



MATTHEW

FROM 10,000 FEET

(Week 5) -

THE CLIMAX

Regarding the Center Kid's Team (our Children's Ministry), we are going to pray over our new team members before we even knew who they will be. We're going to ask God to lead us to the best people for the team and ask Him to turn their heart toward the position. So, if Children's Ministry is something that's been on your mind, I would encourage you to do the same. Children's Ministry too important for us to accept just anyone.

CHAPTERS 21-28

Introduction - As I read through these last chapters of Matthew, they have a wonderful parallel with the story of Moses and the people of Israel eating the Passover meal and then the seeing great deliverance come that night.

In a similar fashion at the climax of Matthew, Jesus eats the Passover meal with His disciples and the next day He is crucified, delivering us from the penalty of our rebellion against God.

But it's what happened after this Passover meal and before the crucifixion that intrigued me — and that is Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus goes to pray in the garden.

Here's what struck me. The very foundations of the Christian faith — the death and resurrection of Jesus — were saturated in prayer before they took place.

This should tell us something about the very nature of the Christian life. It is a life of prayer. But it also tells us something about the nature

of God — that God is relational. Contact with this Creator can be made. It is significant that Jesus prayed in the garden.

[photo of garden]

Big idea: Because God is relational He relates to us through us.

As we conclude these final chapters of Matthew, we're going to look at four reasons why Jesus prayed.

God used prayer to set the foundation and He is using prayer to build the house. (Jesus Christ is the foundation. We're plywood and shingles.)

In the final chapters we watch the two kingdoms clash — Israel's kingdom and that of Israel's leader.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem for the passover riding on a donkey and the crowds are hailing him as the Messiah.

And Jesus immediately marches into the courtyard of the temple and He creates this huge disruption that brings the daily sacrifices to a halt.

As Israel's King, Jesus was asserting His royal authority over the temple, the place where God and Israel met together.

Jesus was showing them that the temple was compromised by the hypocrisy of Israel's leaders and so He is challenging their authority and naturally they are deeply offended. So, they try and trap Jesus and shame Him in public debate and they fail.

So, they decide to have Him killed.

In response, Jesus delivers His final block of teaching. He first offers this passionate critique of the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. Then He weeps over Jerusalem and its rejection of God and His kingdom.

Then Jesus withdraws with His disciples and He starts telling them what's going to happen.

He's going to be executed by these leaders, but in doing so they are going to create their own demise because instead of accepting Jesus's way of the peaceful kingdom they are going to take the road of revolt against

Rome and so Jerusalem and its temple are going to be destroyed.

But Jesus says that is not the end of the story. He is going to be vindicated after His death by His resurrection. And then one day He will return and set-up His kingdom over all nations.

So, in the meanwhile, the disciples need to stay alert and stay committed to proclaiming Jesus and His kingdom and spreading the good news.

Now, with all of that ringing in the disciples ears, the story comes to its climax. That night Jesus takes His disciples aside and He celebrates the passover meal with them. The Passover retells the story of Israel's rescue from slavery through the death of the Passover lamb. Then Jesus takes the bread and the wine from this meal as new symbols showing that His coming death would be a sacrifice that would redeem His people from slavery to sin and evil.

After the meal, Jesus is arrested. He's put on trial before the Sanhedrin, a council of Jewish leaders. They reject His claim to be the

Messiah and charge Him with blasphemy against God.

Then Jesus is brought before the Roman governor Pilate and he thinks Jesus is innocent, but he gives in to pressure from the Jewish leaders and he sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion.

Jesus is led away by Roman soldiers and crucified.

You may notice in this section (just like Matthew did in the opening chapters) he increases the number of references to the Old Testament. He's showing that the death of Jesus was not a tragedy or a failure, rather it was the surprising fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic promises. Jesus came as the servant messiah spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. He was rejected by His own people, but instead of judging them He is judged on their behalf bearing the consequences of their sin.

So, the crucifixion scene comes to a close when the body of Jesus is placed in a tomb. But the book ends with a surprising twist in the last chapter. The disciples discover on Sunday morning that the tomb of Jesus is

empty. Then people start seeing Jesus alive from the dead.

The book concludes with the risen Jesus giving a final teaching called the Great Commission. Jesus says that He is now the true king of the world and so He sends His disciples out to all nations with the good news that Jesus is Lord and that anyone can join His kingdom simply by trusting Him, which we demonstrate through baptism and following His teachings.

Then echoing all the way back to His name Immanuel, God with us, from chapter one, the last words of Jesus to His disciples are, "I will be with you." It's the promise of His presence until the day He finally returns. And that's our overview of the gospel according to Matthew.

When we talk about kingdoms clashing, they clash first in the spiritual realm. To impact the world is to first impact it through prayer. We wage a war with spiritual violence which destroys strongholds.

Strongholds are simply things that hold us back. Now, this applies both to Christians and nonChristians.

A stronghold can be either positive or negative. In the negative sense, a stronghold is like a fortress that keeps something good from you or it keeps you chained to something bad for you.

In the positive sense, it keeps you. It secures you, as in “the LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.” (Nahum 1:7)

As we turn to Matthew 26, we’re going to see four reasons Jesus prayed. And it is prayer that breaks these strongholds. Of course, the common wisdom is — if Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we need to pray?

Matthew 26:36

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.”

So, here we have Jesus, fully human and fully God, and yet He’s praying. We have the only sinless human being who ever lived, so the question is — why did He pray? Well, if you remember how Jesus taught us to pray...

1. The first reason Jesus prayed is simply because God is His Father.

When we begin to desire God for Himself, not for what He can give us, that’s when we begin to move toward spiritual maturity. We pray because God is our Father and we go to Him as His children.

The way God works in this world is a reflection of His nature. Notice that God’s work is relational. He does it through human to human contact.

Maybe you’ve had the experience of someone placing their hand upon your shoulder to pray for you, but suddenly you notice the contact you have with this other human being is greater than merely human to human contact. God is present ministering through one person to another.

Because God is relational by nature — God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit — He expresses Himself through human to human contact, communication, empathy, acts of compassion, etc.

Because God is relational He relates to us through us.

The Apostle Paul said it very clearly in one of his letters to the early church.

2 Corinthians 5:20

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

People often struggle with this idea that God has revealed specific and universal truth to humanity.

I remember another comedian once said to me regarding my faith in Christ, “Well, whatever works for you.” Now, with all due respect, it’s not whatever works. It’s whatever is true. In a similar way, people sometimes say in regards to our faith in Christ, “Well, good for you.” How can it be good for me if it’s not true?

“Well, it may be true for you...”

No, this is truth in the sense that it applies to everyone.

“So, you think anyone who doesn’t believe in Jesus is wrong?” Well, the simple answer is yes.

“You’re just being narrow-minded.”

Okay, let me ask you this — do you believe you’re right? Don’t you believe my view is wrong because your view is right? Then why does that make me narrow-minded, but not you?

The grace of the gospel is the great equalizer of both the religious and the irreligious. I love how Timothy Keller puts it. “Everyone is wrong, everyone is loved and everyone is invited to recognize this and repent (change direction).”

You see, the religious tend to think, “The good people are in with God and the bad people are on the outs with God.” But that thinking is wrong.

The irreligious tend to think, “The open-minded and tolerant people are in and the narrow-minded, bigoted people are out. They’re the problem with the world.” And that thinking is wrong.

The gospel tells us that the humble are in and the proud are out.

So, because God is relational He uses human beings to communicate His truth about the gospel which humbles everybody, the religious and the irreligious.

Now, sometimes people ask, “Why doesn’t God just communicate directly with us?” This is another reason He uses human beings, because He is holy. So, He mediates His communication with us that we might not die from His unadulterated presence.

It’s like getting too close to the sun. If we can’t land on the sun, why do you think we could ever just waltz into God’s presence, the One who created the sun?

God brings us into a relationship with Himself through our relationships with other human beings who share the truth of the gospel with us.

God relates to us through us.

This is why prayer is first relational.

So, we first have to understand how we relate to God.

1 Timothy 2:5

5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

This means there is only one way to relate rightly to God and that is through Jesus Christ, the very one God sent to bring us back into a relationship with Himself.

2 Corinthians 5:18

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

To reconcile is to restore friendly relations between two formerly hostile parties. God did this — brought us back into the relationship that we had lost with Him because of sin and rebellion and He did this through Christ and Christ alone.

This is the first thing the gospel is about — a restored relationship. You can now relate to your Creator. The way has been opened. Communication is possible.

“Well, I relate to God in my own way.”
Why do you think you get to set the conditions for how you relate to God?

That's like me saying, "I've been browsing some dating sites recently."

Aren't you married? "Hey, I relate to my wife in my own way."

By the way, those conditions are not acceptable to her. Because it's a relationship, she has some say about how we relate to one another.

Now, if God is God, which means all-knowing, all-powerful and everywhere. Who do you think will set the wisest conditions for relating to Him?

You see, there are both moral people and immoral people who are relating to God on their own terms, not His. This is where the gospel comes in and says, "Everyone is wrong, but everyone is loved." God invites you to come into a relationship with Him in the way that He has initiated it — which is through Christ (and Christ alone).

We're not offering religion. We're not called to offer religion. We're called to offer you a radical relationship through Christ. Jesus didn't ask you to dip your toe in the water. He commanded you to be immersed in the water. The gospel demands a radical

embrace of what God has provided — His Son.

Matthew 26:37-38

37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

2. The second reason Jesus prayed is because He was troubled.

Prayer is the simple admission that you do not control the circumstances of your life. God does. That's why we're more likely to pray when we are experiencing trouble. The fact that we're not in control of our life is driven home to us when we're in deep trouble.

Jesus, being fully human, experienced trouble, so He prayed. But point number one (that we pray simply because God is our Father) leads us to pray when in trouble. Because God is our Father we can trust Him with our troubles.

We find wonderful promises all over the Bible.

Psalms 91:14-15

14 “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

This phrase “knows my name” is a way of saying that God has revealed true things to us about Himself, specific things. This is why Christianity often offends our ideas about what we think God is like.

But that’s how relationships work. In mutually loving relationships both parties must be able to express themselves, which means they can contradict as well as affirm each other. Now, if you choose to believe only those things in the Bible that you agree with, in what way do you have a God who can contradict you? Only if your God can say things that upset you will you know you have a real God and not just a creation of your imagination.

- The French atheist who was surprised to find a smart Jesus**

15 When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.

So, Jesus prays because He is troubled.

Matthew 26:39-46

39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

- 3. The third reason Jesus prayed was to find God’s will, to find guidance, to find direction.**

Here are these circumstances. I don’t like these circumstances. Can you get me out of these circumstances? But I trust that you know what’s best, so not my will but Yours. Again, prayer at its core is relational. Jesus is accepts whatever God decides because He trusts God.

40 And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Now, here’s a reason we should pray.

I have heard it said that entire ministries have been lost in a single moment of temptation, but I think it’s more accurate to say that ministries have been lost in the prayerlessness that preceded that single moment of temptation.

Now, if ministries can be lost in a single moment of temptation, so can marriages, so can careers, etc. But again, marriages and careers and other things are not lost in that single moment, but in the praylessness that preceded that single moment.

42 Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

Jesus presses in and prays some more about the same situation. Why is that? Maybe He wasn't satisfied He'd received an answer yet. In olden days this was referred to as praying through, which meant you prayed until you were satisfied that you'd received an answer.

43 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. **44** So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.

Now, clearly, this third time something changed. He prayed until something changed. But in this case His circumstances didn't change. His acceptance of His circumstances changed.

45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. **46** Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

- 4. The fourth reason Jesus prayed was to prepare Him for what was about to happen. And He knew what was about to happen. How much more should we pray because we don't know what's about to happen?**

You do not know what tomorrow may bring, but we are promised this. If we draw near to God He will draw near to us.

“God has chosen not to use angels or His omnipotence to turn the tide here on earth. Instead He has sovereignly chosen to use believing Christians as His instruments of redemption in a lost world. But can a sleeping, lackadaisical church accomplish this task? The church must be revived... that in God's strength, she can carry out Christ's mission to seek and save that which is lost.” (Jim Cymbala)