men, usually of the Pharisee party (see 2:16), were known as the “teachers of the law.” Scribes were also part of the Sanhedrin, the governing Jewish body, in which the first seats were reserved for them as well as in the synagogues. In public, people honored them by addressing them as “Rabbi” (Matt. 23:2,6-7). Mark mentioned the scribes 21 times in his Gospel, and only once favorably (see 12:28-34). Otherwise, they constituted part of the opposition to Jesus.

Mark mentioned that “Jesus perceived in his spirit” what the scribes were “questioning in their hearts” (2:6,8; cf. John 2:25). Interestingly, the scribes never said anything aloud in this narrative. Jesus confronted their thoughts directly: “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?” The heart in Jesus’s day referred to the center of one’s thinking, not merely to the emotions. Jesus could know their thoughts because that is something the omniscient God knows (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron. 28:9; Pss. 7:9; 139:1-2,23; Jer. 17:9-10; John 2:24-25; 6:61). Jesus knew “right away” what they were thinking at that very moment!

By Jesus claiming the divine prerogative of forgiving sins, the scribes' conclusion was "He's blaspheming!" (Mark 2:7). Such blasphemy was punishable by death under the Mosaic law (Lev. 24:16; cf. Num. 15:30-31). In fact, blasphemy would be the charge on which the Sanhedrin would later condemn Jesus in Mark 14:63-64. The scribes' statement in verse 7 shows they understood Jesus's declaration of verse 5 as a direct act of divine forgiveness.

The second part of their statement—"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"—is true, as Scripture clearly and repeatedly teaches (Ex. 34:6-7; 2 Sam. 12:13; Pss. 32:1-5; 51:1-3,7-9; 65:3; 78:38; 85:2; 103:3; 130:4; Isa. 6:7; 43:25; 44:22; Dan. 9:9; Mic. 7:18; Zech. 3:4). The form of the scribes' internal question literally reads, "Who can forgive sin except One, God?" Their thoughts echoed the Shema, the Jewish statement of belief that every pious Jew repeated twice a day—"Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). God alone is the One who can forgive sins. Jesus was hinting here what He would say explicitly in John 10:30: "I and the Father are one."

### **To Say or Do?**

Jesus challenged the scribes with a lesser-to-greater counter question: If Jesus could do the greater act, then He could obviously do the lesser. Of the two options, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," was easier, humanly speaking, because there would be no observable proof that such forgiveness had occurred. It's always easier to say—especially if it can't be verified—than to do—especially if it could be immediately disproved. From the divine perspective, however, healing the man's infirmity would be easier.

In this case, Jesus used what appeared to them to be the harder (the observable healing) to prove the reality of the spiritual healing: “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10), He healed the man. In Mark’s Gospel, this was Jesus’s first use of His favorite title—the Son of Man. It is found 82 times in the Gospels and 14 times in Mark. Drawn from Daniel 7:13-14, the title refers to the One who was divinely “given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom” that could not be destroyed. At Caesarea Philippi, after Peter’s supernatural insight into who Jesus is, Jesus regularly used the title “the Son of Man” (Mark 8:31,38). In fact, only here and in 2:28 it is used before that event.

Being Jesus’s favorite title for Himself, it bears further investigation. The title stressed at the same time Jesus’s humanity and Jesus’s deity. Jesus’s probable reason for using this title was that it was free from political and military overtones that other terms such as “Messiah” and “the Son of David” would have had in the minds of Jesus’s hearers. Thus, no one challenged Jesus over His use of this self-identification. Twice the term referred to Jesus’s earthly authority: to forgive sins (2:10) and to supersede the laws of the Sabbath (2:28). Nine times Jesus used it to refer to His coming redemption (8:31; 9:9,12,31; 10:33,45; 14:21,41). Three times Jesus used the title in reference to His return in judgment (8:38; 13:26; 14:62).

Jesus already possessed the authority to forgive and heal. “Authority” (2:10; cf. 1:27) refers to more than merely “the right” or “the power.” The scribes doubted Jesus’s ability or power. In contrast, Jesus declared that His authority to forgive sins is equivalent to that of the Father’s authority in heaven. Jesus

#### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“When Jesus called Himself the Son of Man, He was not practicing humility. . . . That title was pregnant with theological significance concerning Jesus’ deity and office. That was why Jesus used it here; He wanted to show His divine authority to forgive sin.”<sup>3</sup>*

—R. C. Sproul  
(1939–2017)

### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus, as God, has the power to heal a person spiritually and physically. This is ultimately seen through His resurrection that gives us salvation and forgiveness of sin through our faith and trust in Him. One day our bodies also will be gloriously resurrected.

possesses God’s own authority to forgive and brings that authority to earth. Thus, the answer to the scribes’ question of verse 7 is Jesus!

Then, without finishing His statement to the scribes, Jesus gave the man three commands: “Get up, take your mat, and go home” (2:11), and that was just what the paralyzed man did, and he did it right away (v. 12). “Got up” literally is “was raised up.” The man walked out in front of everyone. He could now do what healthy people can do—bend down, pick something up, and carry it. To “go home” meant he could return to a normal life.

In the Jewish thinking of that time, sickness, disease, and sin were linked because the people believed, in one way or another, these were the result of sin (John 9:2; Rom. 5:12; cf. 2 Chron. 7:14; Pss. 41:3-4; 103:3; Isa. 38:17; Luke 4:18). For Jews, complete healing involved more than merely being restored to health. Based on Psalm 103:3, the scribes believed and taught in their rabbinic tradition that a person could not be healed until all of his sins had been forgiven.<sup>4</sup> That was just what Jesus did—He healed the man’s physical infirmity and He healed the man’s spiritual infirmity to the glory of God!

***What has Christ done recently that causes you to be astounded and give Him glory?***

Verse 12 contains two “alls” (Greek, *panton* and *pantas*). The first “all” records the observers’ amazement: “They were all astounded” (see also 1:27). The second “all” is not translated in the CSB but indicates who was amazed—everyone, including the scribes. None of them had ever “seen anything like this!” Whether the scribes also “gave glory to God” or only

**Key Concept:** Jesus has the power to forgive, especially when He sees committed faith.

the crowd is debated. In Luke’s parallel account, he added that the crowd said, “We have seen incredible things today!” (Luke 5:26). The word “incredible” literally is *paradoxa*. Indeed, what a paradox it was between the scribes and Jesus!

***What is better—to be healed of a physical ailment or a spiritual one—and why?***

 **HEAD**

How does God’s Word challenge your preferences and preconceptions?

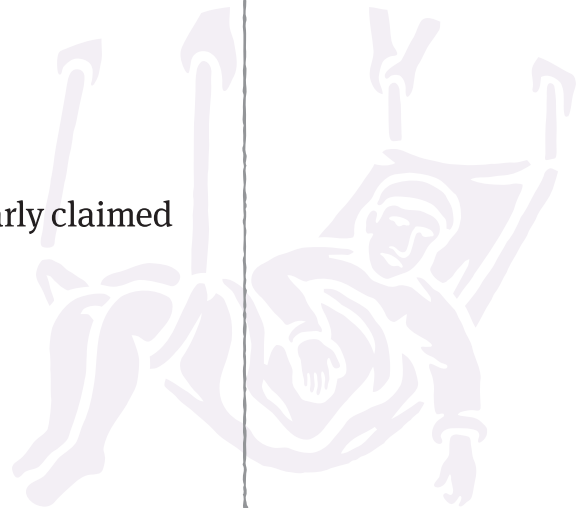
 **HEART**

Where in your life do you need to believe that Jesus is able to deal with sin, whether yours or someone else’s?

 **HANDS**

With whom can you share that Jesus clearly claimed to be God?

Notes



**References**

1. LeMoine F. DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 269–75.
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# HEALING AND CALLING

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 3:7-19

**Context:** Have you ever been in a huge crowd, feeling pressed in by people on every side? That's what Jesus experienced at many points in His public ministry. Everyone wanted in on the miracles, the healing, the blessing. Jesus felt compassion for the broken people seeking help. Yet Jesus had also come for something much bigger. In Mark 3, Jesus had begun His mission of salvation for all nations. To address the present problem of huge crowds and to look to the future after His resurrection, Jesus appointed twelve disciples and began preparing them for a lifetime of ministry.

**Key Concept:** When Jesus calls, His disciples obey to continue His mission.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Mark 3:7-19
- Day 2:** Mark 3:20-30
- Day 3:** Mark 3:31-35
- Day 4:** Matthew 9:18-31
- Day 5:** Matthew 9:32-38
- Day 6:** Psalm 98

## Jesus's mission of healing drew crowds (Mark 3:7-12).

**<sup>7</sup> Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a large crowd followed from Galilee, and a large crowd followed from Judea, <sup>8</sup> Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon. The large crowd came to him because they heard about everything he was doing. <sup>9</sup> Then he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, so that the crowd wouldn't crush him. <sup>10</sup> Since he had healed many, all who had diseases were pressing toward him to touch him. <sup>11</sup> Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God!" <sup>12</sup> And he would strongly warn them not to make him known.**

### They Heard What Jesus Did

"Jesus departed with his disciples" might refer only to the pairs of brothers (Simon and Andrew, James and John) whom Jesus called in 1:16-20 and to Levi in 2:14, but it probably referred to a larger group of His followers. As on the previous occasions in 1:35 and 1:45, Jesus withdrew from Capernaum to a more isolated place. But the identification of their withdrawal as "to the sea" seems surprising since Capernaum itself was located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Thus, Mark probably intended to indicate the sparser areas on the northern end of the lake where the Jordan River flows into it.

To emphasize the size of the crowds that flocked to Jesus, Mark used the adjective "large" or "great" three times. These crowds came from wide and diverse geographic regions, indicating Jesus's fame and popularity. First, there was the large crowd that came from all



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Notes



### Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Jesus's strategy for beginning His ministry in Galilee.

### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus calls us to follow Him. We are His disciples when we follow, obey, and trust in Him as Lord and Savior, preaching the good news to others.

over the region of Galilee (v. 7), an area ruled by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. But a large crowd also came from the south—“Judea,” with its capital in “Jerusalem” (vv. 7-8). They also came from Idumea, over 120 miles farther south in what was referred to as the Negev. “Beyond the Jordan,” or “Transjordan,” referred to the area known as Perea, which lay two-thirds of the way down the east side of the Jordan River valley to the upper third of the Dead Sea. “Tyre and Sidon” were used together to refer to the land of Phoenicia on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in what today is known as Lebanon (see 7:24,31). Tyre was 34 miles north of Capernaum, and Sidon was 25 miles north of Tyre. These were the cities in the northernmost area Jesus visited (7:24).<sup>1</sup>

Not only were these areas geographically diverse, they were ethnically diverse. Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem were Jewish areas; Idumea and Perea were mixed Jewish and Gentile regions; Tyre and Sidon were almost completely Gentile. Living too far away to have seen for themselves, the crowds from Judea, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and Tyre and Sidon came to Jesus “because they heard about everything he was doing” (3:8). Mark’s statement reminds us that people still will come to see for themselves when they hear what Jesus is doing in the lives of His people.

***What could people hear about what the Lord is doing in and through your life?***

### They Came to Be Healed

One can almost picture a mob of people pushing and shoving to see Jesus, and as they did so, Jesus was being backed up against the lake and almost pushed

into it! Mark's use of the strong words "crush him" (v. 9) and "pressing toward him" (v. 10) should not be read as a hostile mob but as the crowd's desire to see and hear Jesus. So Jesus called on "his disciples to have a small boat ready for him." This was not one of the larger commercial fishing boats or lake transport vessels but a small dinghy Jesus could use as a floating platform from which He could speak to the crowd, as He would do in 4:1-2.

"He had healed many" (v. 10) explains "everything he was doing" (v. 8). And for that reason, "all who had diseases were pressing toward him." That Jesus "had healed many" does not mean there were some He healed and others He didn't. The parallel passage in Matthew 12:15 says "he healed them all." Apparently these sufferers believed that if they could only "touch him" they would be healed (Mark 3:10; see 5:25-34; 6:56; Luke 6:19; 8:44).

In addition to those needing healing from physical diseases, there were those possessed by "unclean spirits" (Mark 3:11). "Unclean spirits" is a synonym for demons. Mark used both terms 11 times in his Gospel and used them interchangeably in 3:22,30; 7:25,26,29,30. As in 1:32-34, Mark again distinguished between those possessed by unclean spirits and those suffering from various physical diseases. These unclean spirits, or those possessed by them, "fell down before" Jesus. The word for falling down is used eight times in the New Testament and always refers to an inferior falling prostrate before a superior. They did this upon seeing Jesus, and then they "cried out, 'You are the Son of God!'" (3:11). Mark used a series of imperfect tenses—"were seeing," "were falling," "were crying out"—to indicate that what he described



### Voices from THE CHURCH

*“Many people followed Jesus but didn’t understand his true purpose for coming. Some people came for miracles, some came to hear his teaching, but they didn’t understand the way of the cross. Knowing about Jesus, or even believing that he is God’s Son, does not guarantee salvation. You must also follow and obey him.”<sup>2</sup>*

—Bruce B. Barton

was happening frequently over a period of time. This is reinforced by the introductory word “whenever,” a temporal particle (v. 11). In other words, the exorcisms of 1:21-28, 3:11-12, and 5:1-20 were examples of other frequent episodes.

The unclean spirits’ declaration about Jesus was totally true. Their confession is the main theme Mark announced for his Gospel in 1:1—that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Ironically, to this point in Mark’s Gospel, only God the Father (1:11) and the demons have acknowledged this (1:24; 3:11; 5:7). Because this title eventually would be used against Jesus (Matt. 26:63), Jesus “would strongly warn them not to make him known” (Mark 3:12). “Strongly warn” is the same word Jesus used when He rebuked the wind and waves in 4:39. Demonic forces were not the appropriate ones to announce either who Jesus is or why He came. For Mark, that would be revealed only through the cross (15:39).

***How has Jesus shown Himself to be more than you thought He was at first in your own life?***

**Jesus appointed His disciples to further His mission** (Mark 3:13-19).

<sup>13</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach, <sup>15</sup> and to have authority to drive out demons. <sup>16</sup> He appointed the Twelve: To Simon, he gave the name Peter; <sup>17</sup> and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, he gave the name “Boanerges” (that is, “Sons of Thunder”); <sup>18</sup> Andrew; Philip and Bartholomew;

**Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot,<sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.**

### **Jesus Appointed the Twelve**

Mark did not name the mountain that Jesus went up. For Mark, the important thing was not where this event happened but what happened. Luke reported that before Jesus selected His apostles, He prayed, spending “all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

Mark summarized Jesus’s action in four verbs: “summoned,” “wanted,” “came,” and “appointed” (Mark 3:13-14). Mark emphasized what Jesus Himself did. In contrast to how learners at that time normally would choose for themselves which rabbi to follow, Jesus called His disciples—the disciples did not choose Him. The term “those he wanted” literally is “those he willed” (v. 13). These apostles were sovereignly chosen by Jesus Himself according to His and the Father’s purpose. Because they were summoned according to Jesus’s will, “they came to him,” a statement that emphasized the power of Jesus’s summons.

That Jesus called them reminds us that discipleship is what Jesus does in us, not what we do for Jesus. And while Jesus named this special group “apostles,” Mark only used that term one other time in his Gospel (6:30). Ten times Mark referred to them as “the Twelve” (3:16; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10,17,20,43), a term found outside the Gospels only in Acts 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 15:5, where they are mentioned as witnesses of Jesus’s resurrection. “The Twelve” harkens back to the twelve sons of Jacob (Gen. 35:22-26; 49:1-28). Mark used “disciple” or “disciples” 45 times, referring almost exclusively to the Twelve. Thus, what

**WORD Study**

**APOSTLES:** The word used to describe the Twelve in the original Greek is *apostolos*, or “sent ones.” This is an apt description of the role given to those twelve, as Jesus appointed them and immediately sent them out on short-term ministry missions. Later, after His resurrection, they would be sent to the ends of the earth.

Jesus said of these apostles in verse 14 needs to be represented in all of Jesus’s disciples.

Mark recorded why Jesus wanted, called, and appointed these twelve apostles: “to be with him” and “to send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). The order of these clauses is important. Discipleship is first a relationship with Jesus before it is a task performed for Jesus. Jesus did not choose these men because He needed friends or companionship. He chose them to observe Him, to learn from Him, to absorb all they could from Him. As it still should be today, preparation came before preaching. Being with Jesus changed who these men were (think of Peter and the fiery sons of Zebedee). Further, they later would serve as witnesses to all Jesus said and did (John 1:14; 19:35; Acts 2:32; 4:19-20; 10:39-41; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:1). They would become the guardians of the truth about Jesus (John 14:26; 16:13), and they would be the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14).

Jesus’s second purpose was to send them out for a specific mission. The word *apostle* referred to an official representative. Mark defined specifically what would be involved in their being sent out: “to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14-15). This meant sharing the message publicly in language that hearers could understand. What these disciples were to proclaim was not their own experiences, as many Christians do exclusively today when they “give their testimony,” but to make known the good news of what God has done for our salvation in Jesus Christ. Until this point, only Jesus had cast out demons (1:39); now Jesus gave His apostles the authority to cast out demons—and they did (see 6:13; Acts 5:12-16; 16:16-18).

From this commission, we learn that discipleship involves being with Jesus (a relationship), proclaiming His message (giving a verbal testimony), and opposing evil (acting with His authority). Thus, Jesus's disciples of all times proclaim what they stand for and demonstrate what they stand against. Discipleship involves words and actions. The gospel is both a positive divine message and a confrontation against supernatural evil in the world.

***What can you do to start or continue to follow the call God has on your life?***

### **The Twelve Were Uniquely Suited**

Mark proceeded to name the Twelve whom Jesus appointed. Simon Peter comes first in all four lists of the apostles (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). "Peter" is a Greek word that means "a stone" or "a rock," though Jesus likely would have used the Aramaic form "Cephas." Mark does not inform us about when Jesus gave Simon this name (cf. Matt. 16:18; John 1:42). In both Matthew 16:18 and Galatians 2:9, his nickname is linked to his role in the church. Up to this point, Mark referred to him as Simon (Mark 1:16,29,30,36), but from this point on, except for in 14:37, when Jesus addressed him directly, Mark would always call him Peter. Peter became the leading apostle of the group and their spokesperson.

As with all four lists, the brothers James and John came next. Together with Peter, they comprised Jesus's inner circle and accompanied Him on special occasions (5:37; 9:2; 14:33). These brothers were "the sons of Zebedee" (10:35) and thus cousins of Jesus through their mother Salome, the sister of Jesus's mother,

Mary. Only Mark identified them by the name Jesus gave them—“Boanerges,” or “Sons of Thunder.” While Mark did not give a reason for this nickname, it probably reflected their hot temperament, as revealed in 9:38; 10:35-40; and Luke 9:54. James would be the first of the apostles to be martyred (Acts 12:1-2), and John would be a leading apostle in the early church (Acts 3:1; 4:7,13,19; 8:14,17). John eventually was exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). John wrote the fourth Gospel, the three brief letters of 1–3 John, and Revelation.

Andrew, a Greek name meaning “manly” or “brave,” was the brother of Peter and a former disciple of John the Baptist. Andrew was the one who brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-42). He often was pictured as bringing people to Jesus (6:8-9; 12:20-22). Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (1:44) but had a fishing business and house in Capernaum (Mark 1:29). These four were the first disciples Jesus called (1:16-20).

Philip also was from Bethsaida. He introduced Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:43-47; 12:21) and was mentioned by name in John’s Gospel in 6:5-7; 12:21-22; and 14:8-9. “Bartholomew,” referring to Nathanael, is not a personal name but meant “son of Talmi” (see 2 Sam. 3:3; 13:37). When Jesus met Nathanael, He said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit” (John 1:47).

Mark referred to the fifth disciple Jesus called—a tax collector—as Levi (Mark 2:13-14), though from Matthew 9:9 and 10:3, we know he was called Matthew. Matthew wrote the first Gospel. “Thomas” means “twin,” and while he is referred to as being a twin (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2), nothing is said about his twin in the Gospels. Since his name is paired with

Matthew, some Bible students have suggested they were twins. Mark did not mention Thomas elsewhere, but he is remembered primarily for his doubting that Jesus was raised from the dead (John 20:24,26-29) and questioning in the upper room where Jesus was going (14:5). His nickname of “Doubting Thomas” is unfortunate as he was the one who convinced the other disciples to go to Jerusalem with Jesus, even if it meant they would die with Him (11:16).

James the son of Alphaeus, or James the Younger (Mark 15:40), is so labeled to distinguish him from the other persons named James in the Gospels. Mark also labeled Levi “the son of Alphaeus” (2:14), leading some to speculate that perhaps Matthew and James were brothers. Thaddaeus appears in Matthew’s list also (Matt. 10:3) but does not appear in neither of Luke’s two lists (Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), both of which mention “Judas, the son of James.” Judas is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Judah.” Perhaps to avoid confusion with Judas Iscariot, both Mark and Matthew used Thaddaeus. Otherwise, he too is unknown.

The Greek word Mark used to distinguish Simon from Simon Peter literally is “the Cananaean.” This did not refer to Simon as a Canaanite or as a resident of Cana. Luke directly called him “the Zealot” in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13. A zealot was a person within a political and quasi-religious movement that opposed Rome and eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.<sup>3</sup> If Simon was a zealot involved in the revolution against Rome, his political leanings were a stark contrast to those of Matthew, who was a tax collector for Rome.

Judas Iscariot concludes the list and is further described as the one “who also betrayed him.”

## THEOLOGY Connection

**CALLING:** The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

“Iscariot” may mean “from Kerioth,” a town in Judah twenty miles east of the Dead Sea (Josh. 15:25; Jer. 48:24; Amos 2:2). If so, this would make Judas the only one of Jesus’s apostles from Judea. “Iscariot” was not Judas’s personal name, however; it was a name by which his family was known, for in John 6:71 and 13:2,26, he is called “Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son.” Judas apparently was initially well-trusted by his fellow apostles for John tells us he served as the treasurer for the group without them realizing at the time that he was a thief (12:6). Mark added the note about his betrayal to prepare his readers for Judas’s part in Jesus’s arrest and crucifixion.

What a diverse group: a collaborating tax collector, common fishermen, and perhaps one or two radical zealots who saw themselves as patriots and revolutionaries! All were common people; none came from high society. Yet Jesus called them, as He calls people today from all walks of life and backgrounds into becoming a community that loves one another (John 13:34-35).

As a group, the apostles (minus Judas Iscariot, of course) were the leaders of the Christian church (Eph. 2:19-22; Rev. 21:14). And in the future, these apostles will rule with Jesus in His eschatological kingdom (Matt. 19:27-28). However, as individuals, we know almost nothing about them. In the Book of Acts, only Peter, James, and John are mentioned by name after the initial list in Acts 1:13. What role they played, where they each went, and what happened to them later in life is lost to us except for some accounts from the early church. This should remind us that countless individuals have proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ, gone into all the world with that message, and

**Key Concept:** When Jesus calls, His disciples obey to continue His mission.

suffered for their faith without ever being known by those who came after them. The same will be true for most all of us. Nevertheless, we are called to be Jesus's faithful witnesses in the here and now.

***How does it make you feel to be called to participate in the same mission the twelve disciples were given?***

 **HEAD**

How does the calling and commissioning of the apostles challenge your idea of what it means to be a Christian?

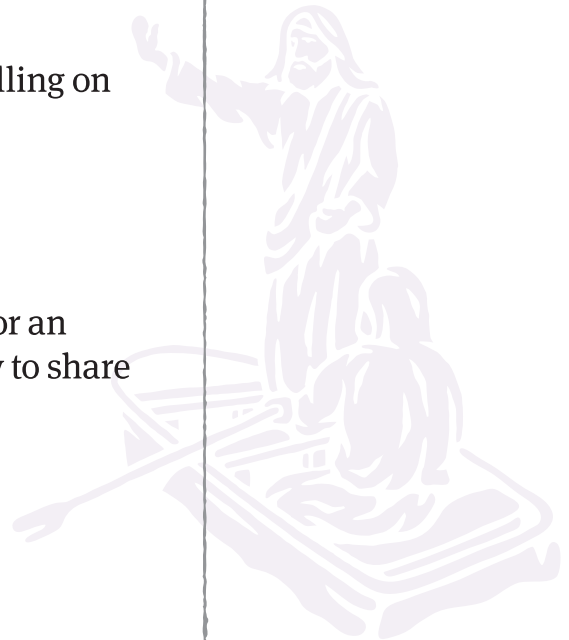
 **HEART**

How do you see God's love for you in His calling on your life?

 **HANDS**

How can you participate in God's mission for an unbelieving friend, seeking an opportunity to share Christ with them?

Notes



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# LORD OF THE SABBATH

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 12:1-14

**Context:** People didn't know what to do with Jesus. In Matthew 11, even John the Baptist struggled with doubts about Jesus. Jesus lamented an unresponsive generation, yet to those who did accept Him, Jesus gave one of the greatest promises in Scripture: "Come to me . . . and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). In Matthew 12, however, we see the religious leaders' misunderstanding of the heart of God. They mistook God's provision of the Sabbath to display God's goodness for the good itself.

**Key Concept:** Mercy and goodness outweigh ritual and law.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Mark 2:23–3:6
- Day 2:** Matthew 12:1-21
- Day 3:** Matthew 12:22-50
- Day 4:** Matthew 13:1-23
- Day 5:** Matthew 13:24-58
- Day 6:** Psalm 59

## Jesus points to mercy as greater than sacrifice (Matthew 12:1-8).

**<sup>1</sup> At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. <sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” <sup>3</sup> He said to them, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry: <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? <sup>5</sup> Or haven’t you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? <sup>6</sup> I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”**

### The Pharisees Looked for Controversy

At the end of chapter 11, Matthew recorded Jesus’s invitation for the “weary and burdened” to come to Him and He would give them “rest”—a word Jesus repeated a second time when He said, “you will find rest for your souls.” Jesus promised that “my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (11:28-30). It is only fitting then that Matthew immediately continued his narrative with two confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath (a word that means “rest”) that contrasted the heavy burden the religious leaders placed on the people versus the light burden Jesus offered them. While all three Synoptic Gospels recorded these events (Matt. 12:1-14; Mark 2:23–3:6;



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



Luke 6:1-11), Matthew provided the fullest account of this controversy. The story centers on an occasion when Jesus and His disciples were walking through the fields and the disciples “began to pick and eat some heads of grain” (Matt. 12:1). Unlike today, pathways for travelers often went through farmers’ fields rather than around their property so walking through fields was not uncommon.

We are not told where Jesus and His disciples were going in Galilee on that Sabbath or why. The ripe grain indicates it was springtime—late March or April. We also are not told whether the grain was wheat or barley, but both crops produced the seeds of grain in clusters at the top of the plants. The disciples picked some of the clusters, rubbed them in their hands to separate the husk from the grain (Luke 6:1), and then blew away the chaff to prepare the snack to eat. Nothing about their actions was illegal, for the law of Moses allowed travelers to pick and eat some of the ripe harvest as long as they did not use a sickle (Deut. 23:25). Cutting the grain with a sickle would indicate more than satisfying one’s hunger and thus would constitute theft. What made the disciples’ actions an issue for the Pharisees was that they did it “on the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:1). The Pharisees confronted Jesus about the actions of His disciples because a teacher was responsible for the deeds of His followers: “See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath” (v. 2).

Setting apart one day of the week as the Sabbath was a distinguishing mark for the nation of Israel and the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). Its stated purpose was for the people to have a day of “rest” and refreshment (Ex. 23:12; 34:21; Deut. 5:14). Thus Israelites and even aliens who lived

among them were forbidden from doing any work on that day (Ex. 20:10-11; Deut. 5:12-14). The Pharisees, however, found it necessary to further classify and restrict what involved “work.” They developed thirty-nine categories of activities that they believed constituted work. They made these conclusions part of their oral law, or traditions, and later codified them in two lengthy tractates of the Mishnah, “The Sabbath” and “Sabbath Limits.” These regulations became so meticulous in detail that the rabbis themselves admitted, “The rules about the Sabbath . . . are as mountains hanging by a hair, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many.”<sup>1</sup>

All of chapter 7 from the Mishnah’s tractate “The Sabbath” is devoted to what constitutes work on the Sabbath. Eleven of the thirty-nine categories relate to growing and harvesting wheat: sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleaning crops (separating good grain from bad grain), grinding, sifting, kneading, and baking. To illustrate just how meticulous these laws were, it was illegal on the Sabbath to reap and grind more grain to eat than the size of a dried fig!<sup>2</sup> Thus, according to Pharisaic considerations, Jesus’s disciples had violated the Sabbath laws regarding reaping, threshing, winnowing, and food preparation!

***What is a modern-day example of someone who cares more about the letter of the law than the genuine needs of people?***

### Jesus Appealed to Scripture

Since the Pharisees had challenged Jesus regarding what they considered to be “not lawful” (Matt. 12:2), Jesus’s first response was to recall an Old Testament narrative that also involved something that was “not lawful” (v. 4). The way Jesus formed His question “Haven’t you read . . . ?” (v. 3) expected a yes answer. Still, His rhetorical question was a rebuke. Since these were the religious leaders who taught the people, of course they had read this story.

Before David became king, he spent several years fleeing from King Saul, who jealously recognized that God was with him and would one day give him the throne. In 1 Samuel 21:1-6, David and his men went a few miles south of Jerusalem to a place called Nob, and David appeared before Ahimelech the priest at the tabernacle. David pretended that he and his men were on a mission for the king and indicated they were hungry and needed supplies by asking for any food the priest had on hand (vv. 2-3). Ahimelech told him the only bread available was the consecrated bread (1 Sam. 21:4), that which Jesus reminded the Pharisees was “not lawful for him or for those with him to eat” (Matt. 12:4; cf. Lev. 24:5-9). Saul later had Ahimelech and eighty-five priests executed and the city destroyed with all its men, women, children, babies, and domestic and service animals (1 Sam. 22:11-19)—not because Ahimelech had broken the law but because he had unwittingly helped Saul’s enemy.

Jesus’s rebuttal was another *a fortiori* argument, from the lesser to the greater. If David was not condemned for this “unlawful” action in violation of God’s written law, then neither should Jesus’s disciples be

condemned for a violation of the Pharisees' unwritten law. Human need is always more important than ritual laws.

Only Matthew recorded Jesus's second example in verses 5-7. This involved the law concerning the Levitical priests and their Sabbath service, first in the tabernacle and then later in the temple (Matt. 12:5). Again, Jesus's question "Haven't you read in the law . . . ?" was rhetorical. According to the law, the priests were responsible to make the normal daily sacrificial offerings and doubling them on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9-10). Here, Jesus gave a clearer example of people who "violate the Sabbath and are innocent" (Matt. 12:5). Jesus's word "violate" means "desecrate" or "profane." It is used elsewhere only in Acts 24:6. Yet according to Jesus, the priests were "innocent" or "blameless" because they were doing God's work. According to the Babylonian Talmud, the rabbis themselves plainly stated, "The sacrificial service supercedes the Sabbath."<sup>3</sup>

As a conclusion to His examples, Jesus again used a lesser-to-greater argument, this time about the institution that surrounded the sacrifices: "I tell you that something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6). Translations are divided as to whether Jesus's word for "something" was a neuter word ("something," referring to "mercy" in v. 7) or a masculine word ("someone"). However, verses 41-42 show the neuter form can be used to refer to individuals. Jesus placed the word "temple" in His statement in the position of emphasis. If the priests' service in the temple rendered them innocent of breaking the Sabbath regulations, then Jesus's disciples were innocent because they served the One who is greater than the temple.

**GOSPEL**  
Connection

God's mercy allowed His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for humanity's sin. We have always missed the mark of God's holy standards of the law. But through Christ, we are rescued from the penalty of death because of His love and goodness.

**Biblical CONCEPT**

**LORD OF THE SABBATH:** To claim to be Lord of the Sabbath was to claim to be Lord of the law. The only Lord of the law is the One who gave it—God Himself. In this passage, Jesus did not just tweak cultural norms; He claimed divine authority.

Jesus concluded this controversy with two declarations. First, quoting Hosea 6:6 for a second time (cf. Matt. 9:13) and using a contrary-to-fact construction, He told the Pharisees that while they prided themselves on knowing the Scripture, they had misunderstood its true meaning. The Lord's desire—His divine will—was for His people to reflect mercy over ritual practices. The word for “mercy” in Hosea 6:6 is the important Old Testament word *hesed* that characterized God Himself (see Ex. 34:6). If the Pharisees had understood that fundamental point, Jesus said, they “would not have condemned the innocent” (Matt. 12:7). Using the same word “innocent” for His disciples, Jesus placed their action on the same level as the Old Testament priests in verse 5.

In Jesus's second declaration, He used His favorite title for Himself—“the Son of Man” (v. 8). Then Jesus made a statement that asserted His deity by using the word “Lord.” He declared that He “is Lord of the Sabbath.” To make it clear that He was asserting absolute divine authority over the Sabbath and its regulations, Jesus placed the word “Lord” first in the sentence for emphasis. He made it clear that He already is the Lord of the Sabbath—Lord of that which God pronounced holy (Gen. 2:3), that God gave to Israel (Ex. 16:29), that was enshrined as the fourth commandment in the central law of Israel (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-14), that which Yahweh specifically stated was a “Sabbath to the LORD” (Ex. 16:23,25; 20:10; Lev. 23:3; 25:2; Deut. 5:14), and that which God called “my Sabbaths” (Ex. 31:13; Lev. 19:3,30; 26:2; Isa. 56:4; Ezek. 20:12,20). From this controversial conversation, we learn that Jesus is greater than David, greater than the temple, and greater than the Sabbath.

*When have you or someone you know misunderstood or misapplied the heart behind one of God's commands?*

Notes

**Loving care toward others fulfills the law of God** (Matthew 12:9-14).

<sup>9</sup> Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. <sup>10</sup> There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand, and in order to accuse him they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" <sup>11</sup> He replied to them, "Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out? <sup>12</sup> A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath." <sup>13</sup> Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other. <sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

### What Would Jesus Do?

Matthew also recorded a second Sabbath controversy. While it may appear that this episode occurred on the same day as the one in verses 1-8, Luke clarified that this one occurred on a different Sabbath (Luke 6:6). Thus, "moving on from there" (Matt. 12:9) is a literary transition and not a chronological one.

Matthew referred to the synagogue where this occurred as "their synagogue" (v. 9), perhaps to suggest that it was under the influence of the Pharisees (v. 14; 23:2,6) and to point to the increasing conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment. Perhaps, however, it merely indicated that it belonged to the local people.

A man who had a shriveled hand was in the synagogue. The word “shriveled” literally is “dried up.” Other possible translations include “withered,” “palsied,” and “atrophied”—it was useless. Luke added that it was the man’s right hand (Luke 6:6)—a real hardship in a culture where virtually everyone worked with his hands.

Rather than wait until after the action, as in the previous story, “they”—who Matthew makes clear referred to the Pharisees—took the initiative and asked Jesus a legal question to try and trap Him: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (Matt. 12:10). All three Synoptic Gospels make it plain that this was not an academic question but one that was asked “in order to accuse him” (v. 10; Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7).

According to the oral law later recorded in the Mishnah, the Pharisees already had settled that question: One could heal on the Sabbath only if it were a life-threatening situation<sup>4</sup>—which this man’s condition clearly was not. In fact, rabbinic law as recorded in the Mishnah did not allow for tying bandages, setting a broken bone, relocating a dislocated joint, or providing any relief to a sufferer on the Sabbath. Other rabbis were not as strict; they said one could relieve pain or suffering.<sup>5</sup> But the strictest set of the Pharisees in Jesus’s day—the followers of Rabbi Shammai—did not even permit praying for a sick person on the Sabbath!

Jesus countered with a question to the worshipers at the synagogue, not just to the Pharisees. “Who among you” (Matt. 12:11) also made it a personal issue, not merely a legal one. Basically, Jesus was asking them, “What would you do?” In Jesus’s day, pits would be dug to trap wild animals (Isa. 24:18;



Jer. 48:44). Sometimes a domestic animal would fall into one of these pits (Ex. 21:33). The only way for it to get out would be for someone to “take hold of it and lift it out” (Matt. 12:11). Jesus’s question assumed a positive response. Of course the people in the audience would help their animal, even if it were on the Sabbath. Once again, using a form of the-lesser-to-the-greater argument, Jesus stated, “A person is worth far more than a sheep” (v. 12).

Using their same words, Jesus answered the Pharisees’ question of verse 10 about what was “lawful” and about what could be done “on the Sabbath.” He gave a positive principle that went beyond the specific incident and applied to every Sabbath: “It is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath” (v. 12). Jesus took the people beyond merely doing or not doing what was lawful; He focused on doing what was good or beneficial because that was the whole purpose of the Sabbath.

***What norms of ours might Jesus upset if He walked into one of our church services?***

### **Jesus Healed on the Sabbath**

Having settled the subversive “academic” question of the Pharisees, Jesus now focused on the man who had been at the center of the dialogue—the man who never even asked to be healed. Jesus simply commanded the man to stretch out his hand, and in the process of doing so, the man’s hand was immediately restored. To emphasize the completeness of the restoration, Matthew added “as good as the other” (v. 13). That Jesus did not do anything, such as touching the man or using any oil or ointment, meant Jesus had

#### **Voices from CHURCH HISTORY**

*“The Divine sabbath law is large, comprehensive, spiritual, and therefore searching. But it is elastic, and adjusts to man’s varying conditions; it does not expect men to force themselves to fit to it. Human sabbath rules were, in our Lord’s time, and are still, most vexatious things—yokes that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”<sup>6</sup>*

—H. D. M. Spence-Jones (1836–1917)

## THEOLOGY Connection

### GOD IS MERCIFUL:

Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God's withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

not violated neither the Sabbath nor the Pharisees' excessive restrictions on the Sabbath as He had not done any "work."

### ***How is God glorified when His people do good to those around them?***

Matthew concluded the story by telling us the reaction of the Pharisees. Matthew first tells us "the Pharisees went out" (v. 14), perhaps indicating the loss of control of "their synagogue" or because of their embarrassment. Luke said they "were filled with rage" (Luke 6:11). Mark added that the Pharisees joined with their opponents, "the Herodians," against Jesus (Mark 3:6). Both Matthew and Mark further state that they "plotted" against Jesus, "how they might kill him" (Matt. 12:14; Mark 3:6). The Greek word both writers used was *symbolion*, to "take counsel" either in the sense of conferring with one another (Luke 6:11) or having "held a council" (see Acts 25:12). Since their stated purpose in verse 10 had been "to accuse him," in the sense of bringing a legal charge against Him, some Bible students find it unlikely that these few Pharisees in Galilee could have been influential enough to get Jesus condemned in Jerusalem or to have Him executed in Galilee. Nevertheless, official opposition to Jesus was growing, and in chapter 27, He would be "gotten rid of."

Matthew left us confronted with the ironic situation that those who were so concerned with not violating the minutest human restrictions of the Sabbath went out and plotted a murder on the Sabbath, violating the Lord's fourth and sixth commandments!



## HEAD

Where might your thinking on God's commands need to move away from rigid religiosity toward life-giving love?



## HEART

What is one situation in your life right now in which you need to ask God for greater love toward others?



## HANDS

What is one way you can actively display the loving heart of God through your actions this week?



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# LORD OF LOVE

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 6:20-23,27-36

**Context:** Jesus did amazing things. He healed the sick, made lame men walk, cleansed lepers, and cast out demons. He called ordinary, untrained, unlikely men to be His closest followers and told them He would use them to change the world. He confronted the religious leaders of the day, exposing their hypocrisy. When Jesus taught, He revealed things about the meaning of life, the hearts of men, and the nature of God that have echoed through history. Luke 6 contains the Beatitudes, some of Jesus's most wonderful, influential, and challenging teachings.

**Key Concept:** The way of Jesus is humble, sacrificial love that is countercultural.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Luke 6:1-16
- Day 2:** Luke 6:17-49
- Day 3:** Matthew 5:1-48
- Day 4:** Matthew 6:1-34
- Day 5:** Matthew 7:1-29
- Day 6:** Psalm 147

**The humble and meek rejoice in their heavenly inheritance** (Luke 6:20-23).

**<sup>20</sup> Then looking up at his disciples, he said: Blessed are you who are poor, because the kingdom of God is yours. <sup>21</sup> Blessed are you who are hungry now, because you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh. <sup>22</sup> Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, insult you, and slander your name as evil because of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Take note—your reward is great in heaven, for this is the way their ancestors used to treat the prophets.**

### Four Blessings

While a large crowd was present and heard Jesus's sermon, He specifically spoke to His disciples (v. 20), the apostles who accompanied Him down the mountain (vv. 12-19). To be "blessed" is much more than finding happiness, experiencing well-being, or being fortunate in life. Biblical blessing comes from God and does not depend on external circumstances or one's situation in life. Jesus taught His disciples about the blessings for those in God's kingdom.

Jesus's first blessing was for those who are poor. Probably many people in the larger crowd—especially those from Galilee—fell into this financial category. Yet Jesus's couplet "because the kingdom of God is yours" (v. 20) should not be taken as a universal blessing on those stuck in poverty. The word "yours" is a possessive pronoun and makes it clear that Jesus was talking directly to His disciples, who had left everything to follow Him (18:28) and by doing so had joined with Him who had "no place to lay his head" (9:58).<sup>1</sup> Jesus



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Notes

even placed the word “yours” first to emphasize this. Further, Jesus’s promise is present tense. This blessing was not merely for the future; the disciples already possessed it. While Jesus’s pronouncement of God’s blessing had socioeconomic implications, it was made specifically to these disciples Jesus had summoned, chosen, and named as apostles (6:13), as the rest of His statements will make clear.

Because these disciples had chosen poverty to follow Jesus, the second Beatitude flowed naturally—“Blessed are you who are hungry now” (v. 21). The poor and the hungry often are linked in the Old Testament (Job 22:7; 24:4-11; Isa. 32:6-7; 58:6-7,9-10; Ezek. 18:7,16). “Hungry” is the same word used of Jesus’s hunger in the wilderness after His temptation (Luke 4:2). Their present circumstance—“now”—would not be their ultimate condition but would be reversed in the future—“you will be filled” (Luke 6:21). Yet their being “filled” does not refer to physical satiety with food but with spiritual satisfaction. In her Magnificat, Mary proclaimed, “He has satisfied the hungry with good things” (1:53).

The Scripture is full of comforting promises to God’s people who weep or mourn. In Isaiah 61:3, the Lord promised “those who mourn in Zion” that He would “give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair.” In Isaiah 25:8, we read, “The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face.” The Lord promised the remnant of Jeremiah’s day, “I will turn their mourning into joy, give them consolation, and bring happiness out of grief” (Jer. 31:13). In John 16:20, Jesus said, “Your sorrow [weeping] will turn to joy.” In Revelation 21:4, God promised His people that “He will

wipe away every tear from their eyes” and that in His eternal kingdom, there will be no more “grief, crying, and pain.” Jesus again contrasted the “now” with what they “will” do in the future—“laugh.” Laughter (Luke 6:21) and joy (v. 23) often go together in the Old Testament (see Ps. 126:1-3; Isa. 65:19; 66:10). And the Old Testament promises sorrow will be turned into joy (Ps. 126:5; Isa. 60:20).

In His fourth Beatitude (Luke 6:22), Jesus stressed He was talking to His immediate disciples by repeatedly using the second person plural “you.” Then Jesus used four verbs to describe what the experience of His disciples would be in the present age: people will “hate you . . . exclude you, insult you, and slander your name.” “Hate” is related not merely to personal dislike but is used of religious opposition to God and His people (Ps. 69:4; Isa. 66:5; Luke 1:71). Jesus told His apostles this directly: “You will be hated by everyone because of my name” (21:17), and He repeated it again in His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:9. Jesus also told His apostles, “They will ban you from the synagogues” (John 16:2). “Insult” and “slander” referred to verbal attacks. “Slander your name as evil” usually referred to giving someone a bad name, a bad reputation, and treating that person as an outcast. However, “your name” is singular and perhaps does not refer to the disciples’ individual names but to the name Jesus’s disciples will be known by—the name of Christ, or “Christian” (Acts 11:26; 26:28).

Jesus added “because of the Son of Man” (Luke 6:22) to signify that all these things will happen to them because of their association with Him. Again, as Jesus told them in the upper room, “If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you”

#### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“While the world imagines progress, strength, and a grand future, the disciples know about the end, judgment, and the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, for which the world is not at all ready . . . That is why the disciples are rejected as strangers in the world, bothersome guests, disturbers of the peace.”<sup>2</sup>*

—Dietrich  
Bonhoeffer  
(1906–1945)

(John 15:18). Persecution would authenticate the disciples' identity and relationship with the Son of Man.

***How are Jesus's teachings about what it means to be blessed different from what the world says?***

Jesus concluded His four Beatitudes with two imperatives as to how His disciples were to respond when all of this persecution happened to them: "Rejoice . . . and leap for joy" (Luke 6:23). Yet rejoicing and leaping for joy are one total response, not two separate responses. The words picture young goats and lambs bounding in a field.<sup>3</sup> This joyful response of Jesus's disciples should show even in their body language.

The word "rejoice" is in the passive voice, implying that this joy is given to them, not produced by them. The source of the joy is God, which makes sense because joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Humanly speaking, we typically respond in anger, retaliation, or despondency. But rejoicing is just what the apostles did after being flogged by the Sanhedrin according to Luke's record in Acts 5:40-41: "The apostles . . . went out . . . rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name."

Why this seemingly unnatural reaction? Jesus gave two reasons. First was their heavenly reward: "Your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:23). This eternal perspective forces those who suffer for Christ to look beyond their present circumstances. As Paul later wrote: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). Second, their suffering aligned them with how God's

### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus ushered in a countercultural, upside-down kingdom that put love as the highest value. This love is shown ultimately in how He died for us that those who trust in Him might have life and not perish.

prophets were treated. Those who would initiate their present persecution were following in their ancestors' unfaithful footsteps (see 1 Kings 19:10,14; Neh. 9:26; 1 Thess. 2:14-15; Heb. 11:35-38; Jas. 5:10). Jesus's euphemistic expression "used to treat" about the prophets covered all He predicted for His disciples in verse 22 and more.

*Which blessing in this passage brings you the most comfort or joy?*

**Loving others, including enemies, is the way of Jesus** (Luke 6:27-36).

<sup>27</sup> **"But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don't hold back your shirt either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don't ask for them back. <sup>31</sup> Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them. <sup>32</sup> If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."**

## Dealing with Difficult People

After Jesus announced His four Beatitudes (vv. 20-23), He followed with four “woes” (vv. 24-26) and then recalled the last Beatitude with four types of persecutors: “enemies . . . those who hate you . . . those who curse you . . . those who mistreat you” (vv. 27-28). Jesus then listed four ways to respond to these groups.

First, Jesus spoke of “your enemies” and the faithful response toward such enemies—to love them (v. 27)! That Jesus could command His followers to love shows that this *agape* love is not based in emotions or feelings but in actions, as His next statements reveal. The second group Jesus mentioned was “those who hate you.” The word “hate” (*miseo*) in this context refers to actively acting against Jesus’s disciples, not merely disliking them.<sup>4</sup> Such hatred is based in vehement anti-Jesus passions—they hate disciples for being followers of Christ. The natural response would be to reciprocate, give back the same negative energy. But to these haters, Jesus’s followers are instructed to “do what is good” in tangible ways. This shows that *agape* love is love in action.

To “those who curse you,” Jesus told His disciples to “bless” them (v. 28). To curse someone was more than cussing at them; it was to pronounce a divine curse on someone hoping that evil, misfortune, and harm would come upon that person. The natural human reaction would be to respond with a counter-curse. Instead, Jesus’s disciples were to respond by asking for God’s favor on their opponents’ lives. Such a response is only possible because these disciples had just had God’s blessing pronounced upon them (vv. 20-22; cf. Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12; Jas. 3:9-10;

1 Pet. 3:9). As for those who “mistreat” Jesus’s disciples, Jesus told His disciples to “pray for” them (Luke 6:28). This response turns the disciples’ reaction vertically. Both Jesus (23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60) beautifully illustrated this response.

All four of these responses are imperatives in the present tense. In other words, these are commands that are to be the continuous responses of believers. “Enemies” act in all these ways. Thus, the disciples’ reactions needed to incorporate all of these responses all the time.

Jesus followed His four exhortations in verses 27-28 with four examples or illustrations of how His commands might work out in real life situations (vv. 29-30). In all four of these examples, Jesus switched to the singular “you” to indicate that this is how individual disciples should respond in one-on-one situations. Some debate whether the first example pictures a public insult or a follower of Jesus being punched in the jaw in a violent act. A slap on the cheek was the means of public expulsion from the synagogue, which Jesus warned His disciples would happen to them (John 16:2). When that happened, Jesus’s instruction was to “offer the other [cheek] also” (Luke 6:29).

Jesus’s next illustration was part of the preaching of John the Baptist in 3:11, but here, Jesus was talking about a robbery—“if anyone takes away your coat” (6:29). Jesus would soon send His apostles out on a mission (9:1-6), and the roads in places were full of bandits and robbers who preyed on travelers (10:25-37). “Your coat” referred to a long outer garment, a tunic or robe. “Your shirt” referred to a short undergarment that was worn next to the skin. Robbers must have taken both from the traveler in the story of the good



Samaritan, for “they stripped him” (10:30). When Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them “don’t take an extra shirt” (9:3). In this case, voluntarily giving up all of one’s clothes would provide the robbers no reason for further aggression. And what the robbers intended as harm for a victim would be turned into an active act of love designed to do good to the assailants.

Jesus’s third example is unlimited and without exception: “Give to everyone who asks you” (6:30). Jesus did not specify the motives of the persons asking, their worthiness, or whether their request involved money or goods. He just told His disciples to give. Jesus put the verb “give” in the present tense to indicate His disciples should always be ready to follow this action. The fourth example envisioned either a thief (“someone who takes your things”) or a borrower. In this situation, Jesus said, “Don’t ask for them back,” or, “Don’t demand them back.” Jesus then stated what we often refer to as the Golden Rule: “Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them” (v. 31).

Do Jesus’s teachings sound bizarre? Unrealistic? Someone has quipped that if Jesus’s disciples practiced His teachings, they would soon end up bloody, naked, and penniless! Were Jesus’s instructions merely overstatements or hyperbole for effect? Well, Jesus Himself did them. He gave His cheeks to His tormentors (22:63-65; cf. Isa. 50:6); to those who took His outer clothes (Luke 23:34), He gave even His seamless tunic (John 19:23-24; cf. Ps. 22:18); and He prayed for those who mocked and cursed Him (Luke 23:34). Jesus was teaching the Twelve that showing God’s love to others is more important than one’s own selfish claims, that they could demonstrate to the lost in practical ways God’s own self-sacrificing generosity, and that being

Jesus's disciples meant giving up their rights to everything to follow Him.

***When have you seen a Christian stand out because of his or her radical love?***

### **Lil'e Father, Lil'e Sons**

Each of Jesus's three illustrations in verses 32-34 are negative examples designed to distinguish His disciples' love from that of those who don't know Him. Each of these illustrations builds off of Jesus's statements in verses 27-30. In each, Jesus returned to using the plural "you." He began each example with an "if" and concluded with the same words: "what credit is that to you?" or, "what benefit is that to you?" (vv. 32,33,34). Conventional actions may build credit with people but not with God. By practicing Jesus's teachings, His followers would not only act graciously but would build "credit" or "reward" (v. 35) with God.

In all three illustrations, Jesus taught His disciples they must do more than the natural action of giving to get something in return. Loving those who reciprocate love is only natural. Even sinners do that (v. 32)! The same is true with doing good to those who do good to you (v. 33) and lending to those who either will pay it back or who will lend to you in the future (v. 34).

People ordinarily act with reciprocity in mind. They expect to receive something back. But Jesus's standard for His disciples went far beyond this. He summarized His teaching again in verse 35: His disciples are to "love . . . do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." The verb translated "expecting nothing in return" literally means "hoping nothing from it." Such an attitude turns the loan into a gift.

#### **THEOLOGY** Connection

**GOD IS LOVE:** To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“We who hated and destroyed one another, . . . now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly . . . that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all.”<sup>5</sup>*

–Justin Martyr  
(c. 100–165)

Disciples are to love their enemies for that’s what God does. They are to do good, focusing on concrete goodwill acts. They are to lend without thinking of *quid pro quo*. And again, Jesus stated each action in the present tense, indicating that these should be the continuous practices of His disciples.

When Jesus’s disciples act in these ways, two results follow: First, “your reward will be great” (v. 35), not just a reward but a “great” reward. This is what God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:1. As with Abraham, this reward is a heavenly one (Luke 6:23; cf. Heb. 11:13-16). Second, obedient disciples will prove themselves to be “children of the Most High.” This is the same description Gabriel used of Jesus in speaking to Mary in Luke 1:32 (cf. 1:35; 8:28). Acting as God’s “children”—literally “sons”—Jesus’s followers will reflect the nature of God, who “is gracious to the ungrateful and evil”—to all those who don’t deserve His kindness (6:35). Jesus’s disciples do not do these things to become children of God; they do them because they are children of God. Their behavior reflects their spiritual parentage.

Jesus’s final command called on His disciples to “be merciful” to others “just as your Father also is merciful” (v. 36). The word “merciful” emphasizes God’s compassion. “The Most High” God is now identified as “your Father,” that is, their heavenly Father. That God is a merciful God goes back to His earliest revelation of Himself to Israel and is what was stressed about Him throughout Israel’s history (Ex. 34:6-7; Deut. 4:31; 2 Sam. 24:14; 2 Chron. 30:9; Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:15; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Micah 7:18-20). James also reminded his readers that “the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (Jas. 5:11). God is merciful in His very

**Key Concept:** The way of Jesus is humble, sacrificial love that is countercultural.

being and He acts in mercy. His mercy is boundless. As God's mercy is boundless and offered to all, so should it be with His children. This directs Jesus's disciples to base their actions on a divine standard. It clarifies that Jesus's instructions are not rules only but evidence of the godly character His children develop and display.

***Whom in your life do you find hard to love?  
How might Christ be calling you to radical love  
in that situation?***

 **HEAD**

What is a worldly standard or definition of love that you are tempted to believe?

 **HEART**

What spiritual disciplines could you focus on to grow your awareness of Christ's love for you?

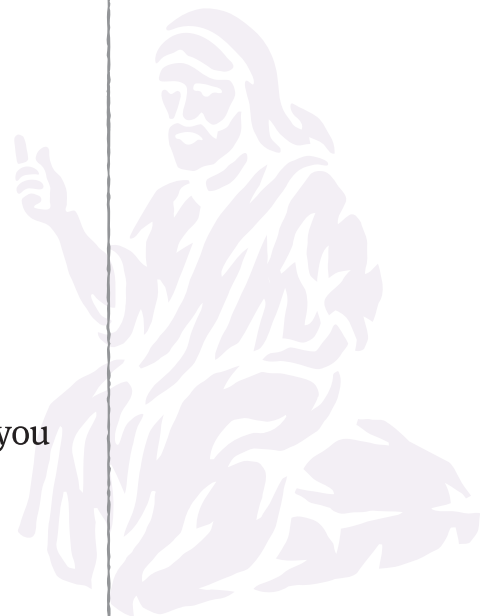
 **HANDS**

What is one specific step toward radical love that you can take this week?

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Notes



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 24

# THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS



MATTHEW; LUKE



#### MEMORY VERSES

“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

–Luke 11:11-13





# HE IS THE MESSIAH

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 11:2-10,16-19

**Context:** John the Baptist was raised up by God as the prophet promised to precede the coming of the Messiah. He was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord by calling them to repentance and baptizing them as they confessed their sins. He fulfilled this mission as he pointed to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But as John's ministry decreased, he was arrested and imprisoned for speaking out against Herod's unlawful marriage. This led to some questions about Jesus's increasing ministry: Was Jesus indeed the Messiah? So John reached out from prison for an answer.

**Key Concept:** Jesus's actions and the fruit of His actions prove that He is the Messiah.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Matthew 10:1-15
- Day 2:** Matthew 10:16-42
- Day 3:** Matthew 11:1-15
- Day 4:** Matthew 11:16-24
- Day 5:** Matthew 11:25-30
- Day 6:** Psalm 149

## Jesus pointed to His actions as evidence of His messiahship (Matthew 11:2-10).

<sup>2</sup> Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples <sup>3</sup> and asked him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” <sup>4</sup> Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, <sup>6</sup> and blessed is the one who isn’t offended by me.” <sup>7</sup> As these men were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the wind? <sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? See, those who wear soft clothes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.”

### John the Baptist Had Questions

Have you ever watched a movie that contained a significant plot twist? As you are watching the movie in real time, the new event seems unpredictable and unexpected. But later you think back over the movie and you say to yourself, “I should have seen that coming!” In movies and literature, we call these hints of what is to come “foreshadowing.” Once the movie ends and you see the conclusion, you can look back and see the foreshadowing for what it is. A good book might frustrate you in this way. You get to the end and then remember a subtle hint that came way back in



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Notes



### Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about John the Baptist's imprisonment.

### Voices from THE CHURCH

*“John’s perspective was limited, and so is ours. Whenever we go through difficult situations with unmet expectations and questions rising up within us, we need to remember that our perspective is always limited. In the end, we must trust that God knows what He is doing.”<sup>1</sup>*

–David Platt

chapter 2 that didn’t get resolved until the book’s final pages. But once you got to the end, you understood. Foreshadowing helps you anticipate the outcome.

The Bible is full of foreshadowing from cover to cover. In fact, you could rightly suggest that the whole of the Old Testament is one big hint at what was to come when Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God—stepped into humanity. It’s one of the reasons many Bibles are filled with notes and cross-references that help us see that one passage of Scripture actually draws from another passage. Many times, New Testament authors refer to the Old Testament in order to make their point, sometimes through quotes and other times through allusions. It is a comfort to God’s people to know that what happened in the New Testament was promised in the Old. When you begin to see these connections, you notice how the Bible is one big story that anticipates the outcome from the beginning.

Jesus Himself used Old Testament foreshadowing to help others make sense of who He is and what He came to do. In Matthew 11, John the Baptist had doubts about Jesus’s identity and mission. This should come as no surprise—John was in prison for confronting Herod about marrying his brother’s wife (Matt. 14:3-4). No doubt he knew one of the roles of the Messiah would be to set the captives free (Isa. 61:1), yet John languished in prison. So he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask about His identity. Specifically, they asked if Jesus was the promised Messiah or just another forerunner.

Rather than saying, “Yes, I am the Messiah,” Jesus encouraged John by pointing to His miracles. But He directed John to these miracles in a unique way. Instead of saying, “Look at what I’m doing,” Jesus alluded to

the Old Testament. Jesus was responding directly to John's question. This wasn't some random aside. Jesus wasn't trying to avoid the question. He wanted to give John the answer in a way that John would know Jesus's identity and mission were all a part of God's plan. The hope of the Messiah was derived from the Old Testament, where God's prophets often spoke of the fulfillment of God's promises to destroy Satan, sin, and death through this promised Seed of Eve (Gen. 3:15).

Jesus drew upon the prophet Isaiah (see Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1-3), whose writing was filled with prophecies of the Messiah's arrival. According to Isaiah, the Messiah would perform miracles that resulted in healing, restoration, and care for the broken and marginalized of society. He would give sight to the blind, cause the lame to walk, and bring freedom to the prisoners. Similarly, in Luke 4:16-21, in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus boldly claimed that He fulfilled the work Isaiah prophesied about. These were no small claims. All the hope that Israel had for the coming Messiah was present in the person of Jesus.

How could John the Baptist know Jesus was the Messiah? Jesus did not merely say He would do the things Isaiah spoke of, but He was actually doing them. Those who knew Jesus knew that He was a miracle-worker. Even today, we can read the Gospels and find story after story of Jesus doing exactly what Isaiah said the Messiah would do. In Jesus's day, anyone who understood Isaiah's prophecy would have known that these miracles were like a supernatural spotlight marking the true Messiah's identity. So Jesus told John's disciples to go back to John and tell him that Jesus was doing exactly what Isaiah said the Messiah would do. In other words, Jesus is the Messiah!

## ***What evidence from your life proves that Jesus is who He says He is?***

### **Jesus Affirmed John's Ministry**

Not only did Jesus say that prophets testified to His work, but Jesus also affirmed to the crowd that John himself was a witness to who Jesus is and what He came to do (Matt. 11:7-10). Remember that by the time Jesus came to earth, no prophets of the Lord were proclaiming God's messages and word. Prophecies had ceased; the Lord had gone silent. God had told His people through the prophet Malachi that the next prophet would be the forerunner in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way of the Messiah (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). It had been roughly four hundred years since Malachi's message, so you might imagine the people were anxious for God to fulfill His promises.

This is why each of the Gospel writers emphasized John the Baptist's role. His ministry as the forerunner broke the silence. John was rightly known as "the Baptist" because he baptized people who repented of their sins in preparation for the coming Messiah, but he could also be called "John the Prophet" or "John the Last Prophet." The prophet Amos predicted the silence of the prophets and spoke of it in the most severe terms: "Look, the days are coming—this is the declaration of the LORD God—when I will send a famine through the land: not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). Now at last, the people heard the voice of one whose life and ministry was to usher in the Messiah's presence among the people.

John's first message fit right into the common pattern of prophetic speech: "Repent, because the

kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 3:1). John himself pointed back to Isaiah, claiming that it was his calling to “prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness, make a straight highway for our God in the desert” (Isa. 40:3; cf. Matt. 3:3).

***Why are the Old Testament prophecies important for understanding the New Testament?***

Like the Old Testament prophets, John's ministry was a wise design of God. John's ministry was meant to awaken the people from their sinful slumber, call them to repent, and remind them that God was still intent on fulfilling His promise to send the Messiah. And God's plan worked. Many flocked to John and listened to His message.

In Matthew 11, as John's disciples returned to deliver Jesus's message, Jesus addressed the crowd. He reminded them that they didn't just go out to the wilderness to see a wild man who dressed oddly and ate strange food (vv. 7-8). John was unique, even among the prophets. He was not just another prophet. His job description was simple—prepare the way for the Messiah. John did this in two ways. First, he called people to repent from their sin. And second, he urged people to recognize Jesus as the Messiah (3:11-12). Jesus would do the very same things—He also would call people to repent and to acknowledge Him as the Messiah. John prepared the way for Jesus's work because those who heard Jesus knew they were hearing the same message John proclaimed.

Even today, people are wise to listen when God speaks. His voice—whether through a sermon, a song, a word from a friend, a book, and ultimately through

**THEOLOGY  
Connection**

**SPECIAL REVELATION:** Special revelation refers to God's revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

His Spirit and His Word—is a reminder that God commands our attention. The lost also should take heed. When God tries to get your attention and calls you to repent and believe in Him, you should do just that.

**Rejecting Jesus is foolish as the fruit of His work is evident** (Matthew 11:16-19).

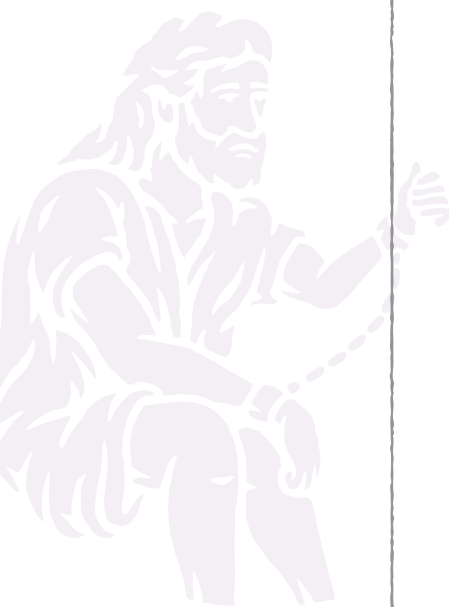
<sup>16</sup> “To what should I compare this generation? It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children: <sup>17</sup> We played the flute for you, but you didn’t dance; we sang a lament, but you didn’t mourn! <sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

### The Wicked Rejected John and Jesus

Just as John the Baptist may have had some doubts about Jesus’s role as the Messiah, many in the crowd may have been skeptical about both John’s ministry and Jesus’s own. Here Jesus condemned the people as a whole by using an image of children playing that His audience would have easily understood:

Rejection of both John and Jesus is inconsistent and hypocritical, like children playing in the marketplace (their playground in that day) who refuse to play the wedding and funeral games their companions propose.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt Jesus’s listeners had seen children in their imaginative play, acting out weddings and



funerals like kids today play house or other events they have experienced. Parents can probably recollect the complaints of their own children when their siblings did not play the games the way they wanted. The picture Jesus painted here of His generation wasn't a pleasant one.

Jesus used the term "generation" to describe the people who witnessed His ministry and miracles. This term hearkened back to the Israelites in the Old Testament. There the term "generation" often was used to refer to those who grumbled against God, doubted His power and protection, and worshiped pagan idols despite all they had witnessed of God's goodness. The entire generation was judged and forced to wander for forty years until they died in the wilderness (Num. 32:13; Deut. 1:35; 2:14; 32:5,20). Then God allowed the subsequent generation to enter the land.

The parallels are striking between the wilderness generation and the generation to which Jesus spoke in Matthew 11. Both groups had ample evidence of the supremacy of God and His power. The Israelites witnessed the exodus and God's miraculous signs and wonders (see Ex. 7–14), and they experienced His care and provision in the wilderness (Deut. 29:5; Josh. 21:45). It's stunning to think that a group of people who witnessed such wonders would grumble and doubt God, but that's exactly what they did. And it wasn't like a great deal of time had passed. No sooner were they delivered from slavery than they started worshipping idols and complaining about God.

The fact that Jesus applied this same term to His generation was not an encouragement. They witnessed Jesus's great miracles. They saw the lame walk, the blind see, and those imprisoned by demonic

### GOSPEL Connection

Though the evidence of Jesus and His works is historically accurate, many will reject Him as Lord and Savior (Matt. 7:13). Still, we have a mission to share the gospel with others to give people the opportunity to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

powers freed. In many ways, these miracles were far greater than those of the exodus. Jesus's miracles should have impacted His generation, spurring them to repent and trust in Jesus. They'd been waiting for the Messiah for so long. They knew the failure of the previous generations. They understood the need for deliverance from sin and death. Yet the Messiah was right in front of them, and they did not respond in faith but with criticism.

God continues to do miracles in our day as well. The fact that He still seeks out sinners and forgives their sin through Christ is an astounding miracle. His presence through His Holy Spirit continues His activity of giving help, answering prayers, and meeting tangible needs. We should be careful that we are not like previous generations who were blind to God's activity in spite of all He is doing in and around us.

***How might your complaints be keeping you from obeying Jesus?***

### Wisdom Vindicated John and Jesus

The Old Testament prophets often looked and acted strange among their generations. They stood out as they took a stand for the Lord. So did John. Some people may have been drawn to John just because he was different. John apparently did not eat and drink like others did, and he got a reputation for it. Even today it is common for many to abstain from certain foods or drink—either through short-term fasting or long-term commitment—as an act of devotion to God. But John's critics said that his strict adherence to a specific diet and way of life was evidence that he was possessed by a demon.

Isn't it strange that the person whom God called to get the people's attention and point them to the Messiah was mocked and blasphemed? This is common in our day as well. God continues to speak His truth through faithful leaders who proclaim His Scriptures. The gospel of Jesus is countercultural, and those who declare that our generation needs to repent and turn to Jesus often are badmouthed and criticized. Rather than repenting and believing the gospel, people reject it and continue in their rebellion. Paul said that the message of the cross is foolishness to the unregenerate (1 Cor. 1:18) and many will stumble over the truth that Jesus is Lord (v. 23).

Jesus pointed out that people who overlooked and mocked John's message as too strict and difficult rejected Jesus's message for the opposite reason. In contrast to John, Jesus came eating and drinking, especially with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:10-17; Mark 2:13-22; Luke 5:29-39). This practice earned Jesus a derogatory nickname of sorts—He was the “friend of sinners.” Jesus was not the least bit threatened by this title. He wore the description as a badge of honor (Mark 2:13-17). In Luke's Gospel, Jesus summarized His mission by saying, “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Rather than see and understand this mission, the faithless generation of Jesus's day scoffed. Jesus responded with a simple claim about life: “Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Matt. 11:19). In other words, wise people don't just talk intelligently, they live out right living. They act wisely. This claim clearly pointed back to Jesus's earlier assertion about His miracles. He was unconcerned with cowering to people's view of what the Messiah should or should not do. He

**WORD Study**

**VINDICATED:** In Matthew 11:19, the word *vindicated* means “to justify.” Elsewhere in Scripture, this word is used to describe having legal justification before God and vindication in the face of opposition (Luke 18:14; Rom. 3:24). John and Jesus were maligned by the crowd, but their actions would be vindicated—or justified—as righteous.

knew that people often equate godliness with a certain distance from the sinful world. But Jesus knew that His mission was to invade that very world with His miracle-working power. He came into the world for that very purpose, and His miracles vindicated the fact that He is the Messiah. Remember, this claim was made long before the greatest miracle of Jesus’s life—His victorious resurrection that purchased our redemption. At the empty tomb, wisdom truly would be vindicated, as Jesus proved once and for all that He truly is God incarnate.

Christians today want to vindicate our claim to be God’s people through our good works (Eph. 2:10). We do not earn God’s favor through our righteousness, but because we are given the righteousness of Christ, we strive to live faithful, holy lives offered in worship to God (Rom. 12:1). We also should follow the example of our Savior by pursuing the lost through genuine relationships in which we can share the gospel and point others to Jesus. Granted, our friendship with sinners should look different than our relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ, but we should actively live on mission in the places God has us (2 Cor. 5:16-21). This may result in mockery by others who don’t understand why we love and serve and show hospitality to the broken and marginalized of the world. But when we are insulted and slandered for the name of Christ (see Luke 6:22), we are living faithfully in the pattern set for us by Jesus Himself.

***How can we confront our own fickle, unbelieving generation with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ?***

**Key Concept:** Jesus's actions and the fruit of His actions prove that He is the Messiah.



## HEAD

How does the truth of Jesus in Scripture address your doubts and questions in life?



## HEART

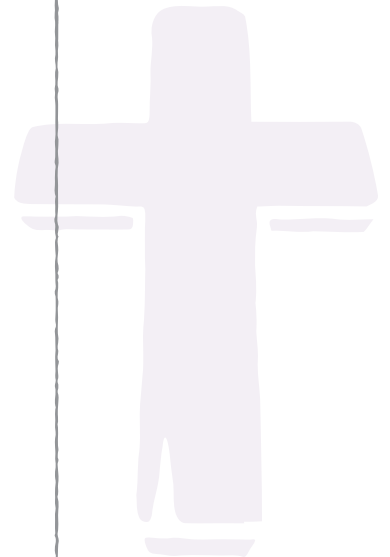
What struggles are you facing that call for you to turn to Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture?



## HANDS

What actions will you do this week to help others see the wisdom of God in Jesus and His gospel?

Notes



### References

1. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 146–47.
2. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 189.

# HE RESURRECTS LIFE

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 7:11-17

**Context:** Luke recorded his account of Jesus's sermon on the mount in Luke 6. After Jesus concluded His teaching, He entered Capernaum and encountered a Gentile centurion who came to Jesus to plead for the healing and life of his servant. This healing Jesus performed from a distance, praising the centurion's faith. He then traveled to a village called Nain, where He encountered a funeral procession. Jesus's compassion for the widowed mother of the deceased young man led Him to perform a miracle on her behalf.

**Key Concept:** Jesus gives new life because He is compassionate and good.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Luke 7:1-10
- Day 2:** Luke 7:11-17
- Day 3:** Luke 7:18-23
- Day 4:** Luke 7:24-28
- Day 5:** Luke 7:29-30
- Day 6:** Psalm 88

**Jesus has compassion on us and wants to give us new life** (Luke 7:11-13).

**<sup>11</sup> Afterward he was on his way to a town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him. <sup>12</sup> Just as he neared the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the town was also with her. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said, "Don't weep."**

### **Jesus Came to the Hurting**

Jesus's ministry consisted of steady movement. He rarely stayed in one place for any length of time. At the outset of Mark's Gospel, crowds gathered around Jesus. They were drawn to His teaching and miracles. Much to the chagrin of Jesus's disciples, Jesus got up early the next morning and moved on to another town. Why not stay when Jesus already had crowds? Jesus responded: "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come" (Mark 1:38).

How would you respond in similar circumstances? Crowds were gathering. People were listening. Miracles were happening. It seemed like all was going well. So why leave and go to a new place when things were going so well at the present location? Jesus would leave because He understood His mission. His goal wasn't to gather a crowd; it was to save the lost. So He went on to a new place.

Nain was one of those places. The name means "beautiful," but what Jesus saw there was anything but beautiful. In verse 12, we are given three facts:



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

1. A woman's son was dead.
2. He was her only son.
3. The woman had already lost her husband.

By losing both her husband and her son, all security and hope for the future was gone. This story is quite similar to the situations of Naomi and Ruth in the Old Testament.

Notice in the passage that two crowds were mentioned. A large crowd continued to follow Jesus wherever He went. Apparently they were not content to wait while Jesus went on to the next place, so they followed Him hoping to see what miracle He would do next. The second crowd was from the town, the large funeral procession with the widow for her dead son. In Jesus's day, a tragedy like this would have been marked by a grieving parade of sorts, with mourners walking alongside the family to show solidarity and support. These two crowds collided as Jesus encountered the widow who had lost everything.

Verse 13 starts simply by saying that Jesus "saw her." This is a factual claim but one with a punch when considering the massive crowds that were joining together. Jesus saw the woman. Amid the masses, Jesus took notice of a grieving mother. He was not hyper-focused on the large crowd of people but was attentive to this one woman.

A parallel idea is found in Exodus 2. The nation of Israel was enslaved in Egypt and helpless against the whims of a Pharaoh who feared their numbers but also needed their strength and labor. Much like the widowed woman, the people of Israel were broken and desperate. Miserable. Here's how Exodus 2 ends:

After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out, and their cry for help because of the difficult labor ascended to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the Israelites, and God knew. (Ex. 2:23-25)

Note the progression here: The people cried out to God. God heard their groaning. He called to mind His promises to Israel (meaning He now chose to act on them; the omniscient God does not forget). He saw them in their despair, and He knew their sufferings (3:7). God was attentive to His people Israel and provoked to action because of their pain. We are not told that the woman in Luke 7 cried out to Jesus. In fact, we're not even told that she noticed Jesus. But Jesus noticed her, and He knew her pain.

Sometimes it's easy to think that God has better things to do than to see us and care about our needs. After all, He's a supreme God who is upholding the entire universe (Heb. 1:3). We might even feel petty when we think about the concerns that we have in contrast to the big issues that so many other people face. Our problems might feel like first-world issues in contrast to the overwhelming burdens of so many around the world. Other times we feel like we caused our own issues through our foolish decisions, so why should God care about our needs? Why not just let us suffer for our own mistakes? And sometimes we feel like the widow in this story. We've lost much and life seems hopeless. We just assume God has given up on us or no longer cares.

**Voices from  
CHURCH HISTORY**

*“Our Lord Jesus Christ never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His heart is still as compassionate as when he was on earth. His sympathy with sufferers is still as strong. Let us bear this in mind, and take comfort from it.”<sup>1</sup>*

–J. C. Ryle  
(1816–1900)

Remember Jesus's words in Matthew 6. There He taught His disciples that He is perfectly capable of caring for everything at the same time. A God who cares for the lilies of the field and the birds of the sky will surely care for people made in His image. Because God is good and faithful, we don't have to worry about tomorrow; instead, we should seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and trust that God sees us and cares for all of our needs (Matt. 6:25-34).

### **Jesus Responded with Compassion**

Not only did Jesus see this widow who'd just lost her son, but He also had compassion on her. This is what Exodus means when it says that God knew (Ex. 2:25). It's more than merely the fact that God had intellectual knowledge of the bad situation Israel was in. He knew in the sense that He was provoked to deliver them. Of course, in God's divine will, He always intended to redeem His people from Egypt, so the plagues, the exodus, and the crossing of the Red Sea were not a knee-jerk reaction on His part. But the fact that their cries were linked to God's activity shows that God was moved, both by their pain and by the reality of the promises He had already made to love and care for them.

You might compare this to parents of a growing child. The parents know the challenges that come as children move from the early years to adolescence to adulthood. Parents might look back over their own story and remember what they experienced and the foolish acts of their youth. So they are able to empathize with the difficulties of growing up in a fallen world and the struggle to do what is right. They know.

God is eternal and unchanging. He doesn't have a history that He regrets. He doesn't know Israel's situation personally from past experience. But He does know and understand what it is to be human. In fact, later in the redemptive story of the Bible, God the Son was born as a man (John 1:1-18). Here's the way the author of Hebrews described this reality:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. (Heb. 4:15-16)

Jesus is fully man and was tempted like a man. Though He did not sin, He understood the trials and temptations that humans face. He knows and understands what it is to be human, both because He created humanity in His image and because He took on flesh, becoming the image of God. Because of the incarnation, we can come to Jesus and find mercy, grace, and compassion when we need it.

***How should knowing that Jesus is compassionate toward our pain change the way we approach our struggles?***

The woman in Luke 7 personified this reality. She had lost everything, and with the loss of her husband and son, she had no prospects for the future—no provision, no protection, no hope. Jesus, seeing and knowing her pain, moved toward her with mercy and grace. He then invited her, a grieving widow and mother, to do the unthinkable—“Don't weep!” (Luke 7:13).

**GOSPEL**  
**Connection**

Jesus can bring new life in our own lives. As we trust in Him and submit to Him, we are given new life in Jesus, and He will give us resurrected bodies at His return as well.

## THEOLOGY Connection

**RESURRECTION:** Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. (cont.)

It would seem that Jesus was being incredibly insensitive in the moment, but Jesus knew something the woman did not yet know—He knew what He was going to do next.

*How might you need to reevaluate the circumstances in your life that lead you to mourning and weeping?*

**Jesus has the power to resurrect life, and many need to know it** (Luke 7:14-17).

<sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And he said, “Young man, I tell you, get up!” <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us,” and “God has visited his people.” <sup>17</sup> This report about him went throughout Judea and all the vicinity.

### Jesus Intervened

We’ve all been to funerals. We know the solemn tone in the air when we confront death up close. There’s an especially poignant moment when the casket is moved from the funeral service to its final resting place. People stop. Many bow their heads in reverence. Others offer prayers. Now imagine that same experience amid a large crowd of onlookers. As would be common in the Near East, the widow’s dead son was being carried through town in full view of the mourning onlookers. What was unique wasn’t the burial processional but the fact that this son was being carried to his final resting spot when Jesus happened to pass by.

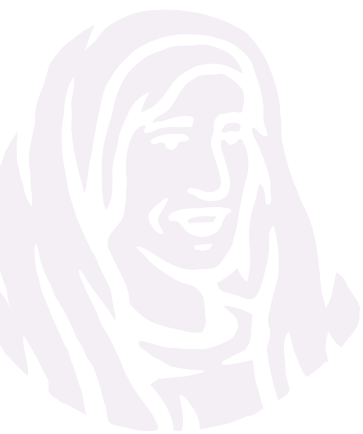
Jesus saw the widow, and He was moved with compassion. He then walked over to the coffin, which in Bible times would have been like a stretcher with the body upon it.<sup>2</sup> Imagine the shock of the crowd. In Jesus's day, no one in his right mind would interrupt a funeral procession, especially not some random man who presumably did not know the widow or her son. Yet the pallbearers stopped, likely astonished that Jesus would approach the coffin. He then did the unthinkable—He touched the coffin, which would have made Him ceremonially unclean (Num. 19:11,14-15; Lev. 21:1-3), and then He told the dead man to get up (Luke 7:14). No one in Jesus's day would think of doing something like that, as touching a corpse was forbidden for all but close family members. Jesus, however, was unconcerned with ceremonial uncleanness when it came to helping those in need. He touched lepers (Luke 5:13), the dead (Luke 7:14; 8:54), ate with sinners (Matt. 9:10-11; Luke 7:39), and responded favorably to a bleeding woman's touch of His garment (Luke 8:47).

***Why do you think Jesus was willing to touch the open coffin?***

This scene calls to mind another familiar story. In John 11, one of Jesus's best friends, Lazarus, died. Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days when Jesus called him from the tomb and Lazarus came out (John 11:41-44). Mary and Martha, Lazarus's sisters, were astonished, but they should not have been. After all, Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. 25-26). Jesus speaks, and dead people come to life.

**THEOLOGY**  
**Connection**

(cont.) Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.



God's Messiah has the power to bring life to those who were dead. We see this in Scripture when Jesus raised the widow's son, Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus. But these resurrections were a picture of a far greater reality: Jesus would die on the cross for our sins and would be raised by the power of God so we could be certain His sacrifice was accepted (1 Cor. 15:1-8,16-19). God is able to make those who are spiritually dead live again as well (Eph. 2:1-10). And those who are made alive by the power of God through new birth are promised that they will live forever. Though they will die one day, they will rise to new life with Christ forever.

### **The People Responded with Fear**

The people got three things right and one thing wrong in their response. First, they responded with fear. This was logical and unavoidable. I'm not sure how I would handle it if I saw someone sit up in a coffin, but I'm sure fear would be at the forefront of my mind. Obviously, the large crowd of people following Jesus knew that He was capable of miracles. But surely no one would expect that He would walk up to a dead body and tell it to get up, let alone that the dead person would obey. That kind of thing just doesn't happen.

Next, they were right to glorify God. It was clear to the people that such a miracle could not happen apart from the power of God. God alone is the One who gives life and takes it. The crowds recognized rightly that Jesus's power was something only God could do.

Finally, they were right to say that God had visited His people. God had performed many miracles throughout the Old Testament through His prophets, usually as a sign of His presence and His working through the prophet. In Jesus's day, the kinds of

miracles that the people had learned about in Scripture were rare—until Jesus came on the scene. If the miraculous healings, driving out unclean spirits, feeding thousands, and walking on water weren't enough, Jesus brought the dead to life. Jesus did what no one had done for hundreds of years.

What the people got wrong, however, was the limitation of what they said about Jesus. They said, “a great prophet has risen among us” (Luke 7:16). Of course, there is a sense in which this is true. Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King. But the clear implication from their comment was that Jesus was only a great prophet, yet He was showing them that He is actually God the Son.

We would be wise not to be too critical of the people in Jesus's day. It would be hard to comprehend that He was the long-awaited Messiah. This difficulty likely explains why Jesus told people over and over again that He is God. He knew that people would be tempted to assume He was just another great teacher or prophet since God had sent many of those in the past. Jesus is unique, however. He wasn't just another in a line of prophets; He is the Messiah.

Luke then said that news about Jesus spread throughout the region. We are left to wonder what news in particular: that Jesus was a miracle-working prophet or that He was the Son of God? Presumably both. Some likely saw Jesus for who He is and trusted in Him as the Messiah. Others saw His miracles and praised God for the work Jesus did while failing to acknowledge that Jesus Himself is worthy of worship.

The same divide is true in our day. The word about Jesus has spread. Many people around us know of Jesus. They may know some stories about His life.

### Voices from THE CHURCH

*“When Jesus saw a widow who had not only lost her husband but now her only son as well, Luke tells us, ‘[Jesus] had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’’ (Luke 7:13). Then he raised her son from the dead. And in this case, not a word was said about her faith. It was a free and lavish overflow of divine mercy, even before faith.”<sup>3</sup>*  
–John Piper

Some may connect Him to images like a cross or an empty tomb. Others may know something of His teaching. It’s common to hear even the most strident atheist attest to the fact that Jesus was a good man and His teachings are worth following. Far fewer people worship Jesus as God.

This somber fact compels our witness as we go through our everyday lives. We must strive to present Jesus as He truly is, not just a teacher or prophet but as the Son of God. We call people to repent and believe, not just to following the teachings of Jesus in the hope of living a moral life. Like the dead son in Luke 7, people around us are dead in their trespasses and sins, and they do not realize it (Eph. 2:1-3). Our unbelieving friends, family members, co-workers, and neighbors are literally the walking dead, and dead people cannot come to life simply by trying to be good. Their only hope is repentance and faith, whereby God grants them a new heart and resurrection life. Spiritually dead people move from death to life by faith in the fact that Jesus is God and He came to die for our forgiveness of sin and to rise again!

Let’s not shy away from this reality in our work of evangelism and missions. The apostle Paul was clear about what is essential for salvation: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

***When have you experienced Jesus’s compassion and power, and how did you share the experience with others?***

**Key Concept:** Jesus gives new life because He is compassionate and good.



## HEAD

How might you have a limited or incomplete understanding of who Jesus is in your life?



## HEART

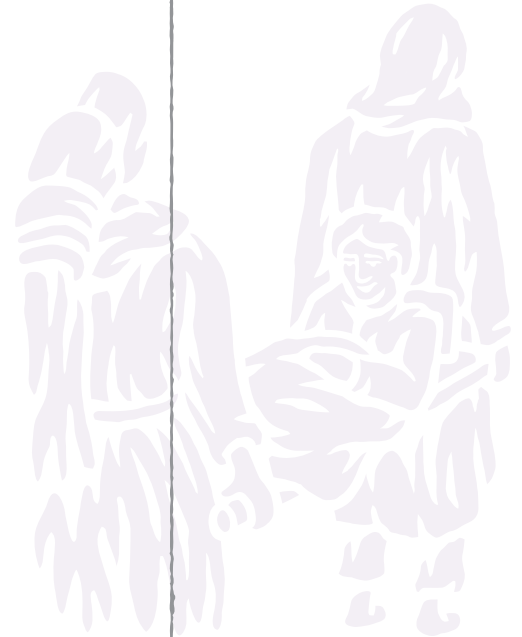
What thoughts and emotions arise when you contemplate the truth that Jesus has compassion toward you in your suffering?



## HANDS

How can you show someone in need that compassion spurs action instead of just empathetic feelings?

Notes



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1. J. C. Ryle, *Luke*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), Lk 7:11–17.
2. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Lk 7:14.
3. John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, Revised Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 87.

# HE FORGIVES SIN

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 7:37-39,41-50

**Context:** Though Jesus was known popularly as a prophet who taught and performed miracles with authority, He had some very powerful and influential opponents. Those who rejected Jesus’s mission sought to discredit Him by labeling Him “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Luke 7:34). The former labels were unfounded, as they describe a sinful lifestyle, but the latter accusation was unquestionably true. The Pharisees bristled at the thought of such friendships, but Jesus embraced them so that sinners might be forgiven.

**Key Concept:** Jesus forgives sinners who come to Him in adoring faith.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Luke 7:31-35
- Day 2:** Luke 7:36-39
- Day 3:** Luke 7:40-43
- Day 4:** Luke 7:44-48
- Day 5:** Luke 7:47-50
- Day 6:** Psalm 3

**We show faith by abandoning all for Christ**  
(Luke 7:37-39).

**<sup>37</sup> And a woman in the town who was a sinner found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume <sup>38</sup> and stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears. She wiped his feet with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the perfume. <sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—she's a sinner!"**

### **A Costly Offering**

We are not told who this woman was in this section of Luke 7, only that she was known to be a sinner. This description from the Pharisee was not meant to put her on an equal field with all other sinful human beings. Rather, she was a notorious sinner. She was known all around town for her sins. This description often was used to refer to sexual deviance, indicating that the woman likely had been immoral or even a prostitute. Not only was she known for her sin, but she was also a woman in a patriarchal culture. Women in general, and a sexually immoral woman in particular, would have been unwelcome company among the religious elite of the day.

The same perspective would have held true for Jesus's interaction with the woman at the well in John 4. It would have been shocking for a Jewish man to interact with any woman in public, let alone a Samaritan woman. And again, the woman was known for her shady past relationships, including the facts



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

## THEOLOGY Connection

### STEWARDSHIP:

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matt. 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21).  
(cont.)

that she had been married to multiple husbands and was now living with a man who was not her husband (John 4:18).

What happened in Luke 7 was even more scandalous than Jesus's interaction with the Samaritan woman. Not only did this woman take the initiative to approach Jesus, she came up behind Jesus and began to wash His feet without asking. Luke was vivid in his descriptions. First, the woman brought an alabaster jar of perfume. This was not a modest act. Most scholars estimate that such a jar of perfume would have cost the equivalent of a year's wages.<sup>1</sup> We aren't told where the woman got this perfume, and using perfume wasn't sinful in and of itself. If she was a prostitute, however, the perfume may have been a tool of her trade, a payment from a customer, or purchased with money given to her for her services.<sup>2</sup>

Luke also noted that the woman began to weep, though we can only speculate as to her reasons for doing so. Maybe she understood her unworthiness to approach Jesus. She was a sinner, and she knew it. We all know the guilt and shame that accompanies a life of sin, so perhaps she wept over the weight of her actions. She also may have wept at the greatness of Jesus. Imagine being in the presence of Jesus. Even the great prophet Isaiah was broken when he encountered the holiness of God: "Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies" (Isa. 6:5). If Isaiah felt this way, how much more this sinful woman.

The woman used the mixture of perfume and her tears to wash Jesus's feet. Jesus was a standard Jewish rabbi in the sense that His life was spent walking from

town to town. We know that in Luke 7, He was in the middle of one such journey through Galilee. His feet would have been mired in dirt and sweat, and they would have smelled at the end of the day. The task of washing feet would have been reserved for servants. The woman willingly assumed such a posture. She humbled herself, washed Jesus's feet, and even kissed them as she anointed them with perfume. If that wasn't enough, she dried His feet with her hair, a scandalous thing for a woman to do in public since a woman's hair was kept covered. Anyone in the audience of the Pharisee's table would have been stunned by her offering, and more than that, they were astonished that Jesus allowed it.

***What might the woman's actions have revealed about her understanding of who Jesus is?***

### **A Proudful Attitude**

If you were not familiar with the Bible, you might assume that what would follow would be something akin to a modern worship service. Surely the onlookers would see this lady's sacrificial act of worship and join her in praising Jesus. But Luke set the stage by acknowledging the problem right from the start. All of this happened in a Pharisee's house (Luke 7:36-37). The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day, and they were threatened by Jesus. He did many of the same things they did, but Jesus was a miracle-worker and He claimed to be God. He did not merely speak and act on behalf of God, but He said that He is God. And He exposed their prideful, sinful hearts.

The fact that the Pharisees were already on edge was compounded by the fact that this sinful woman

### **THEOLOGY Connection**

(cont.) Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Prov. 3:9), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), sacrificially (Matt. 12:41-44), humbly (Matt. 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

**Voices from  
THE CHURCH**

*“Jesus propitiated the holy wrath of God against our sin by suffering the full penalty for it in our place. Jesus does not argue our worthiness, He argues His substitution. We may not be worthy to be forgiven, but He is worthy to forgive us.”<sup>3</sup>*

–J. D. Greear

was now in the house of Simon the Pharisee, anointing Jesus’s feet with expensive perfume. Simon apparently saw this as a great time to question Jesus’s authority and calling. Simon concluded that a prophet surely would know who this woman was—a sinner—and therefore would surely not allow her to touch Him, much less wash His feet. But Simon had the wherewithal not to vocalize his inner thoughts. These inner complaints were standard for the Pharisees from the beginning of Jesus’s ministry:

When the scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he told them, “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:15-17)

Not only was Jesus not offended by the woman’s act of worship, but He was also drawn to the despised, the marginalized, and the broken. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus consistently sought the lost—the sinners—and this pattern infuriated the religious elites of His day.

This would not be the last time foot washing would show up in the story of Jesus. In John 13:1-10, Jesus Himself took a basin and a towel and washed His disciples’ feet. The Son of God humbled Himself to do the act reserved for slaves and servants. He washed the feet of His followers, even Judas, who would betray Him. Paul, writing to the Philippian church, described the sum total of Jesus’s life as demonstrating this type of humility:

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

The humility that Jesus demonstrated in allowing the woman to wash His feet could not compare to the humility He would exemplify in laying down His life to save sinners by dying in their place.

***How does this woman's boldness challenge our understanding of what is required to come before Jesus?***

**Jesus's mission is to forgive sinners, and in response, we love Him more** (Luke 7:41-50).

<sup>41</sup> “A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?” <sup>43</sup> Simon answered, “I suppose the one he forgave more.” “You have judged correctly,” he told him. <sup>44</sup> Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she, with her tears, has washed my feet and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. <sup>46</sup> You didn't anoint my head with olive oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven;

**that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little.”<sup>48</sup> Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”<sup>49</sup> Those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?”<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”**

### **You Have Judged Correctly**

Jesus masterfully integrated parables in His teaching to make a point about the good news of His kingdom. The parable in Luke 7:41-42 was short and clear. If a denarius represented about a day's wage, five hundred denarii would have amounted to almost two years' worth of work—an extravagant sum of money. Even fifty denarii was a considerable amount. In Jesus's parable, a creditor forgave the debt of both these amounts, and Jesus simply asked, “So, which of them will love him more?” (v. 42). The answer, of course, was obvious. The man owing fifty denarii would be grateful, but with a little time and hard work, he likely could have seen a way out of his problem on his own. But the man owing five hundred denarii had no such hope. There was no way to earn enough money to continue to survive with shelter, clothing, food, and drink while also earning enough extra to pay off two years' worth of debt. And if he could not pay, he was looking at slavery or imprisonment.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the posture of the second man, the one who had been forgiven much. An adequate comparison here might be the person who graduates from school with tens of thousands of dollars of debt and enters a career that barely pays the bills. Then someone in the church comes along and pays off the debt. There's an immediate burden lifted. The dread of a

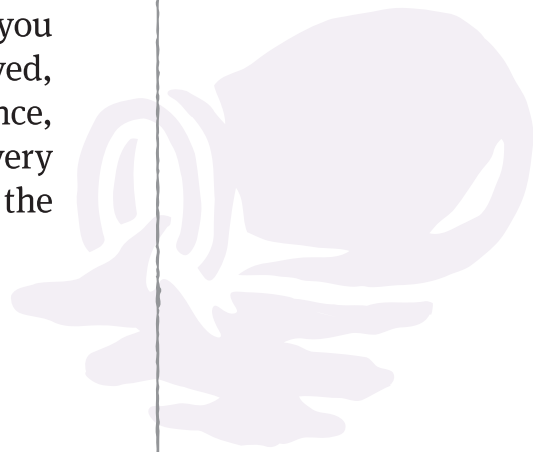
decade of making minimum payments that do little more than keep up with the interest on the loan is removed. There is now tremendous freedom. There is also a deep sense of gratefulness to the person who paid the debt. This thankfulness will not last for just a day or a week. The person forgiven likely will go to his or her grave recounting the story of the time someone kindly and graciously paid off his or her insurmountable student loan debt.

Luke highlighted Simon's answer to Jesus's simple question about which man would be more grateful. Simon said, "I suppose the one he forgave more" (v. 43). What did he mean by "suppose"? Again, the answer was obvious. It was as if Simon already knew that he was trapped. He knew what Jesus was doing with this parable, and it was going to expose the wrong-headed thinking of the Pharisees.

Modern readers immediately are forced to consider how God has forgiven them for their own sin. We too have a clear sense that any lack of love for the lost will be exposed as Jesus continued to address Simon. Likewise, Paul encouraged believers, in light of God's forgiveness, to extend forgiveness to others:

Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

***What are some ways you struggle to apply Scripture personally?***



### A Costly Forgiveness

Jesus packed a punch in this parable, and then He pointed out the difference in mind-set between Simon and the woman. Earlier in Luke 7, Luke said of the widow in Nain, “the Lord saw her” (v. 13). This wasn’t an incidental observation. Now in these verses, Jesus asked Simon a piercing question: “Do you see this woman?” (v. 44). Obviously, Simon saw the woman. Everyone at the banquet saw the woman, saw what she did, and was aghast. She was the focus of this whole exchange. But Jesus wanted more for His audience than for them simply to be provoked by her actions. He wanted her actions to serve for them as a model for true worship.

The contrasts Jesus identified in verses 44-46 are stunning. Simon did not give Jesus any water to wash the dust and grime of the road from His feet, but the woman washed Jesus’s feet with her tears. Simon did not greet Him with a kiss, which was a traditional sign of respect, but Jesus stated that the woman had not stopped kissing His feet. Simon did not anoint Him with oil, but she anointed His feet with perfume. Simon had thought her actions were shameful, but Simon should have been chagrined at how little love and respect he showed Jesus.

Jesus made a similar point in another parable in Luke 18 when he contrasted a Pharisee and a tax collector at prayer. The Pharisee thanked God that He was not like those other people who did really terrible things, such as a tax collector. A tax collector would have been a sinner much like the woman in Luke 7, working in a profession known for collaborating with the enemy and immorality, such as theft and injustice.

The depth of the tax collector's wickedness was clear. So when the tax collector prayed, he simply said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). The tax collector got it right. The religious leader did not. In the same way, the sinful woman got it right. Simon the Pharisee did not.

We need to heed this warning today. Christians can be guilty of minimizing our sinfulness, especially the longer we walk with Jesus. We see the heinous actions of many in the world and have a sense that our sin is not as bad. Yet all sin is an offense against our holy God. And on an even greater scale, we all were dead in our trespasses and sins, yet through faith in the work of Jesus alone, we Christians are made alive and forgiven of all our sins (Eph. 2:1-10). We should all worship like the one with a debt we could never repay, for that is who we are, dead sinners brought to eternal life.

After pointing out where Simon erred in his thinking, Jesus addressed the woman for the first time. He told the woman that her sins were forgiven (Luke 7:48). Jesus was highlighting that it was her faith in His mercy that saved her, not her actions (v. 50). Jesus told her to go in peace—the kind of peace that comes to those whose sins are forgiven (Pss. 29:11; 119:165; John 14:27; Rom. 5:1-2; Col. 3:15).

Now, the rest of the people at the banquet buzzed in confusion in Luke 7:49. They asked, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" The answer was implied—a man could not forgive sins. Even the priests who offered atonement for the people first had to be forgiven of their own sins before offering sacrifices for others. Jesus wanted the people to understand that He is God the Son, and He has authority to forgive sins. This goal drove His earthly ministry. The main goal

#### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*"If our Physician is almighty, our disease cannot be desperate; and if He casts none out that come to Him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but His mercies are more: our sins are great, but His righteousness is greater: we are weak, but He is power."<sup>5</sup>*

—John Newton  
(1725–1807)

of His many signs and wonders was not to draw attention to His miracles but to prove that He is the Messiah so that people would believe in Him and receive life (John 20:30-31).

Jesus forgives sins because He is God the Son. This fact is vividly apparent when God saves those who are seemingly engrossed in immorality like the sinful woman in Luke 7 or a tax collector in Luke 18. Our churches are filled by notorious sinners who were radically saved by God's grace—us! Their sins—our sins—were forgiven. We were clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Jesus is worthy of the worship of all forgiven sinners.

Many may not have the same sinful reputation, but they are separated from the holy God due to their rebellion. Some are religious but not saved. Some are morally upright but not united with Christ through faith. God is worthy of the worship of these men and women as well, though they refuse to give it. So take note: Forgiven sinners, regardless of their past, recognize the great gift of their salvation and pour out their worship on Christ, just as this sinful woman poured out her perfume and tears.

***Why do you think an awareness of our own sin makes us more grateful and more loving toward Jesus?***

**GOSPEL**  
**Connection**

Jesus came to forgive sinners, and He did so through His death and resurrection, saving those who love and trust Him.

**Key Concept:** Jesus forgives sinners who come to Him in adoring faith.



## HEAD

How do you need to reevaluate your perspective on and interaction with sinners in light of Jesus's example?



## HEART

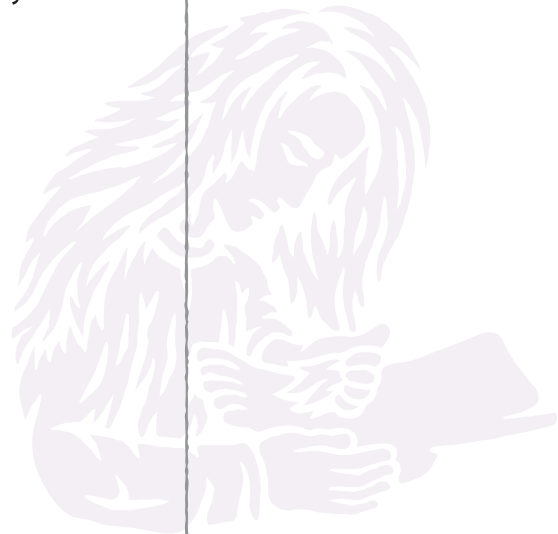
What sins do you need to confess so you can be forgiven and love the Lord with your whole heart?



## HANDS

How should your forgiveness in Christ shape your interactions at home, church, and work?

Notes



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# HE TEACHES ON PRAYER



CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 11:1-13

**Context:** Having called twelve disciples to follow Him, Jesus trained these men in His ways. He performed miracles in their presence, taught crowds in their hearing, and explained His parables to them while leaving others pondering their meaning. Jesus even empowered His disciples and some others to cast out demons and to heal the sick as He sent them out to prepare His way. The disciples enjoyed their success in the field, but after returning to Jesus, they asked Him for one thing—to teach them how to pray.

**Key Concept:** Jesus teaches us how to pray because He wants to give us good gifts.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Luke 9:1-27
- Day 2:** Luke 9:28-62
- Day 3:** Luke 10:1-24
- Day 4:** Luke 10:25-42
- Day 5:** Luke 11:1-13
- Day 6:** Psalm 138

**Jesus taught us how to pray for Kingdom purposes** (Luke 11:1-4).

**<sup>1</sup> He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.” <sup>2</sup> He said to them, “Whenever you pray, say, Father, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone in debt to us. And do not bring us into temptation.”**

**Prayer Is God-Honoring**

Jesus’s life was marked by prayer. This fact should not be lost on those who read the Gospels. Mark opened his work speaking of this reality. Jesus’s ministry was off to a strong start, and crowds gathered to hear Him teach. Yet Mark noted: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying” (Mark 1:35). Though everyone was looking for Jesus, He prioritized to spend time away with His Father in prayer. This fact alone should compel modern Christians to follow Jesus’s example. If the incarnate Son of God needed time alone with the Father, how much more do we?

Jesus’s prayer life was so constant and compelling that Luke recorded the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray. Here’s an immediate point of application for all believers. Does your prayer life prompt others to ask you to teach them how to pray or at the very least to pray for them? There must have been something about Jesus’s prayer life that prompted the disciples to want specific guidance from Him in this area.



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

**WORD Study**

**HOLY:** Holiness means to be set apart, pure, and perfect. God is completely holy. He cannot sin, and His righteous response to sin is wrath. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus emphasized that before asking for anything, our hearts should recognize God's holiness and our dependence on His mercy.

The model of prayer Jesus gave His disciples is often called the Lord's Prayer. Obviously this title is accurate. The Lord gave us this prayer as an ongoing example for believers. But there's a danger in sectioning off this prayer in this way. Sometimes it can be repeated as something of a stale mantra, the way we might recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Done in this way, our prayer may use the right words but lack understanding or the proper motivation. This prayer should be viewed as an example in that it organizes and prioritizes the proper way to approach God in prayer.

First, Jesus told the disciples to address God as "Father" (Luke 11:2). In the section that follows, Jesus uses the imagery of a father to describe the care that God has for His people. Father is a term of intimacy and endearment. Jesus used this term in the section of His Sermon on the Mount when He told people not to worry about tomorrow (Matt. 6:25-34). Why? Because your heavenly Father knows and cares for you. Our prayers start by acknowledging that God relates to us as our Creator and heavenly Father. Jesus will return to this idea to conclude this teaching in Luke 11:9-13.

Next, Jesus followed with two requests: First, that God's name would be honored as holy; second, that His kingdom would come (v. 2). Both of these are somewhat cryptic, at least to modern Christians. The old term was "hallowed," meaning set apart and honored as holy. God is the most holy Being in the universe. He is distinct and set apart from everything He made. God's name is a shorthand way of speaking of His character, so when we pray that God's name would be honored as holy, we are asking that His character would be seen and responded to as He deserves. We pray that God would be loved and honored by all.

***How should addressing God as Father and holy affect the way we approach God in prayer?***

Second, we ask that God's kingdom would come. Again, this language may be a bit removed from the experience of modern readers. A kingdom exists under the rule and reign of a king. So when we pray that God's kingdom would come, we are asking that the rule and reign of the true King—the triune God—would come on earth as it is in heaven. Obviously, in heaven the rule and reign of God is fully present and always available. We believers in Christ long for that heavenly reality to be seen and experienced on earth. This will not happen fully until the new creation at the second coming of Jesus (see Rev. 21–22). However, we experience a foretaste of this reality on earth as God's glory is seen and worshiped as He deserves.

**Prayer Is Petitioning**

Jesus then mentioned three requests for Christians to make in His example of prayer. First, Jesus instructed the disciples to ask God to provide their daily bread (Luke 11:3). Jesus certainly was drawing on the Old Testament imagery of manna in the wilderness for this petition (see Ex. 16). God met the needs of Israel, feeding them with what they needed for each day and teaching them to depend on Him for tomorrow (Deut. 8:3). Bread was a staple of the ancient Near Eastern diet. Even today, bread is eaten in abundance in virtually every meal. So an appeal for God to give daily bread is asking for God to meet our most basic needs.

This simple request to God is an acknowledgment of our dependence on God's goodness and provision. Many of us today take for granted where our next

meal will come from, but hunger and poverty are more prevalent than we might think. Anyone who has experienced a job loss or mounting credit card debt will concede that daily provision isn't always as cut and dry as we pretend. While modern Christians may assume that we no longer need God to care for us, when we ask God for our daily bread, we are confessing to God and ourselves that we recognize that all we have actually comes from Him. In this way, we approach the Lord with humility and gratitude for His good gifts.

***How does asking for “daily bread” challenge the way you think about dependence, provision, and contentment?***

Jesus then instructed those who pray to ask God to forgive their sins (Luke 11:4). First John 1:9 highlights the reality that God is faithful and willing to forgive us for our sins—both at the moment we come to Him with saving faith and continually as we struggle with sin in this fallen world. For those in Christ, the prayer of confession is not a means of procuring God's forgiveness. Sometimes people can fear that if they forget to name a sin they've committed, then God will not forgive them. We believers should be encouraged that our sins—those we know about and confess and those we may not know about or fail to confess—are forgiven in Christ. We pray for God's forgiveness in hope, knowing that He has poured out His wrath for our sin on Christ (see Isa. 53).

Further, we confess our sin to God our Father the way a child confesses wrongdoing to a loving parent. Our humble confession of sin against the holy God restores a vibrant, joyful relationship and unburdens

### CHRIST Connection

Jesus's life was full of prayer and gives us an example to follow in praying for the right things because He desires to bestow on us the good gifts of God. Jesus's best gift is salvation that He gives us freely when we trust in Him.

the soul of the weight of our shame and guilt. As we pray, we need not feel anxious to itemize every sin we've committed, but we should bring our brokenness into the light of God's grace (see Ps. 51). As we confess to God, we also are encouraged to confess to others—especially to those whom our sins have hurt (Jas. 5:16).

Not only should we seek the forgiveness of others, but Jesus linked our forgiveness from God with the forgiveness we should show to others. Jesus often connected our relationship with God and our relationships with others. When an expert in the law questioned Jesus about the most important commandment in the law, Jesus answered:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands. (Matt. 22:37-40)

These two great commandments are necessarily linked, especially in the area of forgiveness. Those who understand the depth of their sin and the undeserved kindness of God to forgive that sin respond by loving and forgiving others who have sinned against them. Jesus told His followers that they must continue to forgive others because that's exactly what God does for His people (Matt. 18:21-35). Jesus connected these ideas in His model prayer so that those who follow His example call to mind the need for forgiveness and reconciliation with others each time they ask God to forgive them for their own sins.

Jesus made this same point in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew when He told His

listeners that they should seek to make their relationships right, even if that meant pausing their worship of God to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:21-26).

Finally, Jesus led His disciples to ask God to protect them from temptation (Luke 11:4). In case it were not abundantly clear in Scripture, Jesus's half-brother James clarified that God does not tempt people, Satan does (Jas. 1:13-15). The Lord's Prayer asks God to protect us from the temptations of the evil one so that we do not fall into sin. In this way, Jesus's prayer gets to the heart of sin. He instructed His disciples to pray to the Father not merely for help not to sin but rather to keep us from being tempted to sin in the first place.

Finally, it's worth noting the simplicity of this prayer, not that it is simple to put into practice but that it's the type of prayer anyone could pray. In fact, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus made this very point. He encouraged people not to be like the hypocrites who prayed long prayers or like the Gentiles who babbled (Matt. 6:5-8). The prayers of both of these groups were for the sake of performance. The Lord's Prayer was given, at least in part, to show that true followers of Jesus are not defined by their big vocabulary or long-winded prayers. What God wants is a humble heart, and that's something any genuine Christian can have.

**Jesus tells us to pray because God wants to give us good gifts** (Luke 11:5-13).

**<sup>5</sup> He also said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, <sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don't have anything to offer him.' <sup>7</sup> Then he will answer from inside and say,**

**‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything.’<sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though he won’t get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend’s shameless boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.<sup>9</sup> So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.<sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.<sup>11</sup> What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish?<sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?<sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?’”**

### **Prayer Is Bold**

Following the model prayer, Jesus used a story to emphasize the assumption we should have about God when we pray. The friend in the story needed food to show hospitality to a weary traveler. In our day, it’s uncommon to have someone show up at your house unannounced and need a place to stay, but in Jesus’s time, such visitors were common. The cultural norm required not only an open door but also an open heart. If a person showed up who was tired from travel, you were expected to take that person in, care for them, and give them ample food and drink. But the man in Jesus’s story who received an unexpected guest didn’t have those provisions handy. So he went to another friend, after hours, and asked for help.

Again, in Jesus’s day, helping your neighbor would have been customary. But it was late, and getting up to



### THEOLOGY Connection

#### PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE:

If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the means God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. (cont.)

provide this food would have been an inconvenience to the whole household. Yet ultimately the man got up and gave the friend what he needed for his guest. Why? Jesus told His listeners in verse 8. It wasn't because the man felt particularly generous in the wee hours of the night but because of the man's shameless boldness in asking. Apparently the man stood there knocking and kept knocking until the neighbor finally responded.

The phrase "shameless boldness" captures the heart of this passage. Jesus was not saying that God begrudgingly answers our prayers. God is nothing at all like the friend who was irritated at having to get up and give the man some bread. Rather, Jesus wants us to be like the man who pounded on the door of a friend that he knew he could count on.

Sometimes we feel shame when we pray, worried about what God thinks of us. We feel helpless or hopeless and are embarrassed we don't have the strength to handle it on our own. Many of us feel too proud to ask for help from other believers, much less from God. We also can be timid in our prayers, asking for and expecting little. Rather than boldly asking for what we need, we pray minimalistic prayers.

In contrast with how we often feel about prayer, the man in the story was desperate. He was in a tough situation and knew that he needed help. So he was willing to expose himself to shame to get what he needed. He did not care what the neighbors might have thought hearing the ruckus; he only knew he needed the man on the other side of the door. So he knocked.

***What can we learn about God's character by contrast with the reluctant friend in Jesus's parable?***

## Prayer Is Answered

You might say that the moral of the story is found in verses 9-13. Again, note that Jesus wasn't comparing God to the man who didn't want to get out of bed. Instead, Jesus was asking those who pray to imagine themselves as the man standing at the door and knocking. Right from the start, Jesus's parable stood as a stark contrast to the mechanical ways that the Lord's Prayer often is recited. Many times people use it like an incantation or a rabbit's foot that promises good luck to those who utter it. But this can't be the case in light of the urgency that Jesus illustrated in His parable. We aren't to recite a rote prayer without feeling; rather, we should shamelessly and courageously ask the Father to answer.

There are three couplets used in verses 9-10: Ask, and it will be given. Seek, and find. Knock, and the door will be opened. These couplets were not meant to imply that we should presume to get whatever we ask for when we pray. We aren't given a promise that we will be given whatever we want. This isn't a blank check.

These verse speak to the heart of our heavenly Father. He is a God who wants to give, who wants to be found, and who wants to open the door. The parallel text in Matthew's Gospel near the end of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is recorded almost verbatim (Matt. 7:7-12), showing that this idea was fundamental to Jesus's earthly teaching. Jesus wanted people to understand that God is not distant or hard-hearted but a God of loving-kindness who wants to answer prayers.

Jesus then used the image of a father again to show God's goodness in answering prayer. Earthly fathers

### THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Even though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that "prayer changes things," and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“Faith asks because she believes God will give; hope having asked expects, and therefore seeks for the blessing; love comes nearer still, and will not take a denial from God, but desireth to enter into his house, and to sup with him, and, therefore, knocks at his door till he opens.”<sup>1</sup>*

–Charles Spurgeon  
(1834–1892)

aren’t usually going to hear their child’s request for food and give them something terrible instead. A father who did such a thing would be wicked and cruel. What Jesus did in Luke 11:13 is common in the Gospels. He took a human example and said, “God is like this, but so much more.” In fact, Jesus was clear that human fathers are sinful and do not possess a perfect heart or perfect character. Yet most dads want to care for their children, meet their needs, and give them good gifts. God is so much greater. He knows exactly what we need and is gracious to hear our prayers and act for His glory and our good.

This imagery frames the idea of asking, seeking, and knocking. We ask knowing that God the Father answers our prayers according to His divine perfection. We may not get the answer we pray for, but we can trust that God will answer our prayers exactly as we need.

Finally, it’s worth pausing to consider that Jesus ended with a mention of the Holy Spirit (v. 13). Jesus reminded His disciples that His primary work was not merely to meet their physical needs or desires. He wanted to meet their spiritual needs. He wants to grant salvation, marked by the seal of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). Salvation is the primary evidence that God is a good Father. The Lord invites spiritually hungry and thirsty people to come to Him for salvation (Isa. 55:1; Matt. 11:28-29). Jesus provides for the spiritual hungry and thirsty if they come to Him in faith.

***Why should we view the Holy Spirit as chief among God’s good gifts to us?***

**Key Concept:** Jesus teaches us how to pray because He wants to give us good gifts.

 **HEAD**

What are some truths about God's character that can give you more confidence to come to Him in prayer?

 **HEART**

What desires in your heart do you need to align with God's will?

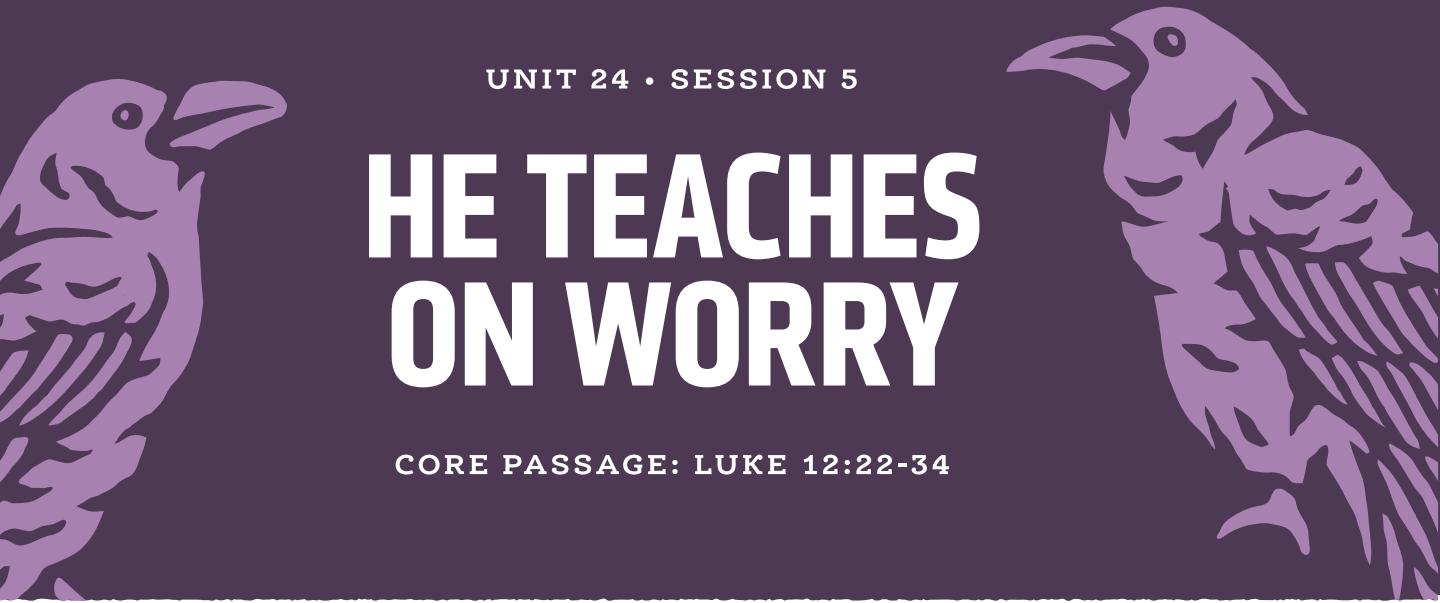
 **HANDS**

What are some ways you will practice forgiveness and generosity toward others for God's honor?

Notes

**References**

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "Prayer Certified of Success," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 19 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1873), 31.



# HE TEACHES ON WORRY

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 12:22-34

**Context:** After teaching His disciples about prayer, which included a request to God for daily bread, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their pride, hypocrisy, persecution, and greed. He then was drawn into a conversation on money by a man who had an issue with his brother over their family inheritance. In response, Jesus taught a parable that warned against storing up treasure for yourself here on earth and not being “rich toward God” (12:21). He then added to this conclusion for His disciples, cautioning them not to worry about their needs in life but to entrust them to God while seeking His kingdom.

**Key Concept:** We need not worry because God takes care of us and provides for our needs.

## DAILY READINGS

- Day 1:** Luke 11:14-28
- Day 2:** Luke 11:29-54
- Day 3:** Luke 12:1-12
- Day 4:** Luke 12:13-34
- Day 5:** Luke 12:35-59
- Day 6:** Psalm 23

**God is sovereign over all and provides for His creation** (Luke 12:22-28).

**<sup>22</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, don’t worry about your life, what you will eat; or about the body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They don’t sow or reap; they don’t have a storeroom or a barn; yet God feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than the birds? <sup>25</sup> Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? <sup>26</sup> If then you’re not able to do even a little thing, why worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider how the wildflowers grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that’s how God clothes the grass, which is in the field today and is thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will he do for you—you of little faith?”**

**Jesus Commands What Seems Impossible**

This section of Luke 12, which is also found in Matthew 6:25-34, begins with one of the most difficult commands in all of the Bible: “Don’t worry about your life” (Luke 12:22). It’s easy to read this command and roll our eyes at the seemingly impossible nature of it. How can anyone face the burdens and complexity of life without worrying?

To ground this command, Jesus focused on two essential aspects of life: food and clothing. While many of us may not be classified as food insecure or homeless, poverty and lack of resources affect a growing number of people each year. Fears about future finances and making ends meet are common, especially in times of political unrest, famine or drought,



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

## THEOLOGY Connection

**GOD'S PROVIDENCE:** Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. (cont.)

and natural disasters. Even those who do not have to worry about where their next meal will come from or their lack of clean clothes actually do worry about something. In fact, many suggest that the modern world is uniquely filled with anxiety and worry. People look at the horrors of the world and the complexity of life and feel weighed down with countless concerns.

Food and clothing would have been a huge concern for many in Jesus's day. Living under Roman occupation made it difficult to go about their daily lives without fear of taxation, compulsion, and theft (Matt. 5:38-42; Mark 12:14; Luke 12:58-59; 19:8). This would have been especially true for the disciples, who had left all they had to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22). Rather than earning money in their family business, they followed Jesus wherever He went, learning about the kingdom of God. Fishermen like Peter, Andrew, James, and John weren't on an extended vacation when they left their boats. They weren't getting paid time off, and the nature of their jobs meant they were unlikely to have savings that could support their families while they traveled with Jesus.

Jesus's extended family was established in Galilee, but Jesus Himself had no house and did not stay in the same place for long (Matt. 8:20). Jesus depended on the hospitality of those in the cities He visited. His disciples had the same itinerant life, and not just for a few weeks—Jesus and the disciples endured roughly three years of such dependence. Clearly, Jesus spoke to the concerns that He'd heard the disciples express. They were nervous about where their next meal would come from and how they'd have clothes for the journey.

Jesus rightly described the real issue when it came to the disciples' worry as a lack of faith in God's

provision. The disciples had not yet learned to trust God to provide despite His provision of bread for the multitude (Mark 6:30-44). On that occasion, the disciples had wanted to send the people away so they could get food, but Jesus said, “You give them something to eat” (v. 37). The disciples only had five loaves of bread and two fish, but Jesus was unconcerned. He knew that God could multiply this meager food and provide for all of the people. And that’s just what He did.

In Luke 12, Jesus was inviting the disciples to have faith in God as they looked at their own lives. They worried about food and clothing, but they were not running around with Jesus stark naked. What they feared was that they would not have *enough*. From that perspective, we can see that worry and greed are interwoven. We see this example in the Old Testament when God gave instructions for the people to gather manna:

This is what the LORD has commanded: “Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.” So the Israelites did this. Some gathered a lot, some a little. When they measured it by quarts, the person who gathered a lot had no surplus, and the person who gathered a little had no shortage. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat. (Ex. 16:15-18)

The Israelites who trusted God to provide gathered just the right amount, but the worried and greedy found themselves no better off. And those who tried to save manna for the next day found it grew worms and stank (16:20). God provided their daily bread.

**THEOLOGY**  
Connection

(cont.) Christians also believe in God’s personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

### Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*“Nothing is more common than an anxious and troubled spirit, and nothing mars a believer’s usefulness and attacks his inner peace so much. The person who can say boldly, ‘The Lord is my shepherd’ is the person who will be able to add, ‘I shall not want’ (Psalm 23:1).”<sup>1</sup>*

–J. C. Ryle  
(1816–1900)

Jesus’s words caution us against worrying about food and clothing by pointing to God’s care for the ravens and the wildflowers. Jesus reminded His followers to trust the God who created them to sustain them, and we are called to do the same.

### *How are greed and worry connected?*

#### Jesus Pointed to Creation

What follows is one of the most beautiful and simple illustrations in the Gospels. You can imagine Jesus gave this teaching while out in the countryside, so He drew upon two examples that surely were right there in front of the disciples—birds and flowers.

Once again, Jesus employed the “how much more” paradigm for His teaching. We saw Jesus do the same in His teaching on prayer in the previous chapter, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Luke 11:13). If an earthly father listens to his children, how much more does our heavenly Father? The same is true here: If God feeds the birds, then how much more will He feed people, who are of far greater worth (12:24). Birds and animals were created by God, but they were not created in the image of God as humans were (Gen. 1:26-28). So God’s care for His creation in general pales in comparison to His care for His image-bearers.

The same point applies to the flowers, where God’s care is seen even more vividly than it is with birds (Luke 12:27-28). Birds are active and at least fly around to get what they need from the Lord. But not flowers. They are entirely stationary. They can’t get

away from harsh weather or devastating insects. They are entirely dependent on God to provide sunshine, rain, and soil. Yet Jesus said wildflowers are like beautiful clothes for the grass (v. 28).

If you've ever seen a field of wildflowers, you know the truth of verse 27. Natural wildflowers are stunningly beautiful. Jesus was intentionally provocative when He compared the flowers to Solomon. Solomon was the richest man to ever live in ancient times (2 Chron. 9:13-29). If ever there were a person who had no concern about what he would eat or wear, it was Solomon. Not only did Solomon not have to worry about food or clothes, but he would have other people making his food and picking out his clothes. He literally had it all. But Jesus said the wildflowers were clothed more beautifully than the world's richest king!

Jesus's main point was sandwiched between these two illustrations (Luke 12:25-26). He challenged the disciples with the idea that worrying is pointless—it cannot add an hour to life. Then once again, Jesus repeated the idea that people must not worry or fear. In fact, many would suggest that worrying actually takes hours away from life since time spent worrying robs us of time we could spend doing more important things.

Why do people worry rather than trust? Jesus said it is because they have little faith (v. 28), a common rebuke in the Gospels. When the disciples were on a boat in a huge storm, Jesus lamented their lack of faith before calming the waters (Matt. 8:26). When Peter began to sink while walking on the water, Jesus asked him why he had little faith (14:31). When the disciples worried about not having enough food to feed the crowds, Jesus called out their lack of faith (16:8). When the disciples failed to cast out a demon, Jesus blamed

### WORD Study

**ANXIOUS:** The Greek work used here for anxious means to be lifted up in the air, unsettled, or tossed around.<sup>2</sup> It brings to mind hovering between hope and fear. Instead, Jesus calls us to trust in His provision for all our needs.

their inability on their lack of faith (17:20). In this passage, Jesus noted that people worry as the result of a lack of faith: People don't believe that God can, or will, care for them.

*Where in creation do you see reminders of God's daily provision?*

**We must seek God's kingdom first and store treasures in heaven** (Luke 12:29-34).

<sup>29</sup> “Don't strive for what you should eat and what you should drink, and don't be anxious. <sup>30</sup> For the Gentile world eagerly seeks all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be provided for you. <sup>32</sup> Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Make money-bags for yourselves that won't grow old, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

### **Don't Strive, Seek**

The strong verbs “strive” and “seek” provide the main contrast in this section. First, Jesus told His hearers to not strive, which was linked to the search for the basic needs of food and drink. This command seems overly simplistic and next to impossible as well. In some sense, people do have to work for their food and clothing. Work was always part of God's plan for humanity, but the curse of sin brought futility and anxiety into our daily efforts, making them toil (Gen. 3:17-18). In the ancient Near East, people had

to do more than work a nine-to-five job to earn money to buy food. They often had to grow the food, reap it, prepare it for consumption, or barter for food. Striving was necessary.

Jesus's point in these verses wasn't that His followers needed to sit back and do nothing, waiting for God to drop blessings in their laps. The command comes in verse 31—"seek." Instead of striving for food and water, seek after the things of God. The issue here was the motivation of the heart. Jesus was concerned that people who sought after food and drink were consumed—pun intended—with worry about having enough and never having the time, energy, or priority to seek the things of God. Those who seek first the kingdom don't waste time striving after worldly needs; they devote themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord.

In verse 30, Jesus made the point that food and drink are not bad in and of themselves. The Lord knows that people need these in order to live. When Jesus said "the Gentile world," He was speaking of those who did not know God the way Israel did. The exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the conquest of the promised land, and the kings in their history should have been enough to make it clear to the disciples that God would meet their needs. Since the Jews knew God in a covenant relationship, they were to have a different type of trust in the Lord's care than the Gentiles who did not have a history of God's provision to look back on.

Two points must be made about verse 31. First, the fact that Jesus said "these things" would be given to them should not be understood as a promise of a certain level of material wealth. God never pledges to give all people all that they want. He knows what people



need and promises that He will take care of them. Next, some faithful Christians around the world still struggle with daily needs. Sometimes people die of starvation due to famine and drought even though they seek God’s kingdom. This raises honest questions, yet we must submit them to God’s supreme activity in the world and rest in the fact that He ultimately will meet the needs of His people, even if those needs are not perfectly met until heaven. God delights to give the kingdom to His children (v. 32). The full manifestation of this kingdom blessing will come when God makes all things new in His eternal kingdom (see Rev. 21–22).

Finally, it’s worth noting the connection between these sections and Jesus’s model prayer in Luke 11:1-4. There are other connections, but the fact that Jesus instructed people to ask God for their daily bread should remind us that our main form of striving for food or drink should take place in prayer. We should ask God, believing that He longs to provide for His children. Jesus also invited people to ask that God’s kingdom would come. So when we seek after God’s kingdom (Luke 12:31), we are submitting ourselves to the very thing we ask God to do in the world. The more people who seek God’s kingdom, the more God’s kingdom is replicated on earth as it is in heaven.

***What are some areas of your life where worry is taking the place of faith?***

### **Don’t Hoard, Treasure**

It’s not enough for our discipleship simply to avoid striving after food, drink, and clothing. Jesus told His disciples to live generously, as self-sacrifice is a supreme statement of trust in God. This is the opposite

#### **Voices from CHURCH HISTORY**

*“Two conflicting forces cannot exist in one human heart. . . . When worry is present, trust cannot crowd its way in.”<sup>3</sup>*

–Billy Graham  
(1918–2018)

of the little faith that Jesus chastised. It's interesting that obedience to this command is one of the ways that God provides for the poor. God desires that those with genuine needs for food and clothing should be cared for through the sacrificial giving of His followers. Maybe one of the reasons that many go hungry is because God's people do not live openhandedly with what God has given them. The true test of stewardship isn't how much money we keep in our storehouses but how we are able to demonstrate trust in God by generously meeting the needs of others.

In Jesus's day, banks were much less available, so people would carry moneybags or hide their material treasures in the ground. Moneybags or treasures buried in the ground were a huge liability. Thieves could break in easily and take whatever they wanted. Physical items eventually grow old and fall apart. Paul warned Timothy of the danger of earthly treasure:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Tim. 6:6-10)

Since earthly treasures aren't trustworthy, Jesus stated that His followers are free to invest in treasure that will last. This lasting treasure comes through seeking God's kingdom. It's found by investing in

### GOSPEL Connection

Jesus is the great provider. He takes care of all our needs, especially our need to be rescued from sin, guilt, and death. Through His sacrifice on the cross, we are forgiven and have new life through Him.

things of eternal value—both your own sanctification and the salvation of the lost. When we give ourselves to things that cannot be destroyed in this life, we are freed from the worry that often accompanies a concern for worldly treasure as well.

The final statement in this section is a nice bow that ties everything together: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). This same point is made in Matthew 6:19-24 in a longer section in the Sermon on the Mount about the dangers of money. In this context, treasure can refer both to money and to anything that money can buy. There are many implications of this simple statement. First, whatever we treasure tells us what is in our heart. Proverbs 4:23 warns: “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.” We must protect our heart because everything we do is an outworking of what’s in our heart. Applied to the theme of treasure, this means that we can see what’s in our heart by what we pursue as our treasure. If money and possessions, then our hearts are full of greed and envy. If the kingdom of heaven, then our hearts are full of worship.

This point also works in the other direction. The way to change what we treasure is to change the heart. This is easier said than done, since humans don’t have the ability to change their own heart. Before someone becomes a Christian, that heart is wicked and depraved, constantly bent toward rebellion and sin (Jer. 17:9). A non-Christian will always treasure the things of this world. But Jesus gives His people a new heart (Ezek. 36:26). This new heart pulsates with love for God and His work in the world so it can treasure God’s kingdom. When a Christian sins, the believer can join with King David and pray: “Create in me a

**Key Concept:** We need not worry because God takes care of us and provides for our needs.

clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). God is the One who gave us a new heart in the first place, and He is capable of renewing that heart so that we pursue treasure that will last.

***How does generosity combat worry and cultivate trust in God’s provision?***

 **HEAD**

How can you reorient your thoughts to be more kingdom-focused?

 **HEART**

What does your pursuit of treasures, whether on earth or in heaven, reveal about the focus of your heart?

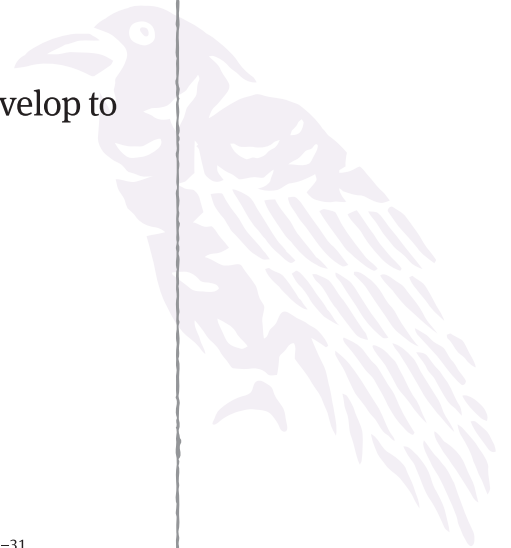
 **HANDS**

What are some habits or practices you can develop to serve others and so store treasure in heaven?

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Notes



# THE GOSPEL PROJECT SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

## **VOL 01: CREATION AND COVENANT**

(Genesis; Job) Fall 2024

Unit 01: Foundations

Unit 02: God's Promises

Unit 03: Struggles of Faith

## **VOL 02: LAW AND LIFE**

(Exodus–Deuteronomy) Winter 2024–25

Unit 04: God's Miraculous Work

Unit 05: God's Character

Unit 06: Humanity's Selfishness

## **VOL 03: LAND AND LOSS**

(Joshua–1 Samuel) Spring 2025

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Unit 08: God Delivers His People

Unit 09: God Cares for His People

## **VOL 04: FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM**

(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)

Summer 2025

Unit 10: The Foolishness of God's People

Unit 11: Everything Belongs to the Lord

Unit 12: The Need for Wisdom

## **VOL 05: DIVISION AND DEFIANCE**

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Unit 14: Renewal

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## **VOL 06: PROPHETS AND PROVISION**

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(The Gospels) Spring 2026

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## **VOL 08: THE SON HAS AUTHORITY**

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Unit 24: The Teachings of Jesus

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(The Gospels; Acts) Winter 2026–27

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## **VOL 11: THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION**

(Acts; The Epistles) Spring 2027

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Unit 32: Living Out the Mission

Unit 33: Christ Focuses Our Mission

## **VOL 12: THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE**

(The Epistles; Revelation) Summer 2027

Unit 34: We Are in Christ

Unit 35: We Are Citizens of Heaven

Unit 36: Jesus



## THE SON HAS AUTHORITY

Jesus entered our world with a mission to serve, yet He did so with power, resulting in a myriad of responses. Some were in awe of Him, and others worshiped Him. Some proclaimed His name to whoever would hear; others criticized Him for what seemed like blasphemy. Yet His teachings and works had authority. No one could deny that Jesus was unique, unlike any other man or prophet. He fulfilled prophecies from Scripture and could heal diseases and cast out demons. When encountering Jesus, people were left with only two choices: believe and trust in Him or reject Him. The Gospels give us proof that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Savior of the world, and we must worship and obey Him in faith.

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