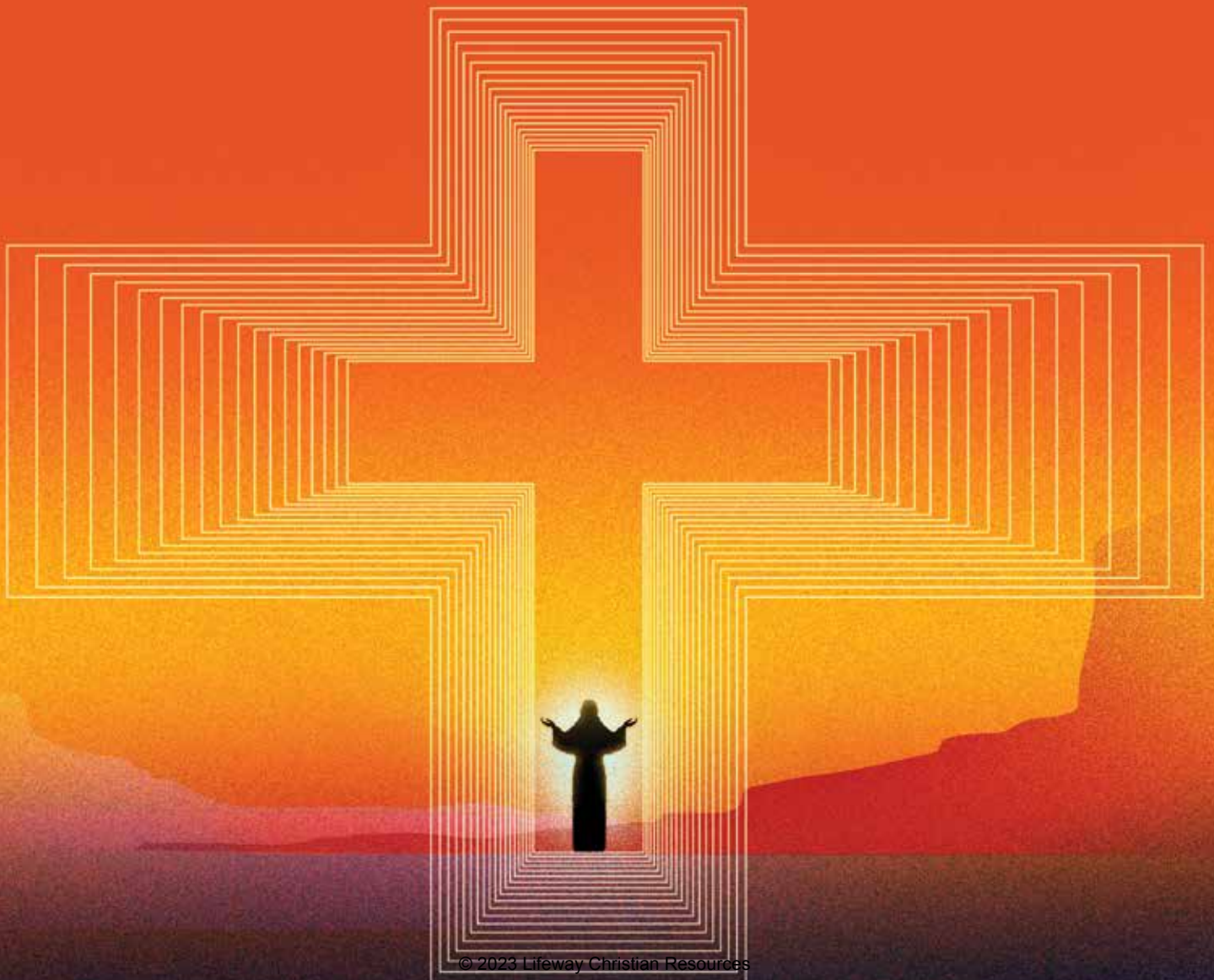




the **GOSPEL** PROJECT.

FROM DEATH TO RESURRECTION

ADULTS / LEADER GUIDE / FALL 2023 / VOL. 9 / CSB



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UNIT 25

JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, WHO KILLS THE PROPHETS

“The Prophet Jesus from Nazareth”

by James Jackson

+

On the slope of the Mount of Olives, to the east of the old city of Jerusalem, sits a small Roman Catholic church called Dominus Flevit. Built in 1955 by the famed “architect of the Holy Land,” Antonio Barluzzi, it was designed to resemble a teardrop. This is no accident, for Dominus Flevit is Latin for “the Lord wept.” The church commemorates the spot where Jesus stopped and wept over Jerusalem in the middle of His triumphal entry (Luke 19:41-43).

THE PROPHET FULFILLING PROPHECY

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He entered as the Prophet, fulfilling prophecy. Riding on a donkey fulfilled Zechariah 9:9. Crowds shouting, “Hosanna,” fulfilled Psalm 118:25-26. Cleansing the temple fulfilled Psalm 69:9. Jesus would fulfill at least seven Old Testament prophecies over the course of the next two days.

On the first day of Passion Week, however, most of this was lost on those waving palm branches and spreading out their cloaks. They had been wait-

ing for a military Messiah who would deliver them from the oppressive Roman government. If they had been paying attention, they would have realized that Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, not on a war horse. They remembered Zechariah 9:9—that a righteous and victorious king would come to them riding on a donkey—but they seemed to forget Zechariah 9:10—that the bow of battle would be removed, and that He would proclaim peace to the nations. They understood that “hosanna” meant “please save us,” but they were shortsighted on what they most needed to be saved from. It wasn’t from Caesar; it was from sin. It’s no wonder that less than a week later, when they saw their Messiah beaten and bound before Pilate, they concluded that Jesus couldn’t have been the Messiah they thought He was, and their shouts turned from “Save us” to “Crucify Him.”

THE PROPHET PICKING A FIGHT

While it is true that Jesus came as the Prince of Peace, that doesn’t mean He didn’t provoke people from time to time,

especially the Pharisees and Sadducees. These two groups of religious leaders didn't agree on much, but the one thing they did agree on was that Jesus was a threat. So later on that week, both groups sent delegations to try and trap Jesus in His own words.

Jesus longs to gather
you to Himself
as a hen gathers
her chicks.

The Sadducees, who said there is no resurrection, were first up. They confronted Jesus with an absurd hypothetical situation intended to make the doctrine of resurrection itself look foolish. Jesus didn't take the bait. He shut them down by showing them how little they truly understood the Scriptures.

Next came the Pharisees. Whatever else was true about them, no one could deny that they knew the law better than anyone else. Anyone besides Jesus, that is. They asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. Rather than trying to pick one of the 613 commands of the Torah (an obvious "gotcha" question), Jesus instead picked the two commands that perfectly prioritize our vertical love of God and our horizontal love of one another.

THE PROPHET POINTING THE FINGER

Jesus said that He wasn't here to condemn the world (John 3:17). But that doesn't mean that He didn't come to condemn human religion. Think of such religion as all the ways human beings strive to justify themselves before God. It can't be done. Justification comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Since religion can't produce justification, it instead breeds hypocrisy. It leads people into believing they can be saved by their own efforts. And it is superficial, dealing only with external surface issues rather than matters of the heart. Jesus's harshest words in all the Gospels were reserved for peddlers of religion. He called them blind guides, blind fools, children of hell, hypocrites, snakes, and vipers.

Ironically, our Prince of Peace really did come to bring division. As we draw ever closer to His triumphant return, we must constantly choose the best of two options. We must choose wisdom over foolishness: getting ready for His return rather than getting lazy at His patience. We must choose between risking big for something good and playing it safe. God's kingdom won't advance when we bury our talents. We must choose between compassion and indifference, never forgetting that what we do or don't do for the least of these, we do or don't do for Jesus Himself.

THE PROPHET SHEDDING TEARS

And so, we come again to the place on the side of the Mount of Olives, where Jesus wept over the city He loved. If you visit Dominus Flevit, you will see all of Jerusalem spread out before you. Jesus saw this as well, not just the Jerusalem of His day but Jerusalem past and Jerusalem future. Jesus wept for all the prophets they had rejected in the past. He wept for all the people who were being misled in the present. He wept for all those who would reject His offer of eternal life in the future. Jesus longs to gather you to Himself as a hen gathers her chicks. When the new Jerusalem comes down, He longs to welcome you into the Holy City.

But if you reject His authority, He weeps for you.



THE CELEBRATED PROPHET

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills prophecy (Matt. 21:1-5).
2. Jesus is the King who receives adoration (Matt. 21:6-8).
3. Jesus is the Son of David who brings salvation (Matt. 21:9-11).

Background Passage: Matthew 21

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus's entry into Jerusalem further revealed that He is the Messiah, the true King of Israel worthy of the people's praise.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, He fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah and proclaimed He is the One who fulfilled them. The people praised Jesus but for the wrong reasons, thinking He had come to free them from Rome. Jesus did not come to free people from the tyranny of a worldly power but rather from the power of sin and death.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we know Jesus as our Savior, we put away hypocritical and hollow worship and exalt Him for who He truly is—the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **If Jesus were sitting next to you right now, how do you think you would recognize Him?** (His nail-pierced hands; His name; His attitude; His robe and sandals; He might call Himself the Bread of Life; He might offer the group water that will quench their thirst forever; He might take over the class and begin teaching)

TRANSITION: Some people recognized Jesus as the promised Prophet because, through His work, He affirmed who He was. Many, however, still didn't fully grasp what He had come to do. We probably won't find Jesus randomly sitting next to us in a Bible study when He returns. He will return as the conquering King. He will leave no room for doubt that He is the Son of God. On that day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). There will be nothing clouding the world's understanding that Jesus reigns above all.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- From His conception, Jesus's life was a steady drum beat of Old Testament prophecy fulfillment. As He fulfilled prophecy, He also prophesied about His future. Jesus came to save the world from sin and death. The Jews were expecting a conquering king, but what they got in Jesus was a humble servant who taught His people, healed His people, and raised them from the dead. Though Jesus continued to prove He was the Messiah, the people of God were expecting something different, so they missed what was right in front of them.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify:

ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH WHO FULFILLS PROPHECY (MATT. 21:1-5).

INTRODUCE: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE**, noting that this is Jesus's final week before His crucifixion, and highlight the "triumphal entry," the subject of this session, as the beginning of this end.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 21:1-5** from his or her Bible.

1 When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, **2** telling them, "Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once."
4 This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: **5** Tell Daughter Zion, "See, your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

HIGHLIGHT: State the main idea of **verses 1-3** below (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 22), and then use the leader content to help explain this main idea.

Jesus displayed His authority by commanding His disciples to bring Him a donkey and colt.

- The "they" mentioned in verse 1 is a massive crowd comprised primarily of Jews who had been following Jesus. Some of these were people who may have seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, heal a blind beggar, save a tax collector whom many people hated, and heal two blind men who proclaimed Him to be the Son of David (20:29-34).
- The crowd was especially large also because it was inflated by the Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Many of these people believed Jesus was the promised King who had come to save them, but they were looking forward to an earthly king.
- When Jesus and the crowd following Him arrived in the village of Bethphage, Jesus sent two of His disciples to get a donkey, a colt that had never been ridden before, as seen in Mark 11:2 and Luke 19:30. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who described Jesus as asking for both a donkey and a colt. Even though the other Gospel writers didn't mention two donkeys, this shouldn't be seen as a contradiction. Instead, it should be seen as Matthew being more descriptive of what was going on. It would have been normal for the mother to accompany her young colt on its first ride to help keep it calm.¹
- Jesus understood His command to take the donkeys to be slightly off-putting, but He assured the two disciples that if the colt's owner resisted, they should say, "the Lord needs them" (v. 3). The word "Lord" in Greek also means owner. Jesus essentially told the disciples to let the earthly owner of the donkeys know that He, the true owner, needed them. Jesus was exercising His authority as King over everything.

BETHPHAGE

Bethphage was a village that sat on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives facing Jerusalem from the east. It was a village in close proximity to Bethany.²

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus was announcing that he was indeed a king, but not a warrior-king. . . . Jesus was the meek one."³

—Craig S. Keener



DISCUSS: Jesus is not physically with us now for us to hear His words and commands. In smaller groups, discuss (DDG p. 22):

How do you know when Jesus is displaying authority over your life, asking you to do something? (it aligns with Scripture; there is an urging from the Holy Spirit; respected friends of faith affirm it)

HIGHLIGHT: Call attention to the main idea below from **verses 4-5** (DDG p. 22), and invite a volunteer to read Zechariah 9:9 from his or her Bible. Then use the leader content to show how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and more.

Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecy that He was the humble Messiah and King from Zechariah 9:9.

- The disciples obeyed, and Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:6-7). But before we read that, in verses 4-5, Matthew asserted that Jesus did these things to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. The prophecy is found in Zechariah 9:9. But the part of the prophecy that Matthew stressed is that Jesus was coming to the people humbly and gently. Contrary to the people's desire for a messianic takeover, Jesus was the King who would humbly come on a donkey to save the world.
- In verse 1, Matthew possibly alluded to another messianic connection with the Mount of Olives, which Zechariah 14:4 refers to as the place to which the Messiah will return, standing on the Mount of Olives as the conquering King.
- Jesus would continue to fulfill many prophecies in the last week of His life prior to the crucifixion, revealing He is the Messiah.

DISCUSS: (DDG pp. 19,22)

From Day 3 in the DDG: **Why is it important that Jesus's life and works fulfilled prophecy from Scripture?** (to show that God is faithful in fulfilling His promises; to show that Jesus is the Messiah; to show that God's story of redemption was fulfilled through the life and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus)

TRANSITION: Jesus not only continued to reveal He was the Messiah who fulfills prophecy, He also continued to reveal that He was sovereign over all, deserving adoration.

POINT 2

JESUS IS THE KING WHO RECEIVES ADORATION (MATT. 21:6-8).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 21:6-8** from his or her Bible.

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt; then they laid their clothes on them, and he sat on them. **8** A very large crowd spread their clothes on the road; others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 6-7** that adoring God includes our obedience (DDG p. 22).

Even though the disciples didn't fully understand all that Jesus came to do, they showed Him adoration by their obedience and care.

- Jesus commanded, and the disciples obeyed. They didn't pause; they didn't ask more questions. They just did as they were told because they trusted Jesus and His authority.
- After bringing Jesus the donkeys, the disciples placed their cloaks on them. This showed that they deeply respected and cared for Jesus. With their cloaks, they created a makeshift saddle for Jesus to sit on to make His ride a little more comfortable. Back then, the clothes people wore provided important social and cultural information.⁴ Clothing differentiated between class, culture, religion, and region. The presence of outer garments also made an important distinction between a slave/servant and a free person. By removing their outer garments and placing them on the young donkey for Jesus to sit on, the disciples willingly took the form of a servant for the benefit of their King.
- Truth is, even at this moment in Jesus's life, the disciples didn't fully understand everything that Jesus had come to do. But by obeying Him and caring for Him, they showed Him adoration.

DISCUSS: In smaller groups of 3-4, read John 15:14-16. Discuss (DDG p. 22):

Why should friendship with Jesus and obedience to His commands go hand in hand? (if we love and enjoy Jesus, knowing He is God, we should naturally obey; it pleases God when we obey Him; unlike other friends, Jesus is holy and righteous, so His requests and commands should be taken seriously; God's commands are always for our good and His glory, so we should obey)

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verse 8** (DDG p. 22):

The crowd didn't fully understand who Jesus was, but their actions also showed their adoration for Jesus.

- Not only did the disciples show Jesus adoration that day, but the crowd did as well as they made a makeshift "red carpet" for Jesus to ride in on. Jesus's entry into Jerusalem was an entry fit for a king. The crowd, much like the disciples, willingly stripped themselves of their outer garments for Jesus's entry.
- Jesus's entry mirrored a parade given for kings when they would return from war victorious over their enemies (2 Kings 9:13). The parade the crowd created here was one more thing that showed they didn't fully grasp who Jesus was or what He came to do. They wrongly believed that Jesus had come to overthrow Roman rule and be their earthly king. By the week's end, Jesus would stand victorious over their enemy, but not the enemy that they thought Jesus had come to conquer. Jesus would soon stand victorious over sin and death, the biggest enemy and threat to the world.
- When you consider that Jesus was marching to His death, a death that would save the world from sin and restore the relationship between God and humankind, it's easy to see that He deserved far more praise than anyone in the crowd could have ever given Him. But as Jesus, the Son of God, mounted the colt, He rode into this last week ready to complete the mission given to Him by God the Father. During this time, kings would ride donkeys in parades like this one only during times of peace after victory in battle. Jesus's fulfillment of prophecy in Matthew 21 represented the peace that He came to bring between God and humanity as He killed the hostility that separated the two. For this reason, Jesus deserved every bit of the adoration He received from the crowd.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 22)

In what ways is Jesus worthy of our adoration? (being holy and blameless; suffering for humanity; dying to save us; being the Son of God; being love)

TRANSITION: God is far bigger than we can ever comprehend. Even on our best days, we can't comprehend the sheer vastness of our Lord. Even though the disciples and the crowd didn't completely understand who Jesus was and why He came, they still adored Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. There is so much that we don't know about Him. Even still, the Word of God tells us everything we need to know. Even with our limited understanding, we are called to adore Jesus as the King who is worthy of all our worship and praise.

POINT 3

JESUS IS THE SON OF DAVID WHO BRINGS SALVATION (MATT. 21:9-11).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 21:9-11** from his or her Bible.

9 Then the crowds who went ahead of him and those who followed shouted: ‘Hosanna’ to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ‘Hosanna’ in the highest heaven! **10** When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar, saying, “Who is this?” **11** The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

HIGHLIGHT: Read the key doctrine as it relates to **verse 9** to explain Christ’s exaltation—Jesus’s receiving the honor and praise that He is due for who He is and what He has done (DDG pp. 22-23).

Key Doctrine #56: Christ’s Exaltation: Whereas the death of Christ was the ultimate example of His humiliation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first and glorious example of Christ’s exaltation. Christ was exalted when God raised Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He ascended to the Father’s right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He returns. All of these aspects work together to magnify the glory and worth of Christ, resulting in the praise of the glory of His grace in rescuing sinners.

- As Jesus entered the city mounted on a donkey, the people shouted and quoted Psalm 118:25-26, acknowledging that Jesus was sent from God. They also acknowledged His lineage as the Son of David. They even accurately exclaimed, “Hosanna,” as a cry for salvation. All signs pointed to Jesus’s being the Savior of Israel.
- The people understood that Jesus came to save, but they thought He came to save them from the Romans, who had conquered their homeland. They didn’t understand the enemy He came to save them from or the method that He would employ to have victory. Jesus wouldn’t bring salvation by leading an army of 300 like Gideon or slaying a giant like David. Instead, Jesus would bring salvation by living, dying, and rising from the grave to defeat an enemy much bigger than Rome. He came to save the people from their greatest enemy, sin.
- Whether the people understood who Jesus was or not, Jesus is the true fulfillment of God’s promise to David (2 Sam. 7:16-17; Luke 1:32-33). Jesus came to Jerusalem knowing that He would be crucified on a cross in just a few short days. Jesus’s death on the cross would prove to be the ultimate example of His humiliation, but it would not prove to be His defeat. Though the crowd exalted Jesus upon His entry, His resurrection would be the most glorious example of His exaltation. And one day, Jesus will return and be exalted by all creation for both who He is and what He’s done to rescue sinners from sin and death.

EXALTATION

Exaltation can refer to either praise or being raised to a higher position. Both are appropriate with respect to Jesus since He is worthy of all praise and has been exalted to the right hand of God (Phil. 2:5-11).

ASK: The crowds exalted Jesus the best they knew how without understanding His mission. But since we understand His mission, ask (DDG p. 23):

How can someone exalt Christ in his or her life? (sing praises to Him for His work of salvation; give Him glory for all things, good and bad; tell others about His love and mercy; live in devotion and obedience to Him)

INTERACT: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 4: CHRIST AS PROPHET (POSTER)** and pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 5: CHRIST AS PROPHET (HANDOUT)**.

Invite a volunteer to reread **verses 10-11**. Then in groups of 3-4, discuss: “Were the crowds right or wrong in calling Jesus a prophet, and why?” (Yes and no: yes, Jesus is a prophet, One who speaks on behalf of God to teach, rebuke, judge, and rescue, similar to the prophets of old; but also no, because Jesus is far more than a prophet—He is the Prophet; He is God Himself).

EXPLAIN: Using the content below and **verses 10-11**, explain (DDG p. 23):

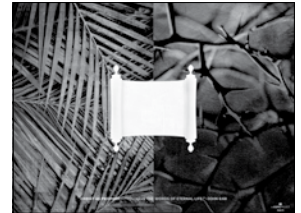
The crowd rightly exalted Jesus for being the Son of David and called Him a prophet, but they didn’t fully understand His mission to save.

- Jesus’s entrance into Jerusalem disturbed the whole city. The Greek word used for “uproar” in verse 10 means shaken as by an earthquake.⁵
- As people asked who this was, the crowds acknowledged Jesus as the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. They were partly correct, for Jesus is far more than just a prophet. He is far more than the Savior of Israel. Jesus is the Savior of the world. In verse 9, the people quoted Psalm 118:25-26 in praise of Jesus. Jesus too would quote from Psalm 118:22-23 in Matthew 21:42, but He would do so pointing to the rejection that would lead to His sacrificial death.
- The exaltation of Jesus as He entered Jerusalem would be but a shadow of the exaltation to come. Jesus came with a mission to save the world from sin. As the Son of David, Jesus didn’t bring salvation the way the people of God expected it to come. Instead, He came humbly, mounted on a donkey, and ready to die. So yes, their understanding was incomplete, but their praise was appropriate.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 23)

How does the misunderstanding of the crowd shape your belief in the importance of studying God’s Word? (knowing Scripture helps us know who Jesus is; knowing Scripture helps us fight against false messages about Jesus; studying God’s Word helps our understanding of God’s saving plan through Jesus throughout the Old and New Testament)

TRANSITION: Jesus is worthy of all praise—not just because of what He did but because of who He is. He is the Son of God who fulfills all the promises of God.



CHRIST AS PROPHET

Scan this QR code for a brief theological reflection on Jesus as the promised Prophet and an explanation of the imagery in the poster.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, He fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. The people praised Jesus but for the wrong reasons, thinking He had come to free them from Rome. Jesus did not come to free people from the tyranny of a worldly power but rather from the power of sin and death. Because we know Jesus as our Savior, we put away hypocritical and hollow worship and exalt Him for who He truly is—the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

HEAD:

Our access to the Word of God is an amazing gift. In His Word, we have sixty-six books that all point to who Jesus is and what He did to save us from sin. We don't have to guess or be led by our emotions when it comes to the way we think about Jesus. One day, Jesus will return and receive all the praise that He is due. We exalt Jesus now in preparation for the day that He returns and our relationship is no longer hindered, impeded, or obstructed by sin.

From your understanding of Scripture, who do you say Jesus is?

HEART:

Jesus is amazing and worthy of our praise because He is the Son of God. Many facts prove His identity, but one of the most prominent is the prophecies He fulfilled. We can trust Jesus is who He says He is because He fulfilled Scripture as the promised Savior.

What will you do to show Jesus adoration?

HANDS:

Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem revealed His determination to continue on His mission to set us free from the grips of sin and death. Jesus spared no expense in pursuing our salvation. This gospel is good news that must be shared through our words and actions. Just as God's people saw that all the signs pointed to Jesus being the Savior of Israel and responded in such a way that people wanted to know who Jesus was, we must live our lives so that people both hear and see the gospel lived out.

What are some ways you can share the good news of salvation with those around you?

PRAY: Jesus, You are the Savior of the world and of our lives. Help us continue to obey and adore You for all You did and all You are still doing in our lives and in the world. You are worthy of all praise, and we exalt You! Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"A true Christian's heart leapeth for joy, even when cast down by divers sorrows and temptations, at the remembrance that Christ is exalted, for in that he finds enough to cheer his own heart."⁶

—Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)

POINT 1: JESUS IS THE MESSIAH WHO FULFILLS PROPHECY (MATT. 21:1-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“Bethphage (v. 1) and Bethany (v. 17) were two small villages just to the east of Jerusalem on or near the slopes of the large hill, known as the Mount of Olives, which dominated the skyline of that side of town. Matthew includes the place names to remind his readers how near Jesus is to Jerusalem and perhaps also to evoke the messianic associations of the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4 . . .). Jesus is consciously making preparations to enter Jerusalem after the fashion of Zech 9:9, with echoes of Isa 62:11. Zechariah’s prophecy was widely interpreted in rabbinic literature as messianic (e.g., Gen. Rab. 98.9; b. Sanh 98a, 99a; Qoh. Rab. 1.9). As again later with their preparation for the Passover (26:18), it is not clear whether the disciples’ rendezvous stems from Jesus’ prior arrangements or from his supernatural insight. ‘The Lord’ is, more literally, their Lord/Master and also suggests a double entendre. The disciples will act as if they are servants of the donkey’s owner. If anyone becomes suspicious of their behavior, their reply need mean nothing more than that the owner has asked them to bring him the animals. But Matthew undoubtedly sees Jesus as the true Master, not only of the donkeys but of all people’s property, which he can rightfully demand at any time.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

General George Patton was a very decorated and influential American general during World War II. Patton was known for his leadership style that was very bold and aggressive. Patton played a key role in many Allied victories in Europe during the war.

Before the Battle of Verdun, Patton was meeting with other generals to receive his orders. When Eisenhower commanded Patton to halt the German drive and launch a counterattack, he asked Patton when it could be done. Patton boldly replied that he could accomplish it in 48 hours. Eisenhower believed Patton was bragging, but Patton had already planned three maneuvers based on three possible orders he could have received from high command. A phone call to his troops set the appropriate plan in action. Patton’s story is a testimony to the importance of preparation and focus in adversity.⁸

In a similar fashion, Jesus had been preparing all His life for what He was walking into in Jerusalem. Jesus’s strategy was one that was prophesied about in the Old Testament. He even

EXTRA

alluded to it as He walked the earth teaching, rebuking, and healing. But everyone missed it. Even still, as Jesus stood at Bethphage looking at Jerusalem, He was ready to execute the plan set forth by the Father before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4)—the plan that eventually will lead to His return and the restoration of all things.

POINT 2: JESUS IS THE KING WHO RECEIVES ADORATION

(MATT. 21:6-8).

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus intentionally declares his identity to the nation. The circumstances of his entry will produce a variety of reactions among the people. At the Passover season, messianic excitement tended to run high. With pilgrims crowding into Jerusalem not only from the various regions within Palestine but also from the Diaspora, hope for the appearance of Messiah was ready to be ignited. The recent raising of Lazarus stimulated renewed interest in Jesus—both the crowd’s hope in him as a miraculous liberator and the religious leaders’ opposition to him as a threat to the national security (John 11:45-53; 12:9-11,17-19).

Jesus’ descent from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem evokes images of Zechariah’s prophecy of the Lord’s fighting against the nations with his feet on the Mount of Olives and liberating Jerusalem (Zech. 14:3-21). Further excitement is stimulated by Jesus’ riding on a colt, fulfilling Zechariah’s prophecy of the messianic king who comes to liberate his people (Zech. 9:9-13; cf. Matt. 21:4-5). This is no mere coincidence. The acclaim of the crowds comes from their own expectations of what they want Jesus to be. But for Jesus it is a self-disclosure to Israel, which will seal the fate of his people but will also be a testimony to his disciples once they reflect on these events with eyes of faith after his crucifixion and resurrection.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Miep Gies was an office worker in Amsterdam, and she was asked by her boss, Otto Frank, to hide his family from the Nazi authorities. Miep agreed, even though she didn’t fully understand the scope of Otto Frank’s request. Miep hid the Frank family in the annex of Otto Frank’s office building, and she risked her life daily by bringing them food and other things they needed to live. She brought them news and books, providing them with a sense of connection to the world outside of the annex. Miep did all of this without really knowing the extent of the dangers that she faced. Miep believed it was her duty to help the Frank family in their time of need, and she followed the directives of her boss with zero hesitation. Miep’s story is a powerful example of the importance of obedience and of following the commands of those we trust, even when we don’t fully understand the significance of what we are doing.

In a similar fashion, the disciples obeyed Jesus’s command to get the donkey and the colt without understanding the significance of the prophecy they were helping Jesus fulfill. They believed Him to be Lord and Savior, and they simply trusted that what He was asking of them was right and good.

POINT 3: JESUS IS THE SON OF DAVID WHO BRINGS SALVATION (MATT. 21:9-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“As the crowd moved along, they shouted words of praise, celebrating the arrival of Israel’s Savior, the Messiah-King. Hosanna is literally a plea to ‘save,’ but by this time it had become an expression of praise for God’s salvation. As had been acknowledged twice by blind men (Matt. 9:27; 20:30-31), and speculated upon by the people who witnessed an exorcism (12:23), now the identity of Jesus as the promised royal Son of David was proclaimed with praise.

For a short time, the people would acknowledge Jesus’ true identity as the sovereign Son of David, but they would fail to identify him also as the sacrificial Son of Abraham. They knew he had come to restore his kingdom, but they missed the fact that he was also here to redeem his people. They anticipated the sovereignty but overlooked the sacrifice. Jesus would not exercise the rule without the redemption.”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

Dr. James Harrison is an Australian who has donated blood almost every week for sixty years. By doing so, he has saved the lives of millions of babies because he has a rare blood type that contains a rare antibody called RhD immunoglobulin, used to treat a condition called Rhesus disease. Rhesus disease is a problematic condition that can happen when a woman with Rh-negative blood becomes pregnant with a baby who has Rh-positive blood. If the mother’s body recognizes the baby’s blood as a foreign invader, it can attack and destroy the baby’s red blood cells, leading to severe anemia and several other complications.

Dr. Harrison’s rare blood type has been used to create a treatment for this problem called Anti-D. This treatment has been given to millions of pregnant women around the world to fight against and prevent Rhesus disease. Dr. Harrison’s story is incredible and shows how one person’s actions can save the lives of so many.¹¹

But how much more is Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross an act of selfless love! He willingly suffered and died to save the world from sin and death. The blood of Jesus spilled on the cross has the power to save everyone who receives God’s promise fulfilled through Jesus.

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THE PROVOCATIVE PROPHET

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus affirms the reality of resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33).
2. Jesus clarifies the centrality of love (Matt. 22:34-40).
3. Jesus claims the authority of the Messiah (Matt. 22:41-46).

Background Passage: Matthew 22

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In His responses to the challenges of the religious leaders, Jesus demonstrated His wisdom, authority, and mastery of the Scriptures.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The religious leaders questioned Jesus to trap Him in His words, but each time, Jesus answered them from the authority of God's Word, and they could not respond. Jesus is the Word of God who came to reveal God perfectly to us. He has all authority in heaven and on earth.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced God's kindness to us in salvation through Jesus, we live under the Word of God's authority in all areas of our lives with gratitude and joy.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **How did you respond to a time when you were challenged about something you knew was right?** (with anger at their doubting you; with doubt about your own understanding of the situation; with stubbornness with your own opinion; with humility in trying to understand the other person's point of view)

TRANSITION: Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees challenged the authority of Jesus, believing that they knew more and better than He did. Jesus, in humility, proved them wrong and in every instance left them amazed at His responses. Jesus is the Word made flesh who died and rose from the grave in order to save humanity from sin. Through His life, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus revealed God perfectly to us, giving us the chance to have life through Him.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- After Jesus entered Jerusalem with the crowds cheering, Jesus had various encounters with the Pharisees and Sadducees throughout that week. Their goal was almost always to discredit Jesus; His goal was to teach about God and His kingdom. Jesus both answered and asked questions that showed that He had a mastery of the Word of God and that He also stood in authority over the Word of God. Jesus's teaching in Matthew 22 showed that He truly was the Messiah and foreshadowed His death and resurrection for the salvation of humanity.



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POINT 1

JESUS AFFIRMS THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION (MATT. 22:23-33).

INTRODUCE: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE**, saying, “On Tuesday, Jesus was in the temple, and the Sadducees questioned Him about the resurrection. What do we know about the resurrection?” Invite someone to read the key doctrine (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 30).

Key Doctrine #97: 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. Because Christ was the first-fruits 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.

ASK: Jesus was resurrected, and one day we will be too. Ask (DDG p. 30):

What are some practical ways the truth of the resurrection should give believers hope? (knowing our bodies are temporary, we need not struggle with self-image; preparing us for a future hope so we don’t have to worry; reminding us that our present sufferings will turn to glory)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 22:23-28** from his or her Bible.

23 That same day some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came up to him and questioned him: **24** “Teacher, Moses said, if a man dies, having no children, his brother is to marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. **25** Now there were seven brothers among us. The first got married and died. Having no offspring, he left his wife to his brother. **26** The same thing happened to the second also, and the third, and so on to all seven. **27** Last of all, the woman died. **28** In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had married her.”

CHART: On a board, draw a large table with three rows and three columns titled “The Question,” “The Trap,” and “The Answer.” Invite the group to summarize the Sadducees’ scenario and question in **verses 23-28** for you to write in the table. Then ask them to identify the potential traps for Jesus, and record those.

- The Sadducees referred to the law where Moses wrote that if a man died with no children, his brother was to marry the widow and have a child in order to continue his brother’s name (Deut. 25:5-10). If the woman died after marrying seven brothers, who, then, would be her husband in the resurrection? They believed that Jesus either had to deny the resurrection or affirm polyandry, the idea that a woman can have more than one husband.



VOICES from THE CHURCH

“The important question is, what relationships are important in the afterlife? These decisions are made on this side of death. The doctrine of the resurrection should spur us on to evangelism so that many more people may enjoy the pleasures of a continuing relationship with God, a relationship that is not limited by death.”¹

–Joe Kapolyo

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 22:29-33** from his or her Bible.

29 Jesus answered them, “You are mistaken, because you don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God. **30** For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven. **31** Now concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven’t you read what was spoken to you by God: **32** I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” **33** And when the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

CHART: Call for the group to summarize Jesus’s answer in **verses 29-33** for you to record. Use the leader content to help explain the nuance of Jesus’s answer.

- The Sadducees only affirmed the books of the Law. Since the doctrine of the resurrection is not explicit in the law, they rejected its validity. *(Note in the Key Doctrine statement that the cited Scriptures come from two Old Testament prophets and the New Testament, but not the books of the Law.)*
- Jesus told the Sadducees that their rejection of the full counsel of God’s Word gave them a narrow understanding of God’s truth and power.
- Jesus informed the Sadducees that men and women aren’t married in the resurrection, just as the angels aren’t. Since the Sadducees also didn’t believe in angels (Acts 23:8), Jesus took the opportunity to affirm their existence. Jesus wasn’t saying that we become angels when we die. Nor was He dismissing the significance of the earthly marital relationship in the resurrection but rather highlighting a shift in the way human beings will relate to one another in God’s presence. In His response, Jesus affirmed the resurrection and negated polyandry.
- Jesus then pointed back to God’s self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 3:6, where He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Jesus used God’s present tense statement to Moses—“I am,” not “I was”—to show that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, affirming the doctrine of the resurrection from the Law.

SAY: In summary, read aloud the following statement (DDG p. 30):

Belief in the resurrection is valid because it is seen in God’s Word.

DISCUSS: The Sadducees picked and chose which Scriptures they wanted to be true, leading to their disbelief in the resurrection. Ask (DDG pp. 27,30):

From Day 3 in the DDG: **Why is it important to affirm the truthfulness of all Scripture, not just the Scriptures we agree with?** (helps us not fall into error; all Scripture is inspired by God; can’t add or subtract from Scripture; God tells us not to depart from His Word)

TRANSITION: Jesus debated with the religious leaders about a lot of topics, and many usually left amazed. He always answered with full authority, as we will see.

BOOKS OF THE LAW

The first five books of the Bible, written by Moses under the inspiration of God: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

POINT 2

JESUS CLARIFIES THE CENTRALITY OF LOVE (MATT. 22:34-40).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 22:34-40** from his or her Bible.

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. **35** And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: **36** “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?” **37** He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. **38** This is the greatest and most important command. **39** The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. **40** All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

CHART: Invite the group to provide the information for the question and the trap for you to record in the table.

- One of the Pharisees' experts in the law approached Jesus about which commandment was the greatest commandment in the law. The Pharisees gave weight to each of the 613 laws in the Old Testament, paying more attention to the commands they considered weightier.² The subjectivity of their practice of dividing laws by weight would have easily caused debate amongst the Pharisees on which laws were more important.

BRAINSTORM: Ask: “What are some ways the world might think the church would answer the question about the greatest commandment?”

CHART: Call for the group to identify Jesus's answer to the question: love, specifically, love God and love others. Record this in the table. Then use the leader content to explain from **verses 34-38** (DDG p. 30):

Being tested, Jesus confirms that the greatest commandment is to love God with our all.

- Jesus referenced Deuteronomy 6:5 in His answer: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind—that is, love God with all that you have and all that you are. The word Jesus used for “love” is the Greek word *agape*, not tender affection or erotic love but the highest form of love—demonstrative, faithful, and true. The greatest commandment is to pursue a relationship with God with our whole self and with a pure love that only He can give us first so we can then give it back to Him (1 John 4:19).

ASK: Knowing what *agape* love is, ask (DDG p. 30):

How can we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind? (spend time with Him to cherish the relationship; living in obedience for His glory; studying His Word to know Him more; giving generously of my resources)

HIGHLIGHT: Using the leader content, explain from **verses 39-40** the second greatest command (DDG p. 31).

Jesus said that loving others as ourselves is the second greatest command.

- The law was never meant to save. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees completely missed the point of the law. The purpose of the law was to show the people of God how to properly relate to God, how to relate to each other, and the need for salvation (Gal. 3:24). No amount of obedience to the law could ever save because no human could ever keep the law perfectly.
- Jesus then gave the answer to the second greatest commandment—to love others as yourself—referencing Leviticus 19:18. Jesus used the same word and idea of *agape* love in the second commandment as He did in the first. Love for God and love for neighbor are so central to the Christian faith that you can't say that you have love for one and not the other. And understandably, this type of love is not possible without God. Much like the Sadducees' question, the Pharisees' attempt to compartmentalize the law into lighter and weightier categories was irrelevant. As Jesus states in verse 40, the ethical teaching of the entire Old Testament could be summed up in two commands featuring one verb: love God and others.
- Just a few days later, the religious leaders demanded Jesus be crucified on the cross. In the greatest act of love the world has ever known, Jesus allowed His own creation to take His life. But Jesus didn't stay dead. On the third day, Jesus would rise from the grave and stand victorious over death. He did that because of the love He had for humanity.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 31)

Why is loving others like ourselves so difficult? (we are selfish and think of our needs first; we don't fully trust that God is in control; we think we will be hurt or feel loss if we love others; it's easier just to think of ourselves; perhaps we don't love and care for ourselves, forgetting we are made in the image of God)

TRANSITION: Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees tested Jesus to discredit Him. Both were unsuccessful. Jesus—the Word made flesh—knew Scripture better than they could ever imagine. But they refused to believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and they had no desire to submit to His authority, as we will continue to see.

POINT 3

JESUS CLAIMS THE AUTHORITY OF THE MESSIAH (MATT. 22:41-46).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 22:41-46** from his or her Bible.

41 While the Pharisees were together, Jesus questioned them, **42** “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They replied, “David’s.” **43** He asked them, “How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? **44** The Lord declared to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet’? **45** If David calls him ‘Lord,’ how, then, can he be his son?” **46** No one was able to answer him at all, and from that day no one dared to question him anymore.

CHART: Emphasize that here Jesus turned the tables on His challengers and asked some questions of His own. Call for the group to summarize from **verses 41-44** Jesus’s questions and identify the potential trap for the Pharisees. Using the leader content, explain (DDG p. 31):

The promised Messiah would be a victorious King and a Suffering Servant; He would be a human Son of David and the divine Son of God.

- Jesus asked the Pharisees who they thought the Messiah was. Specifically, He asked, “Whose son is he?” Jesus knew they would say, “David’s [son].” They could have quoted several Old Testament texts pointing to the Messiah as being the son of David (Ps. 2; Isa. 9:7; 11:1; Jer. 23:5). But Jesus knew that they didn’t have a full understanding of what that meant, similar to the crowd at His triumphal entry, who called Him “the Son of David” (Matt. 21:9).
- Two dominant ideas existed in the Old Testament about who the Messiah would be. One was the picture of the Messiah standing victorious over His enemies (Ps. 110:1). The other was the Messiah depicted as the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53). Both are correct as both are verified in Scripture. The Son of God would stand victorious over His enemies, and the Son of David would suffer and die in the place of sinners.
- Jesus responded to their answer with another question, quoting Psalm 110:1. In doing so, Jesus posed two dilemmas for the Pharisees. First, the Pharisees couldn’t deny that Jesus was showing respect for Scriptures, contrary to the Sadducees, because He affirmed the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of Psalm 110 through David (Matt. 22:43).
- Second, David referred to the Messiah as “my Lord.” The Hebrew word for the first “Lord” in Psalm 110:1 is *Yahweh*, the name of God (“LORD”). The second “Lord” is *adonai*, which could mean “my master or lord” as a term of respect for a human (Gen. 18:12), but it also was often used to refer to Yahweh Himself, “the Lord.” The Greek translation of Psalm 110, from the Septuagint, uses the word *kurios* for “Lord” in both places, implying a shared deity between the Lord and His appointed Messiah. If the Scripture is inspired and true, then the promised Messiah must be a literal, divine Son of God.

DAVID

Succeeded Saul as king over the united kingdom of Israel. A man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), though not sinless, David was the benchmark by which every other king was evaluated for their faithfulness to the Lord. David received the promise of a royal Messiah on an eternal throne through his lineage (2 Sam. 7:11-16). David himself ruled from about 1005 to 965 BC.³

CHART: Highlight from **verses 45-46** that the Pharisees had no answer to Jesus's question regarding Psalm 110:1, a conspicuous blank for the table.

- Jesus stated His concluding question simply in verse 45: "If David calls Him 'Lord,' how, then, can he be his son?" The Pharisees had just answered that the Messiah is a descendant of King David, and thus the Son of David, an identity the crowds had publicly and favorably attributed to Jesus. And yet, Jesus emphasized that David said the Messiah is his Lord, which logically required the Messiah to be divine. Which was right: human or divine? The answer is both. Jesus is David's Lord as the divine, pre-existent, and promised Messiah, and the Messiah is a man born from the lineage of David as David's son.
- Jesus's question presented the Pharisees with irrefutable truth drawn faithfully from the inspired Scriptures, but He had trapped them into silence, whether from ignorance or stubbornness. They were neither expecting a divine Messiah nor prepared to affirm one. And to agree with Jesus's premise and reasoning from the Scriptures would affirm Jesus as a teacher and likely embolden the crowds that presently held Jesus to be the Messiah on account of His teachings and miracles. So they remained silent, unable to answer.

EXPLAIN: State and explain the following statement (DDG p. 31):

Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah, teaching the Word of God with authority, because He is the Messiah.

- Jesus presented the Pharisees with a truth they may not have understood but one they couldn't escape because He is the promised Messiah. He is the Word made flesh, so He teaches the Word of God with complete authority. And on top of that, He fulfills the Word of God, both in its parts and as a whole. All the signs of the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus as the human and divine Messiah, the victorious King and Suffering Servant. The Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah find their fulfillment in Jesus, and the Old Testament storyline culminates in the person and work of Jesus. Being both God and man, Jesus was able to be tempted and never sin, He was able to be killed on the cross to satisfy the full wrath of God, and He rose from the grave, defeating death.

ASK: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 6: DAVID'S LORD**, highlighting how the Old Testament points to Jesus as the Messiah. Then ask (DDG p. 31):

Why do you believe Jesus is the Messiah? (Scripture says so; history gives evidence of it; Jesus has worked and is working in my life; He has worked and is working in the lives of my friends)



MY RESPONSE

SAY: The religious leaders questioned Jesus to trap Him in His words, but each time, Jesus answered them from the authority of God's Word, and they could not respond. Jesus is the Word of God who came to reveal God perfectly to us. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. Because we have experienced God's kindness to us in salvation through Jesus, we live under the Word of God's authority in all areas of our lives with gratitude and joy.

HEAD:

We don't stand over the Word as if it were subservient to us, we stand under the Word in submission to God's self-revelation. If we attempt to make ourselves the authority over God's Word, we will neither understand the Word nor know the power of God. Jesus is the authority, and through the Word, He perfectly reveals the Father. If we desire to love God with all our being, we must approach the Word with humility and a willingness to learn.

What are some of the dangers of making ourselves the authority over God's Word?

HEART:

There is simply no comparison between our knowledge of truth and Jesus's. Jesus has a complete understanding of truth because He is truth. Our knowledge compared to His is like a 30-watt light bulb versus all the light emitted by every star in our galaxy and the sun. Understanding the perfect and complete authority of Jesus over the Word should give us a deeper desire to know Him through His Word. As that desire grows, our worship of Jesus will become more vibrant and passionate in all areas of our lives.

How do we let Scripture have authority over our worship?

HANDS:

Living under the authority of the Word of God doesn't just mean agreeing with everything that the Word says. Living in submission to the Word also means doing what the Word calls us to do. Jesus came to this earth on a mission—to bring salvation to all humanity. He did so through His sinless life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the grave. He now calls us to take the salvation we've received to the world through both our words and actions.

How can you live in submission to God's Word this week so that others may see Christ in you?

PRAY: Jesus, Your Word is truth and we submit to it. Help us love You more and love others more. Thank You that we love because You loved us first. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field."⁴

—John Wesley (1703–1791)

POINT 1: JESUS AFFIRMS THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION (MATT. 22:23-33).

+ COMMENTARY

“Appealing to the Pentateuchal commandments about levirate marriage (in which a brother is responsible for marrying a deceased brother’s widow who has had no offspring in order to try to perpetuate the family line), the Sadducees loosely cite Deut 25:5 and Gen 38:8. They envision an extreme situation in which a woman has gone through seven husbands, all brothers, because she has failed to conceive by any of them. . . . The Sadducees could have made their point just as easily with the story of a woman who had had only two husbands, but they want to make the situation look absurd. So they pose the question, Who will be married to whom when the woman and all seven men have new bodies in this supposed resurrection life?”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Something well known about Thomas Jefferson is that he didn’t accept the whole Bible as relevant or true. In fact, Jefferson cut out the portions that he didn’t agree with. He didn’t like the portions of the Bible that he didn’t consider morally and ethically sound. He also didn’t like the supernatural. So he cut those pages out of his Bible. He came to the conclusion that those portions had to have been added to the Word of God by someone else who didn’t have the authority to do so. All Jefferson liked was the moral teaching of Jesus, so he took the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus, pasted them together, and created what we now call the Jefferson Bible.

Jefferson showed that he assumed that his moral thoughts and beliefs were correct and perfect. But they weren’t. Most people, thinking logically, know and believe that there is no such thing as a morally perfect person except for Jesus. Another problem is that Jefferson assumed himself to be in authority over the Word of God. This is the error that the Sadducees fell into. We don’t have the authority to pick and choose what is true. When we do that, we create a moral and ethical code that is ever-shifting because we find that we can’t even keep our own laws.

Jesus, however, not only affirmed the truth, but He believed it and lived to its standard perfectly. Because of Jesus’s authority and perfection, we now have salvation available to us. There is absolutely no hope in creating our own moral code because we will always fail in executing it.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS CLARIFIES THE CENTRALITY OF LOVE

(MATT. 22:34-40).

+ COMMENTARY

“It is not unlikely that Jesus’ hearers were expecting one or other of the Ten Commandments, those that had been written by the finger of God and that, as a group, stood out over all the other commandments. But Jesus did not select one of those. Instead he chose the commandment to love God, the commandment that must have been most familiar of all to his hearers, for it was recited every day by the pious Jew: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.’ Thus far the words are identical with those in Deuteronomy 6:5 (cf. Deut. 11:13), but whereas that passage goes on ‘and with all your might’ Jesus proceeds, ‘and with all your mind.’ We should not make too much of this difference, for both ways of expressing it make the point that love for God should be wholehearted, involving all that we have and all that we are (the threefold all is important). Mark interestingly has the three expressions in Deuteronomy, but he inserts ‘with all your mind’ before the third. ‘This is the first and great commandment,’ Jesus says (in Mark’s version the questioner asked, ‘Which is the first commandment of all,’ so that Jesus’ summary includes the expressions used in the two Gospels).”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

In the summer of 1777, British general John Burgoyne led an army of almost 9,000 soldiers to the Hudson River Valley to split the American colonies in half to weaken their efforts in the war. The situation was bleak for the Continental Army led by General Horatio Gates. They were outnumbered, outgunned, and outmatched. All hope seemed to be lost in the fight for independence.

Despite the odds being stacked against them, the Continental Army was able to overcome the British forces. They inflicted heavy casualties on the British and were able to take supplies from them when they desperately needed supplies. In the end, John Burgoyne and the rest of the British Army surrendered to the American troops sparking a rise in the morale of the Continental Army and forcing the British to realize that the Continental Army was a formidable opponent. Their victory also sparked the confidence of the French, as they chose to join in and help the American colonies after the victory at Saratoga.

The Battle of Saratoga was a major turning point in the Revolutionary War. The victory at Saratoga was something of a resurrection of the morale of the Continental Army. Had General Horatio Gates and the Continental Army chosen to give up when all hope seemed lost, the American colonies may have never won their independence.

In the war against sin, the resurrection of Jesus wasn’t just a turning point in a war that it seemed like He lost, but it was also the guarantee of victory for the people of God. By the Sadducees’ refusal to validate the resurrection, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God, they stripped the law of all its meaning and purpose, effectively removing the very thing that guaranteed God’s victory over sin and death.

POINT 3: JESUS CLAIMS THE AUTHORITY OF THE MESSIAH (MATT. 22:41-46).

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus was careful to point out that David’s psalm was written under the inspiration of God’s Spirit, so there was no mistake in what he had written. Jesus was drawing attention to the fact that by the phrase my Lord, David was referring to someone other than himself. He was referring to the Christ or Messiah, whom the Pharisees had just said was a son of David. Jesus’ final question for the Pharisees was, ‘How can the Messiah be both David’s Lord and David’s son?’

Jesus’ implication was clear: The Messiah, the Son of David, was more than a special person. He was also Yahweh the Almighty himself. It followed that Jesus himself was this Messiah. If the Pharisees answered his question they would have to acknowledge his true identity. Once again, Jesus claimed deity for himself.”⁷

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Use the instructions below to play a favorite childhood game, “Red Light, Green Light,” with a twist. The twist is that two different people will be it, but one of the two is a decoy, and the group doesn’t get to find out who the decoy is until the first person crosses the finish line.

- Choose two people to be “It” and have both stand at the same end of the room. Whisper in one person’s ear, “You’re It,” and whisper in the other’s ear, “You’re the decoy.”
- The remaining players must choose whose instructions they will listen to for the entirety of the round. They can’t switch.
- Both “It” and “the decoy” call out red light or green light at the same time. Players can only move when the person they chose says green light.
- If a player is caught moving after their authority says red light, they must go back to the starting line.
- The first player to reach the finish line ends the game. If he or she were following “It,” that person wins. If following “the decoy,” then nobody wins.
- Repeat the game if you have time.

Use this activity to illustrate the importance of following the correct authority. The Pharisees and Sadducees were following their own authority when it came to the Word of God instead of Jesus’s authority. If they chose to follow their own authority until their lives were over, then they crossed the finish line without the chance at gaining the true victory—eternal life.

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THE DENOUNCING PROPHET

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus denounces hypocritical religion (Matt. 23:1-7).
2. Jesus denounces misleading religion (Matt. 23:13,15).
3. Jesus denounces superficial religion (Matt. 23:23-28).

Background Passage: Matthew 23

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus denounces religion that does not express the heart of God.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus denounced the religious leaders for practicing heartless religion and for believing that their external conduct made them right with God. When we trust in Jesus, we are made right with God, and He changes our hearts so that we can love and obey Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we now, in Christ, have the capacity to love God, we seek to demonstrate our love for Him through obedience, demonstrating true religion before a watching world.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What are some examples of ways we might try to obtain righteousness through our effort rather than faith in Jesus?** (fighting for our preferences instead of loving people; creating rules to stop us from getting close to sin and then treating those rules as if they come from God; doing good things in an attempt to make our good outweigh something that we did that was bad)

TRANSITION: Jesus came to save; He didn't come to condemn. But as He denounced the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, He communicated that they stood condemned because of their failure to believe in the Messiah for salvation. They put all their hope and faith in their adherence to the law, and when the One to whom the law pointed came, they missed Him. They created an entirely new religion—one that had zero ability to save. And not only were they misled, but they also were misleading the people following them.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- As Jesus continued to get closer to the crucifixion, He strove for His people to understand that eternal life could only be obtained through faith in Him. For so long the religious leaders taught a works-based righteousness. They taught that you had to do good enough, be good enough, and look a certain way to truly belong in the household of God. But in their teaching and hypocrisy, all they did was lead the people of God astray, and they missed the Messiah because of it. In Matthew 23, Jesus denounced their hypocritical, misleading, and superficial religion to help them see the error of their ways.



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POINT 1

JESUS DENOUNCES HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION (MATT. 23:1-7).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 23:1-7** from his or her own Bible.

1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples: **2** “The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. **3** Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach. **4** They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them. **5** They do everything to be seen by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. **6** They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, **7** greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by people.”

INTERACT: Bring in a 5 lb. weight. Invite a group of 5-7 volunteers to stand in a circle and pass around the weight as fast as they can 2 or 3 times. Stand in the circle yourself, but when it comes to you, point to the next person and continue having the group pass the weight. Ask the group or the person who passed it to you, “How did you feel when I skipped my turn and made you continue passing the weight?”

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 1-4** the following application (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 38):

As we follow Jesus, we must make sure that we practice what we teach.

- After dismissing the Pharisees with a question that had an inescapable truth, Jesus addressed the crowd and His disciples by denouncing the scribes and Pharisees’ hypocritical religious practices. Jesus’s address in Matthew 23:1-36 is known by many as the “Seven Woes to the Pharisees.”
- Jesus addressed two ways the Pharisees and scribes were hypocritical. First, they were not practicing what they preached. They sat in the seat of Moses to teach, which Jesus commended them for, but what they did wrong was they didn’t practice what they taught.
- The Pharisees built a fence around the Law of Moses to prevent them from getting anywhere near breaking it. What they ended up doing, however, was following their own version of the law, which had nothing to do with pursuing holiness. They also demanded that the people hold to the oral tradition as they did. There are a total of 613 laws in the Old Testament. The difficulty of keeping the law doesn’t just come from the sheer number of laws but also from the fact that just breaking one meant you’ve broken the entire law (Jas. 2:10). Therefore, attempting to keep the law in itself would have been quite the burden. Adding laws to the laws would have been an unbearable weight. The law was never meant to save but to show the people of God their need for a Savior (Gal. 3:19-26).

CHAIR OF MOSES

This seat was an actual seat that the Pharisees would sit in when they would teach in the synagogue, and it also represented the authority to teach the law like Moses in the synagogue.¹

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“It is a deadly thing to desire the applause of men, for once you receive it your flesh enjoys it, and you want it more and more. As a result, you become less and less content with the approval of God.”²

—David Platt

DISCUSS: It is sometimes difficult to avoid hypocritical living. Ask (DDG p. 38):

What are some things that we can do to help us avoid hypocritical religion? (follow our personal convictions without presenting them as the divine Word of God; ask God to show us the difference between what He requires versus our personal preferences; continue believing the gospel by trusting the Word; living out our lives like Jesus would)

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 5-7** (DDG p. 38):

The Pharisees were blinded by their religion because of their love of people's praise. Because of it, they completely missed the presence of the Son of God.

- Jesus then addressed the Pharisees' false piety. The Pharisees displayed an attitude that looked very religious through their supposed strict adherence to the law. And they did so bowing down at the altar of people's praise. Everything they did, they did to be seen. Jesus addressed this in part in Matthew 6:5 when He said that the hypocrites who pray publicly and loudly have received their reward (e.g., the praise of people).
- They wore enlarged phylacteries to show how serious they were about keeping God's commands. They wore their tassels unnecessarily long as a sign of their piety (Num. 15:38-41; Deut. 22:12). They always wanted to sit in the place of honor, where they could be seen by everyone, including the seat of Moses, making the seat of Moses less a place to teach the Word of God and more a position of prominence. They desired to be greeted in the marketplace with honor, and they loved being called rabbi because it set them apart from everyone else.
- God never designed the law to be used the way the Pharisees used the law. The purpose of the law was to point to Jesus. But because the Pharisees weren't really following the law, they missed Jesus altogether.

DISCUSS: It's easy to let pride take hold and want to be praised by men. Though we cannot judge others' hearts, discuss in groups of 3-4 (DDG pp. 35,38):

From Day 3 in the DDG: **How do you pursue authentic and genuine faith rather than one based on appearances?** (pray for Holy Spirit guidance and conviction; check your own motives; obey and serve out of a response to God's love and grace; have a good friend keep you accountable)

TRANSITION: The devil tries to tempt us to desire the praise of men. When we fall for it, we find that we have strayed from God's calling for us to pursue Him only. The Pharisees not only didn't practice what they preached and desired the praise of men, but they misled people into their way of religion.

PHYLACTERIES

Objects, also called frontlets, worn on the forehead or upper arm, containing Scripture passages, taking Deuteronomy 6:8 literally. Jews wore them during prayer time, except on Sabbath and feast days.



Scan this QR code for a deeper understanding of the significance of phylacteries.

POINT 2

JESUS DENOUNCES MISLEADING RELIGION (MATT. 23:13,15).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 23:13,15** from his or her Bible.

13 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you don’t go in, and you don’t allow those entering to go in. **15** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to make one convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as you are!”

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 13** (DDG p. 38):

The Pharisees taught a man-made religion masked as God’s law, preventing themselves and others from truly entering the kingdom of God.

- “Woe” is an expression of grief or an expression of condemnation. Jesus used this word as He denounced the hypocritical religion of the Pharisees as both an expression of grief and as a warning of the coming condemnation for their hypocrisy. The word *hypocrite* comes from a Greek word that was originally used for actors in plays who switched masks to play multiple roles in the same play.³ The scribes and Pharisees were following and teaching a man-made religion masked as God’s law.
- Jesus, calling the Pharisees hypocrites, denounced their actions, saying they shut the door of the kingdom to themselves and didn’t let others enter the kingdom either. They were so focused on entering through their own efforts of pursuing holiness in following the law and teaching others to do the same that they didn’t realize they could not be successful. The man-made laws, the oral tradition, of the Pharisees only stopped them from seeing their need for a Savior. They desired to keep the law so intently that they basically created a new religion that brought them nothing but condemnation.
- John 3:18 says, “Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.” Jesus came not to condemn but to save, but many, like some of the Pharisees, who do not listen have chosen to remain in their condemnation for their sin.

BRAINSTORM: Many of us can be modern-day Pharisees without knowing it. In pairs, discuss this application bridge point (DDG p. 38):

What are some possible modern-day pharisaical beliefs within the church? (Christians must dress nicely in shirt and tie to go to church; worship music should only be hymns; worship music should only be modern and uplifting; you must get your act together before you can become a Christian)

MATTHEW 23:14

Omitted from modern-day Bible translations because its prior inclusion and translation were based on manuscripts that were late and inconsistent with earlier manuscripts that did not have this verse. It was most likely added by scribes, not by Matthew himself.

EXPLAIN: Jesus spoke woe to the Pharisees not only for preventing people from entering the kingdom of God but also for spreading that news to others. Using the content below and **verse 15**, explain (DDG p. 38):

The Pharisees, through their works-based religion, inadvertently were growing the kingdom of hell instead of the kingdom of God.

- The second way that the scribes and Pharisees were misleading people was through their making proselytes, or converts. The Pharisees spared no expense to travel over land and sea to make one convert—a Gentile, or someone outside of Israel. The problem was they converted people to their form of holiness based on man-made laws. Through their oral tradition, they were driving people further into condemnation by unknowingly leading them into Satan’s trap. A few times in the Gospels, Jesus called them children of Satan (Matt. 12:44; 23:33; John 8:44). They thought they were bringing people into the family of God, but they were giving the people the kind of false salvation that would send them straight to hell.
- Jesus’s tone was unmistakably harsh as He denounced the scribes and the Pharisees in front of the crowd, and understandably so. Their oral tradition didn’t just condemn them, it also condemned the people who followed them. In Revelation 22:18-19, God warned against adding to or taking away from the Word of God. For people who don’t heed that warning, God promised plagues and death.
- Even though it is possible we can be led astray by other people’s hypocrisy, this doesn’t absolve us from the guilt that comes from not following Jesus. We must make sure that the Jesus we are following is the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus’s denouncement of the Pharisees should push us to take advantage of the access that we have to the Word, prayer, the church, and the Holy Spirit.
- God takes seriously the way we can mislead or misinform people. If through our ignorance or disbelief we lead others astray, then we are like the Pharisees, who will be judged. Let’s make sure we point people to Jesus, and nothing else, as the only way to salvation.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 38)

How can we guard against leading others astray as well as guard against being led astray by others? (know Scripture well; know God and His heart; prioritize the relationship we have with Jesus as we live in obedience; serve with humility and joy)

TRANSITION: Hypocritical and misleading religion on the outside seems deep because it typically involves a lot of pious activity. In reality, hypocritical and misleading religion barely scratches the surface of the gospel because it relies on something that is not Christ for salvation. To address this, Jesus continued in denouncing the Pharisees’ false and superficial religion.

POINT 3

JESUS DENOUNCES SUPERFICIAL RELIGION (MATT. 23:23-28).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 23:23-28** from his or her Bible.

23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others. **24** Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, but gulp down a camel! **25** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. **26** Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside of it may also become clean. **27** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. **28** In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

INTERACT: Call attention to the statement below (DDG pp. 38-39). Then divide the group into two groups, having one list and support the Pharisees’ “good deeds” from **Matthew 23:23-28** and having the other group list and refute their actions.

The scribes and Pharisees obeyed some laws to seem righteous and holy but disobeyed bigger matters of the law, not realizing righteousness is found in Jesus alone.

- The intensity of the scribes and Pharisees’ oral tradition made the depth of their piety look honorable. As we said in Point 1, the honor of people was what they strove for. Their pious practices were no more than a superficial, hypocritical religion that led to nothing but death.
- Jesus’s illustration in verse 24 was a wordplay that many in the crowd would have recognized. The words “gnat” and “camel” are very similar in Aramaic. Gnat was the Aramaic word *galma*, and camel was the word *gamla*.⁴ Gnats and camels were both unclean according to the law (Lev. 11:4,23,41). Gnats were common pests that would often find their way into wine bottles, making the wine unclean. Jews screen over their wine. The Pharisees would cover their wine to stop the smallest unclean thing from spoiling it, but their efforts at holiness still allowed them to eat a camel, an unclean animal.

ASK: The Pharisees’ hypocrisy created a shallow religion. Ask (DDG p. 39):

How do we avoid superficial and shallow religion? (know that Jesus saves us not by our efforts; live in humility, growing in obedience, but knowing we’re sinners; follow Christ not to be honored by men but by God alone)

READ: Invite someone to read the following key doctrine (DDG p. 39):

Key Doctrine #71: Justification by Faith: Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ and not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

READ AND DISCUSS: Reread **verses 25-28** out loud and ask, "How do you explain the analogy of the cup and the tomb in terms of how they relate to justification by faith?"

EXPLAIN: Using the content below and the key doctrine above, explain from **verses 25-28** how, unlike the Pharisees' understanding, justification is by faith.

- Another smokescreen that the Pharisees employed was that of life and righteousness. They were like cups and plates that were clean on the outside but dirty on the inside. The problem with a cup and a plate that were dirty on the inside is that everything they contained became dirty. Jesus told the Pharisees that they needed to clean the inside first. Dirty cups and plates are useless if they are only clean on the outside. Inwardly the scribes and Pharisees were greedy and self-indulgent. They wanted honor, money, and respect, and they didn't care who they had to take down to get them.
- Jesus also likened them to whitewashed tombs. He meant that their man-made religion covered up their impurities and gave them the appearance of life, while on the inside they were dead. The scribes and Pharisees were like whitewashed graves because they seemed to be helping people avoid uncleanness but were making the people unclean as they masked death behind the appearance of life and righteousness.
- Salvation based on works is dead. It gives the appearance of life (everything looks good on the outside), but there is no life whatsoever within. The scribes and the Pharisees sought to be justified based on their works. But justification can only happen through faith in Jesus. The scribes and the Pharisees completely missed the reality that they couldn't do or be good enough to get to God by themselves.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 39)

How can a belief that righteousness is attained through our effort lead to spiritual pride or a lack of understanding the grace of God? (we think we can be good enough on our own; we don't rely on God; we don't humble ourselves; we don't think we need a Savior; we don't see how undeserving we are and thus won't be truly grateful to Jesus)

WHITEWASH

Whitewash was a plaster-like substance made with lime that was used to both hide impurities and mark graves.⁵ Whitewash was used to mark tombs so that Jews who didn't know where graves were could easily spot them and preserve themselves from becoming ceremonially unclean.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus denounced the religious leaders for practicing heartless religion and for believing that their external conduct made them right with God. When we trust in Jesus, we are made right with God, and He changes our hearts so that we can love and obey Him. Because we now, in Christ, have the capacity to love God, we seek to demonstrate our love for Him through obedience, demonstrating true religion before a watching world.

HEAD:

Jesus doesn't like religion that doesn't express the heart of God. It's hypocritical, misleading, and superficial. Jesus denounced this type of religion because it caused the people who followed it to stand condemned before God. The gospel isn't a call to do better and look better. The gospel is the good news that even though you can't do enough to save yourself, Jesus could, and He did. We stand condemned if we trust in our own effort, but if we place our faith in Jesus, we stand before God justified.

Why is hypocritical, misleading, and superficial religion dangerous?

HEART:

Jesus denounced the Pharisees because He wanted the people to stop following their practices. God takes it seriously when we add to and take away from His Word. If we choose to follow a hollow religion, we are responsible, not the person who led us astray. Jesus desires that we pursue true religion because it leads to Him. Jesus's denunciations shouldn't cause us to live in fear; they should cause us to be more confident in His salvation.

In quiet reflection, what are some hypocrisies in your life that you can confess to God?

HANDS:

Christians can love God with all that we have and all that we are. Before a watching world, we can demonstrate obedience to Jesus and submission to His authority, not because it saves us but because He saves us. We are called to share the gospel with our words and our actions, taking care not to mislead anyone with our preferences. Jesus loved us by meeting us where we are; we now get to do the same for others.

How can we demonstrate true religion in our daily lives so that others may see and hear the good news of Jesus?

PRAY: Jesus, You make the way easy for us to know You and enter Your kingdom. Help us not to make it harder by making works righteousness our priority. Help us be obedient to You out of love and joy. We love You. Amen.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Righteous deeds are not the root of salvation, as taught by all other religions; they are the fruit of true salvation—of already being made righteous before God."⁶

—Gregory Brown

POINT 1: JESUS DENOUNCES HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION

(MATT. 23:1-7).

+ COMMENTARY

“To the Pharisee, righteousness meant outward conformity to the Law of God. They ignored the inward condition of the heart. Religion consisted in obeying numerous rules that governed every detail of life, including what you did with the spices in your cupboard (Matt. 23:23-24). The Pharisees were careful to say the right words and follow the right ceremonies, but they did not inwardly obey the Law. God desired truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6). To preach one thing and practice another is only hypocrisy.”⁷

POINT 2: JESUS DENOUNCES MISLEADING RELIGION

(MATT. 23:13,15).

+ ILLUSTRATION

Jack was an amazing chef who went to culinary school, studied hard, and graduated at the top of his class. After graduation though, he realized he didn't have the connections and experience that many of his classmates had to find a job. Discouraged, he decided to open his own small restaurant. But without the necessary finances, his food couldn't compete with other restaurants. Despite all his work and dedication, his restaurant struggled and closed down. Jack learned that achieving great things often requires more than just work, dedication, and desire.

This story illustrates the reality that hard work and dedication, while good, aren't everything. When the object of our faith is us and our own work, we will never be able to receive the eternal life that Jesus promises. If, however, Jesus is the object of our faith, we will receive eternal life because His achievements successfully made a way for us to get that which sin stole.

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THE DIVIDING PROPHET

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus divides the wise and the fools (Matt. 25:1-4,13).
2. Jesus divides the diligent and the faithless (Matt. 25:24-30).
3. Jesus divides the compassionate and the indifferent (Matt. 25:31-40).

Background Passage: Matthew 25

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Followers of Jesus are to live expectantly, faithfully, and compassionately as they await His return and His coming kingdom.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus promised that one day He will return to usher in the fullness of God's kingdom. Until that day, Jesus instructed His followers to make the most of their time, living as His ambassadors, telling others how they too can be part of the coming kingdom.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have come to know the exceeding value of God's kingdom, we urgently proclaim the gospel to the world so that others might be brought into the kingdom as well.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **How do parables help us understand the truths Jesus conveyed?** (parables help us picture the things He taught that are hard to understand; the imagery in parables brings Jesus's truths to life; parables make truths more memorable; they position you to see the truths from the right perspective; they help make truths that seem abstract more tangible)

TRANSITION: Jesus promised that one day He will return. When He returns, He will divide people into one of two categories: those who have placed their faith in Him for salvation and those who have placed their faith in something else. Jesus desires for us to be prepared for His return. We don't know when He will come back, but we know for sure that He will come back. In the meantime, He has given us good work to do to build His kingdom, not that our work can earn us our salvation but it is evidence of our salvation.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- In His last week on earth before His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus's disciples, sitting privately with Jesus, asked when He was coming back at the end of the age (Matt. 24:3). The disciples understood and believed that Jesus had to go away, but they also knew that He would one day return to restore all things. Jesus answered them with parables—fictional stories used to convey moral and spiritual truth—to explain that no one knows the time or hour, but it was still necessary for them to prepare for His return and work to build His kingdom while they waited.



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POINT 1

JESUS DIVIDES THE WISE AND THE FOOLS (MATT. 25:1-4,13).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 25:1-4,13** from his or her Bible.

1 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. **2** Five of them were foolish and five were wise. **3** When the foolish took their lamps, they didn’t take oil with them; **4** but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps. . . . **13** Therefore be alert, because you don’t know either the day or the hour.”

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 1-4** Jesus’s parable about the kingdom of heaven (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 46).

In God’s kingdom, Jesus will one day return like a groom on his wedding day, and His people need to be expectant of it, prepared, and ready.

- In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus described the kingdom of God in the setting of a wedding feast. Back then, groomsmen and bridesmaids had specific jobs. The groomsmen would usher the groom from his home to the home of his bride to pick her up. The bridesmaids would be ready to usher the bride and groom into the groom’s home for the wedding feast when they arrived.
- If the wedding feast was late in the evening, being dark outside, the bridesmaids’ job was to have lamps prepared to show the bride and groom the way to the feast. Being a bridesmaid was a position of honor, much like it is today. But in the parable, not all the bridesmaids gave their position its proper weight.
- Everything about the ten bridesmaids was the same except one thing. Five were wise, and five were foolish. The five who were foolish brought only their lamps; they did not prepare for any extenuating circumstances. They did not stay alert for possible delays. The five who were wise, however, brought their lamps and extra oil in anticipation of any problems. They wanted the groom to have a perfect day, and they thought about all they could do to make that happen for him.

ASK: Let’s not be like the foolish bridesmaids. Ask (DDG pp. 42,46):

From Day 2 in the DDG: **What are some things that we can do to stay prepared for Jesus’s return?** (live devoted to God; forgive others; share the gospel with others; be the hands and feet of Jesus in service; pursue a relationship with God through prayer and reading His Word)

VIRGIN

In this context, “virgin,” *parthenoi* in Greek, refers to a young woman. Jesus’s referring to the ten women as virgins has more to do with their role as bridesmaids than with their purity in this parable.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Watchfulness is required, lest Christ come to take the church for his bride at the least expected moment, when some of those waiting are seeking the praise of others.”¹

–Augustine (354–430)

SAY: “Though we know our works don’t save us, being ready and alert for Jesus’s return involves works.” Invite a volunteer to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 46).

Key Doctrine #72: Justification and Works: Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below and **verse 13**, highlight the fact that though we don’t know when Jesus will return, we need to be alert.

- The parable of the ten virgins was part of Jesus’s response to the disciples’ question on when He would return (24:3). Jesus was teaching His disciples that they would be wise to prepare for Him to possibly take longer to return than they might expect. At the same time, they needed to be ready because He could return at any moment. The question for the disciples wasn’t if Jesus was coming but when. Jesus taught them to be alert because no one knows the day or hour except God the Father.
- As Jesus delivered His final teachings to His disciples, He showed them that justification and works go hand in hand. Like the bridesmaids in the story, His disciples were chosen to do a very important job, not to earn their salvation but because they had received that salvation as a gift by faith.
- We are not justified by anything that we ourselves have done, can do, or will do in the future. We are justified solely based on our faith in the finished work of Jesus, who took our place on the cross. Our good works are not our key into the kingdom of heaven, they are the evidence that we belong. Good works are the fruit of faith in Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Good works are reflections of our love for God and our faith in Jesus. James 2:17 says, “Faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.”

DISCUSS: As we are to be prepared and alert in service to Christ, not knowing the hour when He will return, ask (DDG p. 46):

How do good works verify genuine faith and make our justification evident to others? (good works show that faith is not just passive belief; good works are a reflection of the character of God; good works accompanied with speaking the gospel message are a tangible way for us to reflect Jesus)

TRANSITION: Jesus divides the wise and the fools. Both wisdom and foolishness are reflections of the heart that are seen in our actions. What we do externally reveals who we truly are internally. And what we do with what God gives us is a reflection of what we think about God.

POINT 2

JESUS DIVIDES THE DILIGENT AND THE FAITHLESS (MATT. 25:24-30).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 25:24-30** from his or her Bible.

24 “The man who had received one talent also approached and said, ‘Master, I know you. You’re a harsh man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed. **25** So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ **26** His master replied to him, ‘You evil, lazy servant! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t sown and gather where I haven’t scattered, **27** then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and I would have received my money back with interest when I returned. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. **29** For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. **30** And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 24-27** (DDG p. 46):

Our actions reflect our belief about God, and our belief should include God being all-powerful and sovereign with a desire to build His kingdom. We can either participate in that effort or detract from it.

- In this parable, Jesus divided the diligent and the faithless. The master gave talents to three of his servants while he went away on a journey. He gave them talents in order that they would invest what they were given and return to him what belonged to him with interest. Essentially, the master was asking his servants to build his kingdom while he was away (25:14-23).
- The final servant received one talent—less than the other two servants, but still a considerable amount of money. When the servant came to his master, he showed himself to be faithless through his inaccurate assessment of the master’s character. His perception of the master’s character was inconsistent with the master’s response to the other servants (vv. 21,23). The servant also failed to understand that he and all that he produced belonged to the master anyway. To say that the master reaped where he had not sown was not only inaccurate, it also showed a misunderstanding of his role and his relationship to the master.
- The servant responded to the responsibility given to him by his master in fear instead of faithfulness. He buried his talent in order that he not lose his master’s money. But his action was less an act of self-preservation and more an act of disobedience and disbelief in his master’s goodness. His words and his actions were reflections of his heart. What we do is a direct reflection of what we believe. If we believe Jesus to be good and His salvation to be true, we will respond in loving obedience to building His kingdom.

A TALENT

A talent was the highest currency in Roman society. Just one talent was a considerable amount of money, about two decades worth of wages.

- The servant showed that he was evil and lazy through his disobedience. The master's repetition of the servant's character assessment isn't the master validating what the servant was saying. Instead, the master pointed out the logical inconsistency. If the master truly were as harsh as the servant thought, he should have, at minimum, deposited the talent with the bankers to earn interest. The servant didn't even do the minimum.

ASK: (DDG p. 46)

How are our actions a direct reflection of our understanding of God's character? (if we believe in His holiness, we would want to be holy too; if we believe in His goodness, we will trust Him in trials; if we believe in His grace, we would want to share that grace with others)

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 28-30** (DDG p. 46):

We are blessed in order to advance the kingdom, but for those who reject this privilege, judgment will come.

- The master's expectations were realistic and individualized. But the servant failed to see the honor of his responsibility because he didn't like that he was building a kingdom that wasn't his own. He failed to see that his master desired to be good to him and actually give him more responsibility and authority. So the master responded by taking away the talent that he gave the servant and removing him from his household altogether since the servant's actions proved he didn't belong.
- Then Jesus summarized the parable. Those who are responsible with what's been given them will be rewarded, and for those who are not, their resources will be taken from them and they will be cast out on judgment day. Jesus's reference to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" usually is about the end times. Jesus's warning was stern and serious, not to be taken lightly.

DISCUSS: Because we are saved by grace through faith, it seems easy to be light-handed on our works for the Lord. Discuss (DDG p. 47):

How can we be diligent in God's work, knowing that our faith should be displayed in our service to the King and His kingdom? (in spreading the good news of Jesus to those who don't know; in being hands and feet to those who are marginalized; in showing the love of Christ to the world, knowing He loved us first; in living obedient, holy lives for His glory and not our own)

TRANSITION: God desires that we all take part in advancing the kingdom that He has prepared for us. We each have a different role, but all the work reflects the compassionate heart of God, who sent His Son to die in the place of sinners.

POINT 3

JESUS DIVIDES THE COMPASSIONATE AND THE INDIFFERENT (MATT. 25:31-40).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 25:31-40** from his or her Bible.

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. **34** Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **35** For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; **36** I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? **38** When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? **39** When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

DIAGRAM: Lead the group to make a diagram or chart of the actions of those inheriting the kingdom, as identified by Jesus in **verses 31-36**.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 31-36** (DDG p. 47):

When Jesus returns, He will divide those who inherit the kingdom and those who don't based on their true faith in Christ as seen through their compassionate works on earth.

- Jesus described His return in verse 31 as glorious and authoritative. Jesus will gather every nation. He will divide people like a shepherd divides sheep and goats. The image of Jesus sitting on the throne and separating each person to His right and left gives us context as to what the right and left mean. To the right of a king is always a place of prominence and honor while the left is a place of disgrace.
- Sheep and goats frequently grazed together, but when it was shearing time, they needed to be separated. From afar, sheep and goats may look similar to each other, but sheep had valuable wool. So as Jesus divides the sheep and goats, He puts the sheep in the place of prominence.
- Jesus said in verse 34 to those on His right that they would inherit the kingdom. An inheritance isn't something that you earn; it is something you receive for who you are. Those on the right didn't work to inherit the kingdom of God; their work came because they had an inheritance in the kingdom of God.

- God has prepared His kingdom for us to receive it. Hell was never meant for God's beloved creation. God has always desired that humankind enjoy an eternal relationship with Him unencumbered by the presence of sin. We don't have the ability to do the work necessary to remove our sin and guilt that has condemned us to hell. Jesus has done all that work on our behalf. We are justified by placing our faith in the work that He has done.

ASK: (DDG p. 47)

How does the reality that the kingdom is an inheritance challenge the idea of earning salvation through good works? (the kingdom can't be earned; it places the focus on God's sovereignty; it emphasizes the reality of God's grace)

CHALLENGE: Using the content below and **verses 37-40**, challenge your group to think about the following truth (DDG p. 47):

When believers show love, service, and compassion for those in need, we show our true faith in Jesus and shall have entrance into the kingdom.

- Notice in verse 37 the surprise of the righteous. The great acts of compassion that proved their inheritance with Jesus are unknown to them. They were merely being obedient in loving their neighbor, caring for the downtrodden, and opening up their homes to strangers and foreigners. They knew that being a follower of Jesus meant doing these things Jesus would have done. They didn't realize that He viewed their service as if they had done it for Him.
- Just like how the wise bridesmaids gave proper weight to their position, those on the right are blessed to receive the kingdom that God prepared for them, and their compassion was simply the fruit of their position.
- Our identity as those who will be on Jesus's right should stir our affections to share the message of the gospel through our words and show the message of the cross through our actions.

DISCUSS: It is easy to serve and love family and friends. Discuss (DDG p. 47):

What are examples of serving "the least of these"? (going out of our comfort zone to host a refugee family; adopting a child or a teenager, whether domestic or from a foreign nation; serving consistently in a soup kitchen to build relationships; teaching a Bible study in a prison)

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Decide as a group to do a service project in the coming month or quarter to put this lesson into action.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus promised that one day He will return to usher in the fullness of God's kingdom. Until that day, Jesus instructed us to make the most of our time, telling others how they too can be part of the coming kingdom. Because we have come to know the exceeding value of God's kingdom, we urgently proclaim the gospel to the world so that others might be brought into the kingdom as well.

HEAD:

We are justified through faith in Jesus alone. But being justified by faith in Jesus and not works does not mean that we do not have work to do. God has given each of us gifts and abilities to steward for the growth of His kingdom. Our good works are a tangible demonstration of our faith to the watching world around us. Our good works are how we both wisely prepare and expectantly await the return of Jesus.

What would your current works say of your current faith?

HEART:

The news that we are not justified by our works is good news because we would all fail. Thankfully, we are justified by faith in the work of Jesus. So, we now get to participate in the building of His kingdom through our good works. Our understanding of how justification and works go hand in hand should encourage us. Through our faith in Jesus, we receive the privilege of participating in what God has been preparing since He made the world.

How can we praise God for allowing us to partner with Him in building His kingdom?

HANDS:

Jesus will come back to establish His kingdom one day, and when He does, He will divide the wise and the foolish, the diligent and the faithless, and the compassionate and the indifferent. The gospel is only good news if people hear it and then believe it. The reality of Jesus's return should spur us to prepare by building His kingdom through our proclamation of the gospel. God desires that no one be separated from Him for the rest of eternity. We must steward all that God has given us to bring as many people as possible into the kingdom with us.

How can we steward our gifts for the growth of God's kingdom?

PRAY: Jesus, You don't need us but give us the privilege of being used by You. Help us to be ready in anticipation of Your return. Help us to serve You by serving others. Help us to be faithful in all circumstances. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"True religion is a habitual recollection of God and intention to serve him; and this turns everything into gold. We are apt to suppose that we need something splendid to evince our devotion, but true devotion equals things: washing plates and cleaning shoes is a high office, if performed in a right spirit."²

—John Newton
(1725–1807)

POINT 1: JESUS DIVIDES THE WISE AND THE FOOLS

(MATT. 25:1-4,13).

+ COMMENTARY

“Instead of faithful and unfaithful servants, now we have wise and foolish bridesmaids. Parthenoi (‘virgins’) refers to young women of marriageable age. The word is chosen not to point out their lack of sexual activity but their intimate relation to the bride. The imagery of the parable accurately reflects typical customs of first-century Palestinian wedding festivities. A welcoming processional escorts the newly married couple from the bride’s home to a great banquet at the bridegroom’s home, some unspecified time after the legal nuptials have been exchanged. Torches light the way in the darkness, so all the bridesmaids have to take enough oil to keep them burning for as long as might be necessary. The two groups of women are described as exactly alike in everything except their preparations. Thus the fact that five fall in each category does not teach that there will be the same number saved as lost.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine someone standing at the base of a mountain eager to hike to the top of the mountain. He has filled his backpack with all the necessary supplies and equipment to make the trip. He has a map, a compass, food, water, a first-aid kit, and warm clothing in his backpack. He displays wisdom through his preparedness and should be able to tackle any obstacles that come his way. Because of his preparation, he even eliminates some obstacles, such as hunger and dehydration.

Now imagine a second person at the base of the very same mountain. He has no backpack, no supplies, and no equipment. He has no map, no compass, no food, no water, and no warm clothing. He displays foolishness in his lack of preparation and basically makes the entire trip up the mountain one obstacle after another.

It’s obvious in this example that the person who is well prepared will be able to successfully get to his destination. He will face challenges, but he will do so with the necessary tools. Because of his wisdom, he will be able to enjoy the trip, its views, and feel a sense of accomplishment at the end. On the other hand, the foolish and unprepared person will struggle to gain any headway up the mountain. The difficulties he faces will probably cause him to have to turn back.

EXTRA

When it comes to Jesus's return, being prepared is essential for our journey to His kingdom. To be prepared, we must cultivate a relationship with God through prayer, live under the authority of His Word, and do everything we can to ensure that people who don't know Jesus have a chance to hear the gospel. Our wisdom and preparation will ensure that we are ready to face Jesus's judgment because we will not be judged on the basis of our work but on the basis of His completed work on the cross.

POINT 2: JESUS DIVIDES THE DILIGENT AND THE FAITHLESS (MATT. 25:24-30).

+ **COMMENTARY**

"This parable must not be confused with the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27) though the two parables do have similarities. Please note that each servant in this parable was given money (a talent was worth about twenty years' wages) according to his ability. The man with much ability was given five talents; the man with average ability received two talents; the man with minimal ability received one talent. The talents represent opportunities to use our abilities. If five talents were given to a person with minimal ability, he would be destroyed by the heavy responsibility. But if only one talent were given to a man of great ability, he would be disgraced and degraded. God assigns work and opportunity according to ability. We are living in the period of time between Matthew 25:18 and 19. We have been assigned our ministries according to the abilities and gifts God has given us. It is our privilege to serve the Lord and multiply His goods."⁴

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Imagine you went on a business trip and were put up in a five-star hotel. The hotel only offers valet parking for your vehicle, but they will also wash it and clean the inside if you request it. You take advantage of this perk when you valet your car. Imagine that at the end of your stay at the hotel, you go to get your vehicle, but the valet approaches you weeping and shaking. The valet explains the difficulty in giving you the keys. Imagine that the valet says to you, "Because I am a generous person, I am going to give you the keys to the car that I worked so hard to have." You would take the keys from the valet, explaining that the keys were never his to begin with. You gave him the keys to your car to hold and care for until you returned.

As silly as that sounds, this reflects the posture of many Christians when it comes to giving to God what belongs to Him. We, like the third servant, believe that our money and our work should belong to us, when nothing we have belongs to us at all. What we do with what God gives us proves what we believe to be true about God in our hearts.

POINT 3: JESUS DIVIDES THE COMPASSIONATE AND THE INDIFFERENT (MATT. 25:31-40).

+ COMMENTARY

“The scene switches now to the glorious coming of the Son of Man. He is accompanied in his glory with all the angels, and he sits on his throne of glory. Before him all of the nations will be gathered (25:32). The debated expression ‘the nations’ has been interpreted to mean the church, all humanity, or all unbelievers, but within the Matthean context it is most likely intended to mean both Jews and Gentiles who throughout this age are the combined object of the Great Commission . . . The nations as entities are not judged but rather the people (NIV) within them: ‘He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The shepherd metaphor softens the judgment image but does not diminish the foreboding consequences of separating the sheep from the goats. ‘Sheep’ is a consistent image of the people of God, whether it refers to Israel (9:36; 10:6; 15:24; cf. Ezek. 34) or Jesus’ disciples (Matt. 10:16; cf. 26:31 quoting Zech. 13:7; John 10).”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

When it comes to the produce that makes it on the shelves in our grocery stores, it is important for processing plants to only send out the best of the best. There are several ways that they use machines to separate good apples from bad apples. One common method uses a machine called an apple grader. The apples are placed on a conveyor belt that moves them through the grader. As they pass through the grader, they are scanned by sensors that detect their size, shape, and color. The sensors then send this information to a computer that uses algorithms to determine which apples are good and which are bad. The good apples are then directed to a separate conveyor belt for packaging, while the bad apples are directed to a different conveyor belt for disposal or further processing.

Similar to how the machine separates the good apples from the bad, Jesus also separates the good from the bad. Jesus examines our character, our actions, and our hearts. Jesus knows our hearts better than we do. Jesus can’t be fooled by good works devoid of true faith, or fake faith devoid of good works. The standard for justification is faith in Jesus and Jesus alone. Those who meet the standard of justification by trusting in His saving work are sorted out from those who do not so that the former enter the kingdom of heaven while the latter receive the wages of their sin: death and judgment in hell.

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4. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 92.
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THE TRUE PROPHET

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus, the Word, possesses unique authority (Mark 1:21-22; Deut. 18:18-20).
2. Jesus, the Word, provides eternal life (John 6:66-69).
3. Jesus, the Word, reveals the Father (John 14:6-7).

Background Passages: Deuteronomy 18; Mark 1; John 6; 14

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus fulfills the office of prophet, declaring words of eternal life to the world.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

In the Old Testament, God sent prophets to the people to share His words. Jesus, the Word of God, is the ultimate Prophet, sharing words of eternal life found through faith in Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus came to us sharing words of eternal life found in Him, we share the good news of Jesus with all those around us, always open to follow God's leading to go anywhere to proclaim the gospel.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **Who were amazing teachers in your life, and what made them so?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He immediately turned heads. He taught with authority in a way that completely stunned and amazed the people who heard Him. No one had ever seen or heard anyone teach the way Jesus taught. But Jesus wasn't accepted by everyone. In fact, though many people immediately desired to follow Jesus, they lacked staying power because the teachings of Jesus were very difficult for them to understand and accept. Jesus, the true Prophet, not only declared the way to the Father, but when He did, He revealed Himself as the only way.

TRANSITION: Many have come and claimed to know the way to heaven. But anyone who doesn't begin and end with the work of Jesus is wrong. God sent His Son, Jesus, both to speak the message of eternal life and to do the work necessary for us to receive eternal life. There is no other way to receive eternal life but through faith in Jesus, who alone has provided justification for sinners. Continued and sustained belief in Jesus is the only way to truly know and understand the goodness and grace of God.



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POINT 1

JESUS, THE WORD, POSSESSES UNIQUE AUTHORITY (MARK 1:21-22; DEUT. 18:18-20).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:21-22** from his or her own Bible.

21 They went into Capernaum, and right away he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach. **22** They were astonished at his teaching because he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not like the scribes.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **Mark 1:21-22** (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 54):

Jesus taught with authority in the past, and He continues to teach with authority today through His Word. The sixty-six books of the Bible, coupled with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, tell us all we need to know about Jesus for salvation.

- When Jesus got to Capernaum, He prioritized getting to the synagogue to teach. The synagogue served as a meeting space for the Jews mainly on the Sabbath day. There they would gather for worship, prayer, and a teaching from the Old Testament. It was customary for visiting teachers to be invited into the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach the people. Even though Jesus had no formal training in the law, He taught in the synagogues and was considered a teacher.
- As Jesus taught, the Jews gathered in the synagogue were astonished at His teaching. The Greek word for “astonished” carries the idea of knocking people out of their senses and causing them to feel great emotions like fear, wonder, and joy.¹
- What was amazing about Jesus was that He taught as one who had authority. The Jews were used to the teaching of the scribes. The scribes didn’t teach with authority. In fact, the way that the scribes validated their teaching was typically by referring to other scholars.² Not so with Jesus. He didn’t need any extra-biblical evidence to prove the validity of His words. He was His own reference and source.
- The authority of Jesus over Scripture was evident to all, even His opponents, who constantly tried to explain away His teaching.

ASK: (DDG pp. 49,54)

From Day 1 in the DDG: **What are some things believers can do to live in submission to the authority of Jesus over their lives?** (study the Word with diligence; stay connected to Jesus through prayer; live in joyful obedience; look for Jesus’s guidance in all things)

CAPERNAUM

Located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, this city was an economic center in Galilee. It served as a base of operations for Jesus and His disciples. Jesus was in Capernaum so much that in Mark 2:1 when Jesus returned to Capernaum, the people called it His home.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“A Word sent down from God in heaven, A Word from Christ to mortals given, A Word of truth, a Word of love, What matchless mercies doth it prove: God’s Holy Word. A Word inerrant always true Through all the ages ever new; Though heaven and earth shall pass away, This Word abideth on for aye: God’s Living Word.”³

—R. E. Neighbour
(1872–1945)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Deuteronomy 18:18-20** from his or her own Bible.

18 “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. **19** I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name. **20** But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet must die.”

HIGHLIGHT: Call attention to and read the key doctrine below (DDG p. 54).

Key Doctrine #52: 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).

INTERACT: Ask the group: “How are **Mark 1:21-22** and **Deuteronomy 18:18-20** reflected in this key doctrine?” Clarify their answers when needed with the bullet points on the previous page and below.

- In Deuteronomy, as God was giving instructions to Moses, God told Moses that He would raise up a prophet from among Israel. That prophet would have the words of God in his mouth, and he would speak everything that God commanded of him. His words would be the very voice of God, so much so that anyone who doesn’t listen to the prophet’s words will be held accountable to God Himself.
- Prophets would come before the Prophet that God described, but not all of those prophets would come by the command of God. Some would even speak in the name of other gods. False prophets were to be put to death in Israel because God doesn’t take lightly those who lead His people astray.
- The Prophet God spoke of in Deuteronomy 18 is Jesus. He fulfilled the role of prophet, being the Son of God and the ultimate authoritative teacher of the Word of God. In Him are the very words of eternal life. Jesus, God’s ultimate revelation of Himself to humankind, is the Word and the final revelation of God before the coming of the new kingdom (Heb. 1:1-3). We don’t need further revelation as God has given us all that we need through Jesus.

DISCUSS: In groups of 3-4, ask (DDG p. 54):

How does Jesus’s being the final Word of God shape our understanding of people who claim to have new revelation? (anyone claiming to have new revelation since Jesus is lying; no new revelation is needed; we need to be aware of wolves in sheep’s clothing)

TRANSITION: Jesus’s words are the words of eternal life because through faith in Jesus, we have all that we need for salvation.

POINT 2

JESUS, THE WORD, PROVIDES ETERNAL LIFE (JOHN 6:66-69).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 6:66-69** from his or her own Bible.

66 From that moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. **67** So Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?” **68** Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 66** (DDG p. 54):

True faith accepts and receives Jesus’s sacrifice as the only way to salvation as we give Him our all.

- In John 6:54, Jesus said that in order to receive eternal life, His disciples must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Upon hearing this teaching, many of the disciples—those who had been following Him until this point—went home, either not fully understanding what Jesus wanted of them or not wanting to be fully obedient to such a command. It sounded harsh, demanding their all and full commitment. Those who left were those who followed Jesus because they saw His miracles and heard His teachings, but their astonishment never turned to faith.
- Right before the focal passage, Jesus said He came from heaven and He is the Bread of Life. Anyone who will eat of it (alluding to accepting and receiving Jesus’s broken sacrificial body as payment for sin) receives eternal life (vv. 41,48,51). Many disciples found His teaching difficult to believe and accept (v. 60). So they turned their backs on Jesus and headed home as if Jesus was out of His mind.
- The gospel, though it is good news, is offensive. It’s offensive because the message of the gospel says that we can’t possibly be good enough to save ourselves. No one wants to hear that he or she can’t be good enough to be accepted, but we can’t be good enough. Yet Jesus was good enough on our behalf. We must place our faith in Jesus in order to receive the justification that He offers.
- Every time the gospel is preached, the invitation to surrender to Jesus is extended. There is no such thing as an indifferent response. Everyone falls into one of two categories: those who believe it to be true and show that belief through faith and works, and those who don’t. That choice is a difficult one for some, as many of us don’t want to let go of control of what we have.

THE TWELVE

Though Jesus had many followers and disciples, Jesus had a special connection to His twelve close disciples whom He chose, possibly representative of the twelve tribes of Israel (see Matt. 19:28). This band of followers was privileged to be part of His inner circle, to whom He revealed more truth. They were His friends and confidants.

ASK: (DDG p. 54)

What's the difference between a true disciple and one that just follows for a time but one day will turn away? (a true disciple knows Jesus is the only way to salvation; a true disciple knows that the road with Jesus may be difficult but walks on anyway; a true disciple gives up everything for Jesus; a true disciple has the same mind-set and mission as Jesus)

SUMMARIZE: Call attention to and read the statement below (DDG p. 54). Solicit a response from the group to rank the church's belief in this statement from 0 (complete rejection) to 10 (full acceptance). Allow for some discussion.

Believing and accepting Jesus as God and Savior will give us eternal life.

EXPLAIN: Communicate the meaning of **verses 67-69** using the bullets below.

- After many of His followers abandoned Him, Jesus asked His disciples, "You don't want to go away too, do you?" (v. 67). Peter asked Jesus where else would they go, after seeing that Jesus taught and did things that proved Jesus to be "the Holy One of God," a title of Jesus also found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (but made only by demons who clearly knew who Jesus was and were afraid of His power). Peter's use of the phrase alluded to what Isaiah said no less than thirty times about God being the Holy One of Israel who redeems and saves His people (e.g. Isa. 41:14; 43:3,14; 47:4; 48:17; 54:5).
- Peter then said that Jesus has "the words of eternal life." Only through Jesus can eternal life be found. Even as others who were following Jesus at the time turned away, Peter knew there was nowhere for him to go. Salvation is in Jesus alone.
- Peter's last statement sums up the heart of a true believer. Belief and acknowledgment that Jesus is God and Savior brings salvation and eternal life. A simple yet challenging statement. As believers, we have a choice to make between the truth of Christ and the false truths of this world. What will we choose? So when Jesus asks us if we want to go away, may we answer like Peter and say where else can we go. We have come to believe and know that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

DISCUSS: Eternal life is a gift, but in today's world, some may not think much about it. Ask (DDG p. 54):

What's so amazing about eternal life? (we not only live forever but live forever with Jesus, who loves us completely; with glorified bodies, we get to worship God forever; living joyously on a new earth sounds amazing)

TRANSITION: Eternal life with Jesus is what we were made for. Jesus makes it possible for us to have eternal life by reconciling us to the Father.

POINT 3

JESUS, THE WORD, REVEALS THE FATHER (JOHN 14:6-7).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 14:6-7** from his or her own Bible.

6 Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **7** If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

INTERACT: Place people in pairs and lead them into making an expanded translation of **verse 6**, pointing them to the DDG and Bible reference resources for assistance. Invite pairs to share their expanded translations.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 6** (DDG p. 55):

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only path to God the Father.

- In context, Jesus just told the disciples that He is going to prepare a room for them in His Father’s house, and He would return and take them with Him, for they knew the way. Thomas then said that they didn’t know where He was going, so how could they know the way (vv. 2-5)? Jesus’s answer to Thomas’s question is an authoritative declaration of the truth, telling him and the other disciples that Jesus Himself is the way, the truth, and the life necessary to get to God, for no one goes to the Father except through Him.
- Right from the beginning of Jesus’s statement to Thomas, He declares Himself to be God. The words “I am” come from the Greek equivalent of what God told Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). Jesus declared to them that the way had come, and the way was through Him.
- As the way, Jesus provided reconciliation between God and man as He served as both our propitiation and High Priest through His life, death, burial, and resurrection (Heb. 2:17). As the truth, Jesus perfectly revealed not only the way to the Father but also the Father Himself (Heb. 1:3). As the life, Jesus provided for the resurrection of our souls because those who died with Christ will one day live with Him forever (Rom. 6:8-9). There is no other way to God.
- Many people will say absolute truth doesn’t exist when it comes to God because all religions lead to God. There are two primary problems with this line of thinking: One, the statement refutes itself, being a statement of absolute truth. Two, every religion claims their way to be the way to God, and they all contradict each other. If Jesus says He is the way and Buddha says nirvana is the way, they can’t both be right.
- Jesus’s claim to be the only way to get to God differs from all other religions because every other religion essentially says that you have to do something in hopes that what you do is good enough. Jesus says that you’re a sinner who can’t be good enough, but you can be justified through His finished work if you place your faith in Him.

DISCUSS: Using the Internet or the group's knowledge of other religions, answer the following question (DDG p. 55):

If Jesus is the only way, what are some of the important distinctions between Christianity and other religions? (in Christianity, the path to heaven is through faith in Jesus, while other religions say that the path is through our own works; in Christianity, heaven is guaranteed through Jesus, while all other religions don't guarantee heaven; in Christianity, God in Christ came to us and died, while no other god claims to have done such an act to save)

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 7** (DDG p. 55):

Within the Trinity, Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit are three in one. If we know Jesus, we know the Father and the Spirit.

- Jesus ended His statement to Thomas by declaring Himself and the Father to be inseparable. All throughout the Gospels, the concept of Jesus and the Father being one (10:30) was something the disciples didn't understand. Truthfully, no one really understood what Jesus meant. At one point, some Jews even picked up stones to stone Jesus because of His declaration of being one with the Father (10:31). They saw this as blasphemy because they completely missed that the Son of God, the prophesied Messiah in the Old Testament, had come.
- As we said in Point 2, at least some of the disciples understood that Jesus had the words of eternal life, but their eyes would not be fully opened to who Jesus is and what He came to do until after He revealed Himself post resurrection.
- We have a completed Bible that tells us all we need to know about Jesus for salvation (2 Pet. 1:3). We who have surrendered our lives to Jesus also have the Holy Spirit, who illuminates the truth of God's Word. The Holy Spirit guides us in the knowledge of truth and convicts us of sin (John 16:7).

ASK: (DDG p. 55)

How does knowing Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit are one encourage you? (reminds me I have access to all three Persons; helps me know I have divine power and authority on my side; helps me see a God who is holy yet personal; reminds me that God loves me with His all)

TRANSITION: The Bible makes it clear that the only path to God the Father is through the Son. In Jesus we have all that we need to see and know the Father.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: In the Old Testament, God sent prophets to the people to share His words. Jesus, the Word of God, is the ultimate Prophet. Because Jesus came to us sharing words of eternal life found in Him, we share the good news of Jesus with all those around us, always open to follow God's leading to go anywhere to proclaim the gospel.

HEAD:

Jesus is the true Prophet who speaks the words of God with all authority. In the Old Testament, God sent prophets to speak on His behalf, but they all pointed to Jesus. Jesus is the only way sinners can get to the kingdom of God. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die in our place. Jesus is the only name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).

How does Jesus's death and resurrection demonstrate God's love for humanity?

HEART:

Jesus's authority was tested again and again by religious leaders, but they could never discredit Jesus. Everyone who heard Jesus teach recognized that He taught with an authority unlike anyone else. Today, Jesus's authority as the way, the truth, and the life continues to be tested in the world around us. But even though the gospel message isn't accepted by the world around us, the gospel is still true. This should give us confidence and peace as we seek to live in relationship with Jesus.

How can you praise God for the steadfast truthfulness of His Word?

HANDS:

Jesus is the true Prophet who provided salvation and revealed the way to the Father. As those who have surrendered to the lordship of Jesus, we should be filled with gratitude because of the relationship Jesus has won for us. But Jesus also commanded that we take the message of the gospel to the people around us. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. He has put those words in our mouths so that others might find the way to the Father as well. Thus, we must take the message of the gospel with us everywhere we go, ready to share and show the gospel to people who desperately need it.

How will you take Jesus's words of life to those around you?

PRAY: Jesus, only through You can we have eternal life. Thank You for Your sacrifice that we may have access to the Father. Help us share with others that You are the way, the truth, and the life. There is no one like You. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"It is not only impossible but useless to know God without Jesus Christ."⁴

—Blaise Pascal
(1623–1662)

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS, THE WORD, POSSESSES UNIQUE AUTHORITY (MARK 1:21-22; DEUT. 18:18-20).

+ ILLUSTRATION

When Jeff Han, a blind tech blogger, first heard about the iPhone, he emailed Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, to ask how the iPhone was accessible to the blind. Jobs replied and invited Han to Apple's headquarters to show him iPhone features, such as voiceover, which read aloud the contents of the screen, and adjustment settings that made the iPhone more accessible. Han left the meeting thankful to Jobs for improving the lives of the visually impaired. Steve Jobs, as the pioneer of Apple, was the best possible person to help Jeff Han learn the accessibility features of the iPhone. In a similar way, Jesus, as the ultimate authority over the Word, has the ability to amaze His people when He reveals the Scriptures like no one else.

POINT 2: JESUS, THE WORD, PROVIDES ETERNAL LIFE (JOHN 6:66-69).

+ ILLUSTRATION

In *A Beautiful Mind*, a movie released in 2001, John Nash, a genius mathematician who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, had colleagues and friends at Ivy League universities turn away from him as his condition became worse. His wife and some of his other friends and colleagues, however, supported him, even though they struggled to understand his condition. Despite the challenges he faced, he eventually won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1994. Similarly, those around Jesus struggled to understand His teaching, and many people who began following Him eventually turned away. But those who didn't were eventually able to see and understand the authority by which He taught, spoke, and performed miracles.

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THE HOUR HAS COME

“He Holds His Priesthood Permanently”

by Andrea Burke

+

Four years ago, my husband and I went through the family court adoption process. The task was daunting but one that we knew needed to happen. The thing is we're not lawyers. We're not judges. We needed someone to step into that gap for us, and so, we hired the best adoption attorney we could find and set to work. After months of waiting for court dates, documents, and nervously awaiting phone calls, we eventually sat in a marble courtroom at an ornately-carved table where our daughter's feet couldn't even touch the floor.

Our lawyer arrived with beefy stacks of paperwork—all of the official documentation to present to the judge, who would give his final stamp of authority. It culminated in the moment he swirled his signature across the last line on the last page, stating this act was “final and irrevocable,” forever changing our lives.

I can't think of many modern examples of how we can understand the work of the high priest in Scripture, but that moment in that courtroom was one. The work of the high priest wasn't just the work of someone who knew all the religious laws, nor was it the priesthood as we understand it today—at best, denomination-dependent, or at worst, cloaked in scandal. The work of the high priest was one of maintaining not just a religious status but a legal one. Where the people could not make amends or sacrifices for their sins, the high priest

bore the weight and responsibility to follow and obey God's laws and rituals to stand in on behalf of the people. The high priest, if you will, knew the right paperwork to fill out, where to find the notaries, and what to say when standing before the judge. Where the people were guilty, the high priest stepped in as a lawyer—the kind no one could really afford.

LEGALLY QUALIFIED

The high priest was a role that all of Israel was dependent on. As laid out in the book of Leviticus, under the law, the high priest stood as mediator between God and the people. Where the people fell short, the high priest made sacrifices. He stood as a “holier” priest, one who could step into the places where those who were unclean could not. He was like a lawyer doing what needed to be done on behalf of those who were not qualified. Clothed in glorious raiment, his role in the tabernacle was elevated and nearly royal.

Where the law stopped short and humans simply could not make the ends meet, Jesus arrived as our final High Priest. Christ reminds us in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Jesus was qualified beyond any other priest. Holier than any other man. Set apart in more ways than any other priest who came before Him. Able to make a perfect sacrifice and mediate to the fullest. Jesus had the

sinlessness, the access to God, and all of the qualifications to finish the work He set out to do.

MEDIATOR BEFORE THE JUDGE

When we sat in the courtroom waiting for the judge, our lawyer filled us in on everything he knew about the judge. “He’s pretty straightforward,” our lawyer said. “And he’s always running late.” Clearly this wasn’t the first adoption case our lawyer had worked on. In fact, that’s why we hired him. He knew the judge, and as soon as the judge entered the room, it was clear the judge knew him. A familiar friendliness lingered as we waited for the small talk to subside.

The Judge is eternally satisfied. The Priest has made perfect peace. The blood of the final sacrifice has been spilled. Sufficient. Done.

Jesus does not come before God the Father as a stranger. He is not new to the system, bumbling along like a fresh-out-of-law-school attorney. The Judge is His Father. And Jesus stands as High Priest, reminding us that He also presents us as the ones He has atoned for. Not only is the Judge our Father too, but the lawyer is our Brother. His perfect record and perfect relationship with the Judge establishes Him as the perfect Priest. We have nothing to fear.

FINAL AND IRREVOCABLE

The high priest was to bear the judgment of the people on himself. Part of his priestly attire literally called upon him to carry the names of the tribes of Israel etched on onyx stones on his shoulders (Ex. 28:9-12). No doubt, mediating the sins of God’s people was a weighty

and serious burden to bear. The Day of Atonement called for the high priest to make a sacrifice on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. On one day only, this anointed priest would strip himself of the colorful high priestly garments and put on a linen robe, putting aside the glory and beauty of his normal attire to take on the plain and humble. He would enter the holy of holies once a year to make this peace with God. Perfect animal sacrifices, without flaw or blemish, were required, and their blood provided the atonement. This imagery drenches the Old Testament, and begs the question—Is this really sufficient?

Then Jesus arrived, our ultimate High Priest, who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice once and for all. Just as our judge proclaimed the legal work was “final and irrevocable” as we sat in that courtroom, so God the Father accepted Christ’s work as final and irrevocable. The Judge is eternally satisfied. The Priest has made perfect peace. The blood of the final sacrifice has been spilled. Sufficient. Done.

If we’re honest, books like Leviticus cause our eyes to glaze over, and the fine details of the law are lost. Yet Christ’s being our High Priest is the great fulfillment of an echoing picture throughout Scripture. Someone holier than us had to come and make things right, for we cannot sit before the eternal Judge without a mediator. In stepped Christ to this musty earth, laying aside His glory to make final atonement. “The hour has come,” Jesus said in John 12:23, and into the heavenly holy of holies He stepped as our perfect mediator, our perfect High Priest.



THE ANOINTED PRIEST

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's followers sacrifice greatly for Him (John 12:1-3).
2. Jesus's followers prioritize being with Him (John 12:4-8).
3. Jesus's followers help others believe in Him (John 12:9-11).

Background Passage: John 12

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Those who follow Jesus are called to sacrifice in order to show His worth, prioritizing Him above all as they point others to Him.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, she demonstrated that she was willing to sacrifice greatly because she treasured Him more than anything else. A short time after this, Jesus would sacrifice Himself on the cross so that we might be forgiven of sin and be made right with God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus is our greatest treasure, we live with open hands, willing to sacrifice everything to make Him known to the nations.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



CHRIST AS PRIEST

Scan this QR code for a brief theological reflection on Jesus as the High Priest and an explanation of the imagery in the poster.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is the best gift you have ever given or received, and why was it great?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: No one is better than Jesus, and He deserves our best, our all. In this session, we'll read about an extravagant gift given to Jesus, but in essence, the gift was a costly act of service. Throughout history, believers have served Jesus to the point of giving up their lives for Him. They have done so because the gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure in the world and it needs to be shared. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. The purpose is glory for the Lord, and the result is joy for us—always.

SUMMARIZE: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 7: CHRIST AS PRIEST**, noting the symbolism of anointing oil and blood, as you help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- One day before Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, six days before the Passover festival and His crucifixion, Jesus visited with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Just a short time earlier, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, calling him to come out of the tomb that had been his final resting place for four days. This visit no doubt was accompanied by celebration and thanksgiving for the miracle Jesus had performed, but it also gave rise to acts of devotion and rejection that would culminate in the great High Priest's sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S FOLLOWERS SACRIFICE GREATLY FOR HIM (JOHN 12:1-3).

SUMMARIZE: Enlist a volunteer ahead of the group time to provide a summary of Jesus's first encounter with Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38-42.

- Once on His journeys, Jesus visited two sisters, Mary and Martha. The always-hospitable Martha opened her home to Jesus and His disciples. As she ran around the house preparing the food and setting the table, her sister, Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to what He said. Martha grew tired of Mary's idleness and filed a complaint with Jesus. In His loving way, Jesus told Martha that her sister had chosen the better path (see Luke 10:38-42).

READ: Call attention to the first Saturday on **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE** as the date for this session, a brief backtrack in the biblical storyline. Then invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 12:1-3** from his or her own Bible.

1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, the one Jesus had raised from the dead. **2** So they gave a dinner for him there; Martha was serving them, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with him. **3** Then Mary took a pound of perfume, pure and expensive nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. So the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

GUIDE: Call for the group to identify the characteristics for Martha and Mary between Luke 10:38-42 and John 12:1-3 (*Martha: serving through hospitality; Mary: at the feet of Jesus*). Focus on Martha's service in **verses 1-2** with the leader content while inviting responses to the following statement (DDG p. 66).

Martha's service of hospitality was a sacrifice that revealed her devotion to Jesus.

- Martha's delight in serving Jesus was her sacrifice. Previously, her hard work of serving caused her to complain to Jesus about Mary's not helping, perhaps revealing a self-centered motivation. Martha had not stopped serving, but it seems as if she now continued with a mind-set of loving service. Welcoming Jesus into her home and serving Him was how she showed love to her Savior.
- Although we will see that Mary's sacrifice is the focus of the passage, Martha's act of service and hospitality did not go unnoticed as God inspired the apostle John to record it.

ASK: (DDG p. 66)

What adjectives or characteristics express the way we should serve the Lord? (joyfully; humbly; honestly; faithfully; lovingly; eagerly; without hesitation; without wanting anything in return)



MARY, MARTHA, AND LAZARUS

Siblings from Bethany, a small town about two miles southeast of Jerusalem, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. They were close personal friends and disciples of Jesus. He often ate with them.

ILLUSTRATE: Focus attention on **verse 3** by presenting a bottle of perfume or cologne. You may pass it around for your group to smell, or you might spray a small amount into the air (don't overdo it!). The aroma can linger as you explain the significance of Mary's sacrifice with this statement (DDG p. 66):

By anointing Jesus, Mary was giving Jesus her very best, a sacrifice of devotion and worship.

- *Optional:* We don't know what Mary thought exactly as she anointed Jesus's feet and wiped them with her hair, but Jesus mentioned in verse 7 that in this way, she prepared His body for burial. It's possible that Mary, through the prompting of God, was doing more than she knew (ex. John 11:49-53).
- Mary knew the value of what she poured on Jesus. A pound of perfume was a lot of liquid. Judas put the price of this ointment made of nard at three hundred denarii in verse 5. With the common wage being a denarius a day, Mary anointed Jesus with a year's worth of wages. Her sacrifice was great.
- What Mary did was a humble act of love for Jesus. To wipe His feet with her hair meant she would have to let her hair down, no small thing for a woman of her time. A woman's hair was a woman's glory, and she was giving hers to her Lord. Mary's sacrifice was carried throughout the house as her perfume's aroma drifted from room to room. The entire place was filled with the smell of her devotion, an act of faith signifying Jesus's unique role and preparing Him for His unique act of sacrifice on the cross within the week (see v. 7).

DISCUSS: Set up the following question (DDG p. 66) with this reflection on the passage.

- Our service to Jesus is not a one-size-fits-all sacrifice. In the language of this narrative, some have the means to give expensive perfume, and others have only humble service and a plain meal. Jesus receives it all as service to Him—a fragrant offering (see 2 Cor. 2:14-16; Eph. 5:1-2). Because each woman found her place in service to the Lord, the house in Bethany that day was a joyous atmosphere filled with devotion to Jesus.

What types of sacrifices can someone offer to Jesus today? (their time in serving at church or a nonprofit or other places; their efforts in spreading the gospel; their finances to help in evangelistic efforts and social concerns; their skills and talents to help others for kingdom purposes)

TRANSITION: Followers of Jesus can sacrifice and show their love and devotion to Him in many ways based on each person's unique personality and situation. God honors it all if it is a natural outflow of a heart changed by the gospel of Jesus. But this is not the only way Jesus wants us to devote ourselves to Him.

NARD

An oil taken from a plant grown in India. The extraction process was a slow, methodical one. Being imported and hard to extract, it was expensive.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Martha herself was taking great care with the service and was ministering to Christ with all her heart. Mary herself was seated at the feet of Jesus and kissing them. . . . Christ beholds them both with his divine eyes and is cheered and rejoices over the purity of their mode of life and the offering to him of their undefiled service."¹

—Athanasius
(c. 296–373)

POINT 2

JESUS'S FOLLOWERS PRIORITIZE BEING WITH HIM (JOHN 12:4-8).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 12:4-8** from his or her own Bible.

4 Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot (who was about to betray him, said, **5** “Why wasn’t this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” **6** He didn’t say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it. **7** Jesus answered, “Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of my burial. **8** For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

CONTRAST: In groups of 3-4, ask each group to make a list of the differences between Mary’s and Judas’s relationship and response to Jesus.

EXPLAIN: Use the content on **verses 4-6** to explain following idea (DDG p. 66):

Disciples must turn from sin and differentiate between doing the good things—good works—and the better thing—being with Jesus.

- To Judas, the perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus’s feet was just an expense she wasted. The amount of perfume and its quality made it extremely valuable, about a year’s wage for a common laborer. Sold and given to the poor, it could have done much good. Judas’s stated point was not unfounded. In fact, Jesus’s ministry was a testament to the world of how His followers ought to care for those in need.
- The Gospel writer, John, wanted his readers to see who Judas really was—a betrayer (v. 4) and a thief (v. 6). Judas didn’t truly care about the poor any more than he cared about Jesus. Judas was bitter with Mary’s sacrifice because he couldn’t skim anything from it. He saw the perfume as an opportunity for worldly gain rather than spiritual devotion.
- *Optional:* Ironically, Judas failed to recognize the priceless treasure he had, being in proximity to Jesus. Jesus was on His journey to the cross, and the final push would come from Judas’s betrayal for a few months’ wages.
- *Application:* The point here is not that we shouldn’t think through the best use of our resources but that we shouldn’t miss the opportunity to worship Jesus with them. There is nothing better than being with Jesus.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 66)

Why is it sometimes easier to do good works than to spend time cultivating our relationship with Jesus? (it seems more productive to do good works; cultivating a relationship takes time; we are results-oriented people; in doing good works, we feel good about ourselves and others see the results; we forget the reason why we do good)

JUDAS ISCARIOT

Meaning “Judah from Keriath,” a town near Hebron. He was one of the Twelve, Jesus’s chosen group of disciples, and the treasurer of the group. He also betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

EXPLAIN: Help your group understand the meaning of Jesus's response to Judas in **verses 7-8**, specifically regarding His upcoming burial and His precedence over the poor.

- Regardless of what Mary understood about the value and meaning of her expensive sacrifice, Jesus made it clear that her humble act pointed forward to the day that very week when Jesus would die on the cross and be buried hastily in a borrowed tomb.
- To answer Judas's presenting complaint, which again was a false pretense, Jesus declared that His own sacrifice, resurrection, and exaltation were to take precedence even over the needs of the poor. Christians in every generation have the opportunity and responsibility to serve the poor in Jesus's name. But Jesus's presence on earth at this time was unique in all of history. So Mary's extravagance for Jesus's honor was appropriate and not to be castigated.

SUMMARIZE: Because Jesus is not physically present on earth, His disciples may wonder how they can worship and commune with Him. Jesus's disciples in the Gospels certainly struggled to reconcile His departure with His ongoing mission through His church. Though we do not see Jesus face to face, believers still experience Jesus's presence through union with Christ by faith, a union established by the Holy Spirit that empowers our service to the materially poor and especially the spiritually poor.

INSTRUCT: Encourage the group to read silently the key doctrine "Union with Christ" in their DDG (p. 66).

Key Doctrine #70: Union with Christ: At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

ASK: (DDG p. 67)

Though Jesus is not with us physically, how can we spend more time with Him? (having a time of solitude and prayer with Him daily; reading and studying Scripture to know Him better; asking Him constantly how He would have us act in varying circumstances; having a heart that knows He's present and with us constantly; loving one another in the church)

TRANSITION: The household relished the holy moment of worship Mary just performed, even with Judas's foul-smelling question. And as the crowds outside discovered Jesus and Lazarus were both there, they had different responses.

POINT 3

JESUS'S FOLLOWERS HELP OTHERS BELIEVE IN HIM (JOHN 12:9-11).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 12:9-11** from his or her own Bible.

9 Then a large crowd of the Jews learned he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, the one he had raised from the dead. **10** But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also, **11** because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 9** how the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection was both evidence of Jesus's power and also a potential distraction to some that kept them from seeing the miracle-worker in faith (DDG p. 67).

Jesus's miracles drew a crowd, but some simply enjoyed the spectacle and did not turn to trust the miracle-worker.

- Miracles draw a crowd because they point us to the supernatural and they stump us. We can't explain them. People flocked to Jesus to see what He would do as a miracle-worker. Jesus's miracles were not magic tricks or clever sleight of hand but real displays of His authority and power. When Jesus raised Lazarus in John 11, He prayed that His Father would open the crowd's eyes to believe in Him (11:42). The purpose of the miracle was for the salvation of many, not just the raising of one.
- Miracles are rare and can be viewed as a novelty, so they can attract what novelties attract. In John 12:9, people came not only to see the Lord but to see Lazarus, the living miracle. Lazarus was living proof that Jesus has power over death. For practically all people, when the dirt covers the casket of our loved ones, we will not be reunited with them in this life. But Mary and Martha received their brother back four days after he died (11:39-44).
- Jesus stated that He is the resurrection and the life (11:25), and He proved it by raising His friend from the dead. Lazarus's resurrection revealed that Jesus overcomes death on behalf of His people. Lazarus's resurrection also gives hope to every sinner who is dead in their trespasses and sins. When Jesus gets involved, He can bring to life what once was dead.

ASK: Direct groups of 3-4 to share their responses to this question (DDG p. 67):

How have miracles in your life pointed you or others to Jesus? (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

INSTRUCT: Invite learners to take a moment and ponder why people might reject and rebel against the evidence of a miracle, including the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Call for some responses. Then contrast the response of faith with the response of rebellion exemplified in **verses 10-11** (DDG p. 67).

Because of Lazarus's resurrection, many came to believe in Jesus, trusting in what He did in Lazarus's life and what He could do in their lives.

- Lazarus's miraculous resurrection was not only a sight to behold; for some it was also a problem to be solved. Lazarus was alive again—no one could deny that he had been dead four days—but the chief priests sought to kill him along with Jesus. They planned to undo what Jesus had done. Why? Jealousy.
- The chief priests' influence was diminishing and their power was waning. John said many Jews stopped following the chief priests and began to follow Jesus because of Lazarus. But the chief priests refused to accept Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise of sending the Messiah, yet the Jews who put their faith in Jesus recognized by His miracles and teaching that He is the Messiah.
- *Optional:* The chief priests' murderous response and plan validated Jesus's words in Luke 16:31. When speaking of the religious leaders through a parable, Jesus said, "They will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead."

SUMMARIZE: Followers of Jesus are always at risk of being persecuted simply for their association with Jesus. Miracles can draw a crowd, but it's not always a friendly one. Yet the miracle of new life in Christ is an opportunity to share the gospel with a dying world. All of us are dead in our sins until Jesus gets involved. The Holy Spirit gives life to our dead souls. He changes our desires. He redirects our actions. As a result, people will notice. People might follow Jesus because of you, or people might get angry because of your faith. Whatever the world throws at us, however, the worst it can do is kill us, which only ushers us into the loving and waiting arms of Christ (see Matt. 10:27-32). Death isn't final. Jesus will one day resurrect His people and give them a new heaven and new earth to enjoy forever in the fullness of His presence.

DISCUSS: Remind and encourage your group to keep up with the daily readings as you ask (DDG pp. 62,67):

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How does the hope of future resurrection strengthen you now to live for Christ?** (helps us realize our problems are temporary; encourages us to be strong in the Lord; gives us the urgency to spread the gospel)

TRANSITION: The miracle of salvation and new life through faith in Jesus may lead to rejection by some, but to others, it will be a cause to believe in Jesus.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, she demonstrated that she was willing to sacrifice greatly because she treasured Him more than anything else. A short time after this, Jesus would sacrifice Himself on the cross so that we might be forgiven of sin and be made right with God. Because Jesus is our greatest treasure, we live with open hands, willing to sacrifice everything to make Him known to the nations.

HEAD:

We often assume it was easier for eyewitnesses to Jesus's words and deeds to believe in Jesus. Yet Judas, one of the twelve disciples, failed to believe Jesus is the Christ. The chief priests, experts in God's law, failed to believe Jesus is the Son of God. We have the Holy Spirit and the record of Jesus's death and resurrection bearing witness that He is the Christ. May we believe in Jesus like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus did.

What doubts do you struggle with about Jesus, and how does the Bible address those doubts?

HEART:

Mary's example of devotion and sacrifice calls us to examine our own life before Jesus. Do we adore Him as she did? Are we willing to give our best to Him? Is He our greatest treasure? Mary, of course, had the privilege of seeing and being with Jesus in person. But we have the witness of the Holy Spirit, and through Him, Jesus is present with us always. When we fail to sense His nearness on account of apathy or sin, we can ask Him to renew our affections for Him, and we can be sure He will answer that prayer.

What about Jesus makes you love Him more? Meditate on those things until your heart warms toward Him.

HANDS:

Just as Mary is an example of the right affections for Christ, she is also an example of proper sacrifice. She gave Jesus perhaps the most valuable thing in her home. We all have something we can hand over to Jesus today. It may be our work, our money, or our time. Whatever it is, we should ask ourselves how we can honor God with what we have, and we should gladly give it to Him, which may open a channel for the gospel to be preached and heard.

What can you sacrifice to help others see Jesus is everything?

PRAY: Father, help us love Jesus, our Savior, with all that we are and everything we have, making Him and His gospel our first and highest priority for His glory and the good of our fellow human beings. Amen.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"If we really see Jesus for who he is—the almighty, infinite God of the universe who condescended to take on human form so that he could die a brutal death in the place of his rebellious creatures—if we understand his beauty—that he is the all-satisfying, wondrous, joyful God who promises to give peace, blessing, and satisfaction in himself to those who come to him—if we get this, how can we possibly withhold anything from him?"²

—Matt Carter and
Josh Wredberg

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS'S FOLLOWERS SACRIFICE GREATLY FOR HIM (JOHN 12:1-3).

+ COMMENTARY

“The word for ‘pound’, *litra*, denotes a Roman pound weighing 11.5 ounces or 326 grams. That much perfume was a very large amount indeed. Nard is an extract from an aromatic Nepalese plant, *Nardostachys jatamansi*. The perfume was expensive because it was imported from a great distance, as well as having to be extracted from plant material. The process of extraction usually involved large amounts of plant material yielding only a little aromatic oil. Just how expensive this perfume was is revealed in 12:5. Anointing Jesus’s feet with so much expensive perfume was an act of great devotion.

Mary’s wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair also expresses great devotion. A woman’s long hair was regarded as her glory (1 Cor. 11:15; cf. 1 Pet. 3:3). Each time Mary’s anointing is mentioned, reference is made to her wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair (11:2; 12:3). In Luke 7:44 Jesus contrasts the lack of love in the welcome accorded him by Simon the Pharisee with the love shown by a sinful woman: ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.’ Whatever else it signified, wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair revealed the depth of Mary’s devotion to him.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, Paul described how Christ leads believers in triumphal procession as we spread the gospel, using the metaphor of Christians spreading “the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place.” Paul likened the expansion of the gospel to Roman soldiers returning from war. While the victorious soldiers were greeted by the people, priests carried giant censers of smoking incense. The smell would waft like a cloud over the triumphant soldiers as well as the defeated princes dragged behind, who were to be put to death imminently.⁴ Depending on the hearts of those listening, the gospel brings hope or doom.

Our call is not to create the aroma ourselves. We can’t do that no matter how hard we try. Jesus will do the necessary work. He will provide the scent. His call to us is to go about our regular lives with the knowledge that He is Lord and Savior. The world will notice. Some will be saved. Some will not. But in it all, Christ will be honored.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S FOLLOWERS PRIORITIZE BEING WITH HIM (JOHN 12:4-8).

+ COMMENTARY

“Are you like Mary? Or are you like the Judases of the world, who criticize those who are bountiful in their love? What a contrast there is at this point! Judas’s objection to Mary’s action contains the first recorded words of Judas in the Gospels. They are a carping complaint: ‘Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?’ Mary’s first words are a trusting confession, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’ (John 11:32). Out of his greed Judas eventually sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, an amount probably equal to 120 denarii. Mary gave Jesus an offering worth two-and-a-half times that amount. Judas kept the bag, from which he pilfered. Mary broke her box in order that all might be given to Jesus. Judas sought to turn attention from Jesus. Mary sought to turn it to him.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine a regular Bible study on a Wednesday night. In this meeting, week after week, a group gathers to fellowship, read and study God’s Word, talk about Jesus, share the real state of their hearts in confession, and pray for one another. It is a holy gathering, encouraging the hearts of all who attend.

Now imagine an interaction among the group one night. The teaching time is rich, focused on Jesus and His gospel, and everyone is basking in the love of God in Christ. Then someone interrupts with an unfitting word. He begins to say it is okay if others don’t believe what we are saying. After all, there are varying views on many biblical topics. Perhaps he is not a Judas. His intentions are good, but they are misguided. Rather than add comfort, he takes it away. Rather than offer assurance, he diminishes it.

Not every viewpoint is worthy of interaction, and not every environment is the right one to hash out theological differences. Some moments are too holy for anything but savoring Christ. If it is the real Jesus we are rejoicing in—the One whose gospel is simple enough for a child to grasp yet deep enough that no scholar will ever reach the bottom—then we must be careful not to distract others from seeing and savoring Jesus. There is a time for nuanced theological conversations, but knowing the time matters. We may have good questions that deserve a hearing. But we need to be able to read the room and understand that sometimes we might just not understand. When someone is enjoying Jesus, it is wrong to change the subject.

POINT 3: JESUS'S FOLLOWERS HELP OTHERS BELIEVE IN HIM (JOHN 12:9-11).

+ COMMENTARY

"12:9. After Jesus had raised Lazarus, he left almost immediately for Ephraim (11:54). Probably few people apart from the family, mourners and his own disciples had seen him since that time. The report that he was back in Bethany provided an opportunity for a large crowd of Jews . . . to come out and see him. Probably many came from Jerusalem; indeed, so close to the Feast of Passover, doubtless at least some were pilgrims. Lazarus himself drew spectators. If until this point he had shielded himself from much vulgar curiosity, the public nature of this dinner in Jesus's honour made such privacy impossible: the crowds wanted also to see Lazarus.

12:10–11. Thus Lazarus became a focus for the plots of the chief priests. His very life provided a ground for faith in Jesus, so he too had to be destroyed. . . . Although faith grounded on such a sign could not be as pure and strong as faith based on Jesus's word (cf. 10:38), it is far better than no faith. The calibre of their faith is not assessed (unlike the faith of those described in 2:23–25). What is clear is that the raising of Lazarus prompts many Jews . . . to 'go over' to Jesus and put their faith in him: the expressions assume a self-conscious conversion, a move away from the religion practised by the authorities and a move toward genuine trust in Jesus."⁶

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Miracles in the Bible often provided a platform from which the gospel was proclaimed. People heard God's word, and some were saved while some rejected Jesus. As the apostles went out into the world with the gospel, Jesus worked through them to heal the sick and even raise the dead. In many cases, the miracle provided an opportunity for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached, taught, or shared.

We cannot bring miracles about on our own. As we go about our lives, we may experience what we would call a miracle. Perhaps it is an unexplained cure for a disease. Maybe it is a close call where we can't help but sense the Lord's protection. Whatever the case may be, we can use these events as opportunities to share the gospel with those around us. Some may not believe it, but we leave that up to God. His call upon our lives is to bear witness to Him and to leave the saving in His capable hands.

Say: There are things in life that cannot be explained other than by divine intervention. Ask: How can those times become platforms for preaching the gospel, and what would you say to lift Jesus up?

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4. Charles R. Swindoll, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, vol. 7, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 317.
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THE COVENANT- MAKING PRIEST

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son of Man will be betrayed as part of God's plan (Matt. 26:17-25).
2. The Son of Man will be sacrificed as part of God's covenant (Matt. 26:26-28).
3. The Son of Man will be celebrated as part of God's kingdom (Matt. 26:29-30).

Background Passage: Matthew 26

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus presented a picture of the sacrifice He would make on the cross and also affirmed that He would be victorious: His kingdom would not fail.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

After God made a covenant with Israel and sealed it through sacrifices, the people of God broke the covenant, worshiping false gods. God promised to enact a new covenant in which He would forgive sins and write His law on His people's hearts. At the last supper, Jesus explained that His sacrificial death would establish this new covenant and bring forgiveness of sin.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have new life through Christ, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, looking back to Christ's finished work and also looking forward to His glorious return when we celebrate it with Him.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is the craziest promise you've ever made to someone, and did you fulfill it?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: As Jesus prepared to go to the cross, He instituted the new covenant with His people. In Christ, God would seal salvation through the sacrifice of His Son. The covenant required nothing of God's people. Jesus would complete all the work Himself. He would give His life as a ransom for many and shed His blood to pay the penalty for sins. Jesus, alone on the cross, would complete the work of salvation, and the Lord's Supper would be His people's reminder of their redemption in Christ.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Jesus continued His march to the cross, but He stopped to celebrate Passover with His disciples. The time of His departure was near, and one among them would betray Him. Yet Jesus did something more than simply predict His death and resurrection—He performed the first Lord's Supper. Christians have taken the Lord's Supper ever since as a reminder of Christ's broken body and blood shed upon the cross. This signifies the new covenant between Jesus and His people, a promise sealed by Jesus's blood to save His people from their sins.



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POINT 1

THE SON OF MAN WILL BE BETRAYED AS PART OF GOD'S PLAN (MATT. 26:17-25).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 26:17-25** from his or her Bible.

17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" **18** "Go into the city to a certain man," he said, "and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time is near; I am celebrating the Passover at your place with my disciples.'" **19** So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. **20** When evening came, he was reclining at the table with the Twelve. **21** While they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." **22** Deeply distressed, each one began to say to him, "Surely not I, Lord?" **23** He replied, "The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me. **24** The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born." **25** Judas, his betrayer, replied, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" "You have said it," he told him.

GUIDE: Point to #1 on **PACK ITEM 2: PASSION WEEK MAP**, showing the traditional location of the Upper Room, and to Thursday on **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE** to show where we are in the Passion week. Use **verses 17-19** and the notes below to guide your group to understand the following idea (DDG p. 74):

Jesus's death during Passover pointed to God's continual love and plan of salvation for His people through a sacrifice.

- Jesus directed His disciples to go to a certain man and let him know that "My time is near" and He would keep the Passover at his house. Jesus was speaking of the time of His impending death and sacrifice.
- Because many expected the Messiah to be a political and military leader who would restore the nation of Israel, not die for the world, Jesus's disciples had a hard time understanding that Jesus's death was part of God's plan.
- Jesus, in celebrating the Passover, a meal that commemorated God's rescue through a blood sacrifice, alludes to how His blood would be spilled for our salvation. God's plan in the Passover to save His people and in Jesus's sacrifice of Himself to save the world was precise.

COMPARE: Ask your group to compare God's plan of salvation in the Passover with His plan of salvation in Jesus's death when they answer (DDG p. 74):

How does God's plan of salvation reveal His love? (in offering mercy to undeserving people; in His patience in not giving up on His image-bearers; in His sacrifice of His Son for our salvation)



THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Though some see the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread to be the same, to make a distinction, Passover is one day and the Feast is a period of seven days following Passover where only unleavened bread is eaten (Ex. 13:6-8). Both are a time to remember how God rescued His people out of Egypt from the bondage of slavery (Ex. 12:27; 23:15). For in the tenth plague, God sent the angel of death to kill the firstborn son in every home that did not have the blood of a lamb on the doorposts. If the angel saw the blood, he passed over that house. The lamb's blood was their salvation.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the main idea for **verses 20-25** (DDG p. 74).

Judas's betrayal was all part of God's plan, even if Judas was in full control of his own actions.

DISCUSS: Understanding God's sovereignty and human free will can be difficult to understand for some. Use the sidebar note if needed as you ask the group to respond to the question below (DDG p. 74):

How do God's plan and our choices work together? (God is sovereign over all, and we are responsible for what we do; Jesus and Judas help us see how both divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together in God's grand plan; according to Scripture, both are true and real at the same time)

EXPLAIN: From **verses 20-25**, explain Judas's role in betraying the Messiah.

- As they ate, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me" (v. 21). The disciples were shocked, but when Jesus walked into the room that night, He knew one of His closest friends would turn Him over to be killed. In fact, Judas had already made arrangements with the chief priests (vv. 14-16).
- You can almost feel the disciples' distress after Jesus spoke those words. They asked, "Surely not I, Lord?" Jesus's statement graciously gave Judas time to consider his actions. Would he repent, or was his mind set on executing his plan? The ancient pastor Chrysostom commented, "He did not say, 'Judas, you will betray me' . . . This was again to offer time for repentance . . . He was willing to allow all the others to be alarmed, just for the sake of redeeming this one."¹
- Jesus's only answer came from Psalm 41:9. Jesus said, "The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me" (Matt. 26:23). Everyone would have dipped their hand in the common bowl. It was the natural way of sharing a meal at that time. So again, the Lord was sovereignly and graciously vague in His accusation.
- Jesus held fast to the plan. In verse 24, Jesus said, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him," most likely referring to Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. Jesus knew what His future held. But that did not mean His betrayer was innocent. Judas betrayed Jesus of his own accord. Judas was guilty of the sin, and Jesus knew His death was coming.

TRANSITION: As Jesus and His disciples gathered for their final meal together, Jesus foretold what would happen that night. The disciples were forced to look inside their hearts. But Jesus would continue to reveal His plan.

GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings (Prov. 19:21). In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

POINT 2

THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SACRIFICED AS PART OF GOD'S COVENANT (MATT. 26:26-28).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 26:26-28** from his or her Bible.

26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take and eat it; this is my body." **27** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. **28** For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

CHART: Lead the group in making a chart of the elements, characteristics, and symbolism seen in the Lord's Supper from **Matthew 26:26-28**.

EXPLAIN: Define from **verses 26-27** and the notes below the key doctrine of the Lord's Supper and its symbolic use (DDG p. 74).

Key Doctrine #92: Lord's Supper: The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming (1 Cor. 11:26).

- In this passage, Jesus and His disciples were eating the Passover meal—a specific meal of remembrance with each element an important piece of the exodus story. Traditionally, the narrative of God's redemption would be told throughout the meal. Here, Jesus gave new meaning and initiated a greater salvation not just for the Jews but for all who would trust in Jesus's sacrifice on their behalf.
- Jesus started with the bread. Verse 26 says He blessed it, broke it, and commanded them to eat it. But what He said next was unusual, to say the least: **"This is my body."** The broken bread symbolized the broken body of Jesus. Of course, His body was not yet broken. It soon would be on the cross. Jesus had previously told His disciples He would be killed in Jerusalem, and at the last supper, He reinforced that prophecy.
- In verse 27, Jesus took the cup and again gave thanks. He gave it to His disciples and commanded them all to drink it. Both the bread and the cup are to represent Jesus's sacrifice—His body broken and His blood poured out.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

How does looking at the Lord's Supper with fresh eyes change the way you approach partaking of it with the church? (reminds us to remember Christ's saving work and not take it without thought; reminds us to confess our sins while knowing God forgives; reminds us to celebrate the new covenant we have with Christ)

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The bread broken, and the wine poured out, signify to us the agony and ignominy of Christ's sufferings, the rending of Christ's body on the cross, and the effusion of blood which was distilled from his blessed side."³

—Thomas Watson
(1620–1686)

ILLUSTRATE: Explain from **verse 28** and the bulleted points that Jesus brought a new covenant for the forgiveness of sin (DDG p. 74).

The new covenant Jesus initiated was the fulfillment of the promises found in the Old Testament—as the first covenant was sealed with the blood of goats and bulls, so the new covenant is sealed with the blood of Christ.

- The phrase **“blood of the covenant”** has deep Old Testament roots. When God led the people out of Egypt to the promised land, He made a covenant with His people. God commanded Moses in Exodus 24:8 to throw the blood of sacrificed animals upon the people to seal the covenant the Lord had made with them. In the Old Testament, only two other times blood is thrown upon people: the consecration of the priests (Lev. 8:22-24) and the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:14,25). Leon Morris points out that both signify the transition from defilement to newness of life in the service of God.²
- Jesus may also have had Jeremiah 31:31-34 in mind, in which God promised a new covenant to give His people a new heart. God’s salvation in this new covenant was about to be sealed by the blood of His only begotten Son on the cross. The salvation the world had been longing for was at hand.
- The author of Hebrews adds meaning to Jesus’s words when he harkens back to the cross in Hebrews 9:12. Jesus entered the heavenly holy place not with the blood of bulls and goats but with His own blood to secure an eternal redemption for His people. As the author of Hebrews says, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22).
- The blood of Jesus was spilled upon the cross, and it became for us the means of cleansing our souls before the Holy God. By enduring crucifixion and God’s wrath against sin for us, Jesus’s blood grants forgiveness. As our sacrificial substitute, His blood was shed so ours doesn’t have to be. His life was given for us. Now, by an act of God’s mercy and grace, His righteousness is granted to us. In Christ, we have the security of the covenant promises.

DISCUSS: Having made sure your group understands the word “covenant,” discuss the following question (DDG p. 74):

How does the word “covenant” help us understand the security found in Christ’s sacrifice? (Jesus promises to be with us faithfully, giving us eternal life with Him; a covenant/promise from God cannot be broken; God’s promise to His people is to do what they cannot do on their own, to save them from their sins and to cleanse them forever; understanding the importance of God’s covenant assures us of His salvation and frees us from the fear of His wrath)

TRANSITION: Jesus met with His disciples for a final meal in the upper room. There He initiated the terms of the new covenant, sealed by His blood. But He continued by reminding them He would see them again.

COVENANT

A binding promise made by one person to another to bless or serve him. Covenants often came with a sign. Jacob and Laban made a pile of stones (Gen. 31:46-48); God gave Noah the sign of a rainbow (Gen. 9:12-15); circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (Gen. 17:10-14; Ex. 12:47-48); and baptism is the sign of the new covenant (Col. 2:9-12).⁴

POINT 3

THE SON OF MAN WILL BE CELEBRATED AS PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM (MATT. 26:29-30).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 26:29-30** from his or her Bible.

29 But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." **30** After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 29** that though death was imminent, Jesus wanted His disciples to know the future was not bleak (DDG p. 75).

Though Jesus was about to suffer and die, He was going to accomplish the salvation of His people, allowing them to enter the kingdom with Him for eternity in celebration.

- At times in Jesus's earthly ministry, He spoke in parables that veiled truth from those who did not have ears to hear. But among His disciples, He spoke plainly and clearly. Here He did so again. "But I tell you" in verse 29 means Jesus told them something significant. His days of drinking from the same cup as His disciples were coming to an end for a while. But one day, He would join them again around the table. Or more accurately, they would join Him around His table.
- This was a prophecy of future joy. After what must have been a jolt to the disciples' emotions, Jesus ended their time together with eternal hope. His Father has a kingdom, He is going to it, and they will be there one day too. The triune God was involved in this. The salvation brought about on the cross is the work of the Godhead, working in unison to accomplish redemption for His people. The Passover meal Jesus shared with His disciples was only a foretaste of the family meal to come in the Father's house.

DISCUSS: (DDG pp. 73,75)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **Knowing you will see Jesus one day, how does that encourage you daily?** (gives me joy anticipating that day; gives me hope for a future kingdom; gives me peace knowing this life is temporary)

SAY: Read the following statement on **verse 30** (DDG p. 75):

The last supper ended with a song of worship, giving God the glory and rejoicing in His faithfulness, anticipating the fulfillment of God's salvation plan.

SAY: “It was customary at the Passover meal to sing Psalms 115–118, a section known as the *Hallel*. Perhaps Jesus and His disciples sang together one of those psalms that night. If so, it was fitting. Psalm 115 is about giving glory to God’s name. Psalm 116 is a confession of love to God. Psalms 117 and 118 rejoice in the faithful, enduring love of God.”

INTERACT: Break up the group into four groups, with each group taking one of the psalms from Psalms 115–118. Suggest each group look at how these passages relate not only to the exodus but to this moment in history relating to Jesus. Invite each group to share their thoughts.

SUMMARIZE:

- The Passover meal ended with a song of worship to God. The God whom the disciples praised was the One going to the cross for them. Jesus was the One who washed their feet before dinner that night (see John 13:1-17). Jesus knew one of them would betray Him yet did not grow angry or aloof. He knew the suffering that was coming yet made time to explain to them what it would mean. He instituted the new covenant and would seal it with His blood.
- From the dinner table, they went to the Mount of Olives. The “hour,” or the time of Jesus’s crucifixion and death, was drawing even closer. Jesus would soon be betrayed, crucified, and killed. But it would come after the time of worship in the upper room, singing a song of God’s love for His people, looking forward to the day when they would meet again over a meal and hymns in the Father’s house.

ASK: (DDG p. 75)

How do songs of worship impact your life? (uplifts my spirit when I’m down; reminds me of God’s character; helps me find the words to praise Him; stirs my soul to humble submission)

PRAISE: Consider one or both options below as you conclude this point.

- Read together as a group Psalm 117 as a hymn of worship.
- Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 9: HALLELUJAH HYMN** for your group to sing together in worship of Jesus for His sacrifice for our sins. You may wish to enlist a piano or guitar player in your group ahead of time to lead the song.

TRANSITION: As the last supper ended, Jesus and His disciples sang a song of praise to God together. It was the most fitting end to their time together before Jesus endured the suffering of the cross.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: After God made a covenant with Israel and sealed it through sacrifices, the people of God broke the covenant, worshiping false gods. But God promised to enact a new covenant in which He would forgive sins and write His law on His people's hearts. At the last supper, Jesus explained that His sacrificial death would establish this new covenant and bring forgiveness of sin. So when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we look back to Christ's finished work and look forward to His glorious return when we celebrate it with Him.

HEAD:

As Jesus neared the end of His earthly life, He knew what awaited Him. That the Son of Man would suffer and die on behalf of His people was the gospel story told from the opening pages of the Bible. And as the first covenant was sealed by animal blood, the new covenant was sealed by Christ's blood to rescue a people beloved by the almighty God.

What characteristics describe a God who would sacrifice His own Son to redeem humankind?

HEART:

Isn't it striking that Jesus and His disciples ended the last supper with singing? Praise is always the proper response to God's work. Even when the future appears grim, the Bible helps us see that the future for God's people is always bright. God is on His throne, everything is going His way, and He loves us. Because of these truths, we can sing praises to Him out of a truly joyful heart because we know the steadfast love of God never ends.

How does the good news of the gospel compel us to praise God?

HANDS:

What Jesus did on the cross was the only way to save God's people forever. Because He accomplished His work, we now have the greatest story ever told to share with the world that desperately needs to hear it. Our message is one of a Savior who came to save His people, who stooped low to wash their feet, who gave His body and shed His blood to atone for their sins, to give His life as a ransom for many. It's the greatest story ever told, and it is our joy to share it with everyone we know.

With whom can you share the good news of salvation this week?

PRAY: Father, thank You that You fulfill Your promises. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for our sins. We are so thankful for Your grace, mercy, and love. Help us show that same mercy and love to others this week for Your glory! Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Be assured, that the more constantly and entirely you feed on Christ below, the better shall you be prepared for the nearest intercourse with him above, and the fullest possible communication of all his blessings to your souls."⁵

—Charles Simeon
(1759–1836)

POINT 1: THE SON OF MAN WILL BE BETRAYED AS PART OF GOD'S PLAN (MATT. 26:17-25).

+ COMMENTARY

“People sometimes ask how Judas can be punished for doing what God ordained that he would do. How, they wonder, can his action be free if it fulfills the predetermined plan of God? A scene from family life may help answer the question. Parents of active young children become serious students of the vital question: How do we get our little beans into bed with a modicum of peace? Parents soon learn not to ask, ‘Do you want to go to bed?’ Rather they ask, ‘Would you like me to read you the story about the bunny, or the story about the monkey before we go to sleep?’ The child chooses a story before bed even while the parent predestines a story before bed. If parents can predestine a story before bed while letting their children choose a story before bed, then the Lord God, who is far wiser than we, can do so too.

The analogy is imperfect, of course, but there are others like it. We could also think of the attraction between a man and a woman. The couple chooses each other, yet couples often feel that they were placed together, even summoned to one another, pulled along by some inexorable force. The relationship is freely chosen, yet feels preordained.

These are only analogies. The Bible affirms two truths, side by side: God plans and humans freely, responsibly choose. The Lord’s control is so perfect that he can accomplish his purposes while granting us the freedom to follow our desires and purposes. Peter said this about Judas and his partners in crime: Jesus ‘was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross’ (Acts 2:23). The crucifixion fulfilled God’s plan, yet those who killed him acted responsibly, without constraint.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

“When caught in a less than honorable situation many of us blame it on the devil. ‘The Devil made me do it,’ is more than words. It is an attempt to absolve ourselves of responsibility. ‘Ex-convict John Stephens told a Floyd County (Ind.) judge that he had a full-time job and intended to turn his life around, but had slipped when he tried to rob the Your Community Bank. “If I hadn’t been watching the news and seeing [other successful] bank robberies,” he said, he wouldn’t have been tempted.’”⁷

EXTRA

In the grand scheme of things, even though God is sovereign, we also have free will and are responsible for our actions. We cannot put the blame on others, or on God, when we are the ones who have sinned.

POINT 2: THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SACRIFICED AS PART OF GOD'S COVENANT (MATT. 26:26-28).

+ COMMENTARY

“The words over the cup fill out this idea. Blood . . . poured out is unmistakably sacrificial language, and the allusive phrase for many . . . identifies that ‘pouring out’ as that of the Servant of God of Isaiah 53:12, who ‘poured out his soul to death’, as ‘an offering for sin’ (Isa. 53:10). So the whole idea of vicarious suffering for the sins of God’s people which runs throughout Isaiah 53 underlies these words. Matthew makes this even more explicit by adding for the forgiveness of sins. And that last phrase, together with the mention of the covenant, echoes Jeremiah’s prophecy (31:31–34) of a ‘new covenant’ leading to the forgiving and forgetting of the sins of God’s people. The phrase blood of the covenant (echoing Exod. 24:8) recalls that God’s relations with his people had always depended on the sacrificial shedding of blood, and this new covenant is no exception.

So these words, rich in Old Testament associations, indicate that Jesus’ death will inaugurate the new relationship between God and his people to which the prophets looked forward. To speak of a covenant is to speak of a community of the people of God. From now on this community will be constituted by the sacrifice of Jesus, and will consist of those who by ‘eating’ and ‘drinking’ are identified with the benefits of his sacrificial death. Here, then, is the theological foundation for the theme, which has emerged throughout this Gospel, of a new basis of membership of the people of God. The Passover which brought about the formation of the nation Israel under the Sinai covenant (cf. the allusion to Exod. 24:8) now points forward to a new redemption constituting a true Israel in distinction from the merely national community of the old covenant.”⁸

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

In this study, we read of Jesus’s eating in the upper room with His disciples at Passover. Jesus regularly taught and ate with His disciples and others throughout His ministry as a sign of fellowship and unity, desiring to meet together often around food.

Consider hosting a potluck just for your group to fellowship together with a teaching time or without. Notice that around food, people are able to share their lives together more freely, enjoying hearing each other’s life stories and how Jesus plays a part in it all. In so doing, hearts are encouraged and lives are united around Christ, who binds us all together.

POINT 3: THE SON OF MAN WILL BE CELEBRATED AS PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM (MATT. 26:29-30).

+ COMMENTARY

“Matthew tells us that after the meal the disciples, like Moses, sang ‘the hymn’ and went to the Mount of Olives. Matthew does not tell us what hymn the disciples sang, but it may well have been all or part of Ps. 114–18 because those psalms are often sung at the end of Passover to celebrate God’s care of Israel and, in particular, the rescue from Egypt: When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became God’s sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water. (Ps. 114) So sang the disciples celebrating God’s care of Israel in a time in which Israel was anything but victorious. That they sang the hymn, or one like it, is a significant political act. Singing can be a form of resistance, because to sing not only witnesses to but creates community. Singing, next to eating, is the most physical and communal form of behavior. Our voice comes from our body. When we sing our bodies are joined, making possible a good in common that cannot be destroyed even when a people are under occupation or persecution or otherwise do not seem to be in control of their own destiny. The Psalms are testimony to Israel’s understanding of how to survive as a people—the very form of survival is a song. It is, therefore, not surprising that a community bound in unity through the body and blood of Jesus is also a community that not only sings but must sing.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Sometimes we come to church not really feeling the music if it’s not to our taste or if we prefer a different style or arrangement. One day an older lady at a church populated with young people was asked by her pastor, “What do you think of the music at our church these days?” She responded, “I love it because the young people love it.” It was clear that she would prefer something different, but she was not going to let her preference stand in the way of singing with her brothers and sisters.

When the church gathers to sing praises to God, we look outward and upward to the God who is praiseworthy. Our voices lifted to Him ring out the truths of the gospel and lift our hearts to Him. We sing about what we love, and even if the song isn’t our jam, joining with the church in loud singing is a beautiful shot of redemption breaking into a tired, broken world. Would any of us have dared not join in singing the hymn with Jesus and the disciples after their Passover meal? Surely with Jesus there, our voices would have joined in song.

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THE BETRAYED PRIEST

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son of Man predicts abandonment (Matt. 26:31-35).
2. The Son of Man trusts in God's plan (Matt. 26:36-46).
3. The Son of Man exercises restraint (Matt. 26:47-56).

Background Passage: Matthew 26

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Even as Jesus was betrayed and arrested, He did not waver in His obedience to the Father and continued to trust in His plan to provide salvation.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

In the garden of Eden, Adam failed to resist the serpent and instead chose to follow His way over God's. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, the last Adam, submitted to His Father's plan. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for sin that we all deserve as those born in the likeness of Adam.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been saved through the sacrifice of Jesus, we embrace suffering as we follow in the footsteps of our Savior, whose mission was to seek and save the lost.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you said you would never do something but then you did?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: Jesus's remarkable life began its descent into His remarkable death. As Jesus faced what He knew would be immeasurably great suffering and pain, He did so knowing His suffering was the fulfillment of God's grand plan to save His people. That suffering and pain started not in His arrest and crucifixion but in the failures of His disciples to stay faithful, though they had said they would. Still, Jesus gave Himself as the substitute for His people, giving His perfect life of obedience to God on behalf of His people to save them from their sins. He was the perfect Priest who also became the perfect sacrifice.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- As Jesus and His disciples left the upper room, Jesus embarked on the final leg of His journey to the cross. He entered the garden of Gethsemane, knowing all His disciples would fail to stand and watch and pray. He knew Peter would deny Him three times. He was utterly alone, but He never wavered. In the garden, Jesus did what Adam could not do. He stood against the devil and bowed His will to the Father's. By doing so, He brought many sons to glory.



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POINT 1

THE SON OF MAN PREDICTS ABANDONMENT (MATT. 26:31-35).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 26:31-35** from his or her Bible.

31 Then Jesus said to them, “Tonight all of you will fall away because of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. **32** But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

33 Peter told him, “Even if everyone falls away because of you, I will never fall away.” **34** “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to him, “tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” **35** “Even if I have to die with you,” Peter told him, “I will never deny you,” and all the disciples said the same thing.

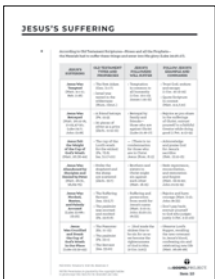
EXPLAIN: With the content below, explain from **verse 31-32** that Jesus predicted His disciples would abandon Him (DDG p. 82).

Jesus knew His friends would desert Him, but He continued with His plan of salvation anyway.

- Jesus’s suffering ran the gamut of human experiences. He truly was the man of sorrows who became like us in every way, except without sin (Heb. 4:15). Whatever we suffer, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual, we have a God who understands the pain, and He can help us when we are there.
- If you know the hurt of abandonment, Jesus does too. The night of His arrest, Jesus knew all His disciples would fail Him. Quoting Zechariah 13:7, He told them they would fall away (Matt. 26:31), though they didn’t believe Him. There must have been some comfort in knowing that what was about to happen was the fulfillment of Scripture. It was the path laid out for Him, the path He chose, and the path He suffered for the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:1). Though the pain was acute, God was still in control, and the plan was still on track.
- Jesus knew His death was imminent, and though His disciples still did not grasp it, Jesus pointed again beyond the grave. He mentioned His resurrection in verse 32: “After I have risen, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” In the hours ahead, the disciples would surely feel the guilt and shame of abandoning Jesus, but He left them with something to hold them up in the dark hours. He would see them again. They would be together in Galilee. The risen Christ would be there waiting for them.

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 10: JESUS’S SUFFERING**, highlighting different ways Jesus suffered but was still faithful. Then discuss (DDG pp. 81,82):

From Day 5 in the DDG: **What can you do to show your thankfulness, knowing Jesus was willing to face death to bring about salvation?** (follow Jesus’s example; praise Him; sacrifice something for His mission)



VOICES from THE CHURCH

“You may have spent a lifetime deserting him or betraying him or denying him. But if you will come to him he says to you this morning, ‘I will be your sovereign, merciful Savior and Lord. I will be everything you need.’”¹

–John Piper

CHALLENGE: In **verses 33-35**, Peter and the disciples denied that they would deny Jesus, as if they could correct what Jesus said. Challenge your group to think about the following (DDG p. 82):

Jesus's disciples failed, but they still remained Jesus's disciples whom He loved.

- The ever bold and self-assured Peter tried to refute Jesus by claiming he would never abandon Jesus. Peter's self-assurance was admirable here; no doubt he sincerely meant it. But Peter said more than he could back up. He talked the talk without the power to walk the walk. Jesus knew that, and He told him so: "Truly I tell you . . . tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times" (v. 34).
- Peter's words revealed his dismay: "Even if I have to die with you . . . I will never deny you" (v. 35), still adamant about his perceived faithfulness. And Matthew tells us in his Gospel that all the disciples said the same thing. No one there with Jesus believed they would abandon Him in His hour of need. Moments later, however, not one of them could stay awake long enough to pray. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.
- Though we see Jesus's disciples all falling away, we can contrast that with Jesus's actions. He intended to remain true to His friends and could not imagine leaving them nor forsaking them. So when the time came, unlike the disciples, Jesus did stay true. He faced the cross. He laid His life down as the substitutionary sacrifice to save His people from their sins. Jesus's friends all abandoned Him, but Jesus will never abandon His friends.
- *Application:* There is extreme foolishness in the self-confident heart of human beings. We are not as strong as we believe we are, and we will fail in many ways. But Jesus is still there when we fail. He remains faithful when we are not. He faced the cross when others ran for the hills. Jesus's friends may not have stood by Him in His hour of need, but Jesus will never fail to stand by you in yours. He endured death and came out alive on the other side. Fear not! He's going ahead of you to Galilee, and He will meet you there.

DISCUSS: God knows we fail but loves us still. Discuss (DDG p. 82):

How does the gospel change the way we view the disciples' failures the night of Jesus's arrest? (we know that disciples don't have to be perfect; Jesus's work forgives us of our sins; Jesus accepts His disciples the way they are)

TRANSITION: As Jesus and His disciples finished their last supper, Jesus predicted their abandonment. But they all denied it. Though Jesus knew they still would, He continued on His course. He would now go to the garden of Gethsemane to pray and wait for what was to come.

POINT 2

THE SON OF MAN TRUSTS IN GOD'S PLAN (MATT. 26:36-46).

READ: Point out Gethsemane (#2) on **PACK ITEM 2: PASSION WEEK MAP**, and invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 26:36-46** from his or her Bible.

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he told the disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." **37** Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** He said to them, "I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me." **39** Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." **40** Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Peter, "So, couldn't you stay awake with me one hour? **41** Stay awake and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." **42** Again, a second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." **43** And he came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open. **44** After leaving them, he went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. **45** Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? See, the time is near. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. **46** Get up; let's go. See, my betrayer is near."

CONTRAST: Use the content below and **verses 36-38** to contrast what happened in the two gardens concerning salvation and explain (DDG p. 82):

Two gardens play a role in salvation: the garden of Eden, where sin entered the world, and the garden of Gethsemane, where sin met its match in Jesus.

- In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve failed to obey God's command and ushered sin into the world. At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane. There, He succeeded where Adam failed, obeying so that many would be made righteous (Rom. 5:19).
- Here, Jesus perhaps is at His most human. Charles Spurgeon said, "Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life on earth. . . . No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language."² Jesus poured out His soul to His Father through prayer, and by doing so, taught us how to suffer.
- Jesus clearly was in distress in the garden. After asking the disciples to sit while He went over to pray, He took Peter, James, and John—the three in His inner circle—and revealed His heart to them. He was "deeply grieved to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38). All He asked was that they stay awake with Him. That should have been an easy request, given their prior insistence that they would never leave Him (v. 35). Yet when Jesus needed His friends the most, they couldn't even stay awake to keep Him company.

ASK: (DDG p. 82)

What can we learn from Jesus in the garden for when we are grieving and sorrowful? (we need to pray; we should seek out friends to support us; we can show emotion and accept our grief without sinning)

READ: Highlighting **verses 39-46**, read the main idea (DDG p. 82).

Through Jesus's prayer, we learn that He didn't reject His role but gave Himself up to God's plan, knowing it would come at an immense cost.

THINK AND DISCUSS: Ask groups of 3-4 to discuss: "Would you agree with this statement: 'There is a right way and a wrong way to pray'? Why or why not?" Invite groups to share their thoughts with the whole group.

ASK: Lead in from the question above to the following (DDG p. 82):

How does Jesus's acceptance of God's will instruct us on how we should pray during difficult times? (in difficulty, we can come to the Father in humility; in hardship, we can pray for God's will; we can trust in God's plan and submit to it when we pray)

SUMMARIZE: Using the content below and **verses 39-46**, explain that Jesus felt tremendous sorrow, yet He submitted Himself to God's will.

- Jesus fell face down in prayer (v. 39) and cried out to His Father in desperation: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Jesus was not trying to circumvent the plan. He was simply asking if this was the only way. But He knew there was only one path, and He accepted it as the will of God.
- Jesus knew the "cup" of the wrath of God for sin was going to be poured out on Him on the cross. He knew He would face it alone. He did that for us.
- Jesus returned to His disciples to find they couldn't stay awake for one hour. Jesus urged Peter and the others to pray so that they wouldn't enter into temptation (v. 41). In our darkest hours, prayer makes the difference, because in it, we put our dependence on God.
- Jesus went away again to pray for a second time, moving from praying for the cup to pass to accepting that it won't: "Your will be done" (v. 42).
- Going back to His disciples, He again found them asleep. So He went a third time to pray and returned to find His friends still sleeping. But then the time for praying and watching had passed. The betrayer was approaching.

TRANSITION: Jesus chose the path of suffering. He accepted God's will, trusting in the plan of redemption. And He showed restraint when needed.

"THIS CUP"

When Jesus prayed that the cup might pass from Him, He referred to the cup of God's wrath over sin, as seen in the Old Testament. Psalm 75:8 says: "For there is a cup in the Lord's hand . . . All the wicked of the earth will drink, draining it to the dregs." Isaiah 51:22 calls it "the cup of my fury." Ezekiel 23:33 talks about the "cup of devastation and desolation."

POINT 3

THE SON OF MAN EXERCISES RESTRAINT (MATT. 26:47-56).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 26:47-56** from his or her Bible.

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. A large mob with swords and clubs was with him from the chief priests and elders of the people. **48** His betrayer had given them a sign: “The one I kiss, he’s the one; arrest him.” **49** So immediately he went up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. **50** “Friend,” Jesus asked him, “why have you come?” Then they came up, took hold of Jesus, and arrested him. **51** At that moment one of those with Jesus reached out his hand and drew his sword. He struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his ear. **52** Then Jesus told him, “Put your sword back in its place because all who take up the sword will perish by the sword. **53** Or do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will provide me here and now with more than twelve legions of angels? **54** How, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?” **55** At that time Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs, as if I were a criminal, to capture me? Every day I used to sit, teaching in the temple, and you didn’t arrest me. **56** But all this has happened so that the writings of the prophets would be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the possible emotions from those present as seen in each action described in **verses 47-50**.

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 47-50** that Jesus willingly complied with His unjust arrest (DDG p. 83).

Jesus gave Himself up without a fight because it was all part of God’s salvation plan in His timing.

- Jesus was still speaking with His disciples when Judas brought the mob armed with swords and clubs. They came from the chief priests and elders of the people. They were there to arrest Jesus. But Jesus did not stand out. Judas told the mob beforehand, “The one I kiss, he’s the one” (v. 48). Either it was too dark or Jesus blended in with the disciples, but the only way the mob could identify Him was from one of His own, Judas.
- When Judas approached Jesus with a kiss, Jesus was ready. A kiss from a disciple to a rabbi was a sign of honor, but in this case, it was the opposite. Judas did not honor Jesus. He betrayed Him. Jesus’s response, “Friend, why have you come?” (v. 50), is not easy to understand. R. T. France points out that “friend” was sometimes used for a “table companion.”³ Perhaps Jesus was rebuking Judas, reminding him of how he sat at Jesus’s table with Him. Whatever the case, Jesus knew why Judas came, and Jesus let Judas know He knew.

CHALLENGE: Sometimes we go through life with problems upon problems, not knowing when God will deliver us. Challenge your group and ask (DDG p. 83):

How does knowing God's timing is different from our timing help us in dealing with hardships? (we can trust that God is moving and working even when we don't see; we can trust in a good God; we can know that what He says in His Word is true; we can learn to remain patient)

DEFINE: Using the content below and **verses 51-56**, show that Jesus showed restraint because He believed what was written in Scripture and knew that the Scriptures would be fulfilled because Scripture is inerrant (DDG p. 83).

Key Doctrine #4: Inerrancy of Scripture: Inerrancy refers to the belief that Scripture is completely truthful, without any mixture of error, in all its teachings, no matter what subject it addresses. Believing the Scriptures to be inerrant does not preclude the biblical authors' inclusion of observations from a human observer, the use of round numbers, unusual grammatical constructions, or varying perspectives on a particular event. It does mean, however, that Scripture is an infallible guide to salvation and that it is truthful in all that it affirms (Matt. 5:18; John 10:35; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

- The Gospel writer Matthew said a disciple drew his sword (Matt. 26:51). John's account said this "one" was Peter (John 18:10-11). Peter struck the high priest's servant and cut off his ear. Luke also adds that Jesus healed the ear, an act of grace (Luke 22:51). Perhaps Peter thought his time to prove himself had come, but Jesus rebuked Peter (Matt. 26:52). Jesus's people do not live by the sword. The anger of man never achieves the righteousness of God (Jas. 1:20).
- Jesus had legions of angels at His beck and call yet refused to call upon the Father for their assistance. Jesus showed immense restraint because He knew this arrest needed to happen. He addressed the crowd, asking why they came with weapons as if He were a violent threat. But Jesus knew these events happened so that "the writings of the prophets would be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:56), especially those of the Suffering Servant seen in Isaiah 53.
- After Jesus submitted to His arrest, His disciples fled—another prophecy fulfilled: the Shepherd was struck and the sheep scattered (Zech. 13:7).

ASK: Over and over we see Jesus fulfilling prophecy. Ask (DDG p. 83):

Seeing prophecies fulfilled, what do we learn about Scripture? (God's Word never returns void; He always brings to pass what He says; if God has already kept His promises, He will continue to do so)

TRANSITION: With a kiss, Judas betrayed Jesus, and the Messiah gave Himself up, showing immense restraint because it was God's will as seen in Scripture.

A LEGION

A legion was comprised of about 4,500-6,000 soldiers. In a military sense, it was comprised of the best soldiers. "Twelve legions" mentioned by Jesus would have been around 72,000 angels. Jesus was commenting on how He had a large army at His disposal to help Him if He called to the Father for them.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Though in the garden of Eden, Adam chose to follow His own way, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus submitted to His Father's plan. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for sin that we all deserve, as those born in the likeness of Adam. Because, then, we have been saved through the sacrifice of Jesus, we embrace suffering as we follow in the footsteps of our Savior, whose mission was to seek and save the lost.

HEAD:

Jesus made Himself weak like us, taking upon flesh, living a life filled with suffering and trials, so that He could become the perfect man to sacrifice Himself upon the cross and atone for our sins. The gospel is good news of a Savior—Jesus Christ—who accomplished all that was necessary as foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

How does seeing Jesus fulfill Old Testament prophecies encourage your faith in the Bible?

HEART:

On the cross, Jesus was utterly alone. His friends abandoned Him. One betrayed Him. He suffered not only the physical pain of crucifixion but also the emotional pain of desertion. He did it all willingly without even a single sinful thought. As Jesus hung on the cross, He did so with joy, knowing the salvation He was purchasing for His people. That ought to move our hearts to worship Him all the more.

How can you praise God knowing that Jesus willingly gave Himself up for you?

HANDS:

Jesus experienced everything anyone could experience. By taking on human flesh, He allowed Himself to be hurt. By becoming a man who could build friendships, He allowed Himself to be betrayed. By showing restraint when He was wrongfully accused and misunderstood, He allowed Himself to be wounded. He did that for you. To save you. To save the world.

With whom this week can you share the amazing love of Christ and how He endured suffering and death for us?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, You were abandoned and betrayed. You know what human loss feels like. Strengthen us when we feel the same. Assure us of Your presence when trials come our way. Help us be more like You. Help us to submit always to the Father's will. And help us to do this joyfully and humbly so that others may see You through us and come to know You in faith. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I trust in the Lord God Almighty . . . that He will not take away from me the cup of His redemption; but I firmly hope to drink from it today in His kingdom."⁴

—John Huss (1369–1415)

POINT 1: THE SON OF MAN PREDICTS ABANDONMENT (MATT. 26:31-35).

+ COMMENTARY

“This prediction evokes a strong contradiction from the leader of the disciples. He does not know what the situation of which Jesus is speaking will be, but he postulates the worst possible scenario: ‘Even if I must die with you.’ As it turned out, with soldiers coming to arrest Jesus later in the night, that is what the situation must have appeared to be, and Peter was found wanting. But at this moment his strong loyalty to Jesus made him incredulous. He is emphatic: ‘I will certainly never deny you.’ Peter did not know the depths of which he was capable and saw it as unthinkable that he should ever deny Jesus. And in this he was not alone. We think of Peter’s denial because he was the outstanding leader in the Twelve and because he was so vehement in his affirmation that he would never do any such thing. But he was not alone in this. All the disciples said likewise, so apparently their affirmations of loyalty were just as firm and their subsequent falls just as great. Matthew is making the point that all the disciples said that they would not deny Jesus, and later he will tell us that all of them did. He is bringing out the facts that Jesus’ closest followers all made protestations of loyalty, but that when the testing time came all were found wanting. Throughout his ordeal Jesus was alone.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

“Trouble and pain are inexorably intertwined. Overcoming, or breaking the pain barrier, is one of the secrets of victorious living. It is estimated that one of every four-hundred thousand babies born will have a rare genetic disease called dysautonomia. Victims are unable to feel pain and usually die early. Persons, athletes in particular, have their careers altered because they take drugs to dull pain rather than discovering and treating the source of the problem. Pain is not God’s way of punishing people; but rather His way of warning persons that something is wrong physically, mentally, or spiritually. Jesus did not shy away from difficulties.”⁶

Jesus, knowing He would be betrayed and abandoned, in suffering and sorrow, trouble and pain, still walked firmly on the path set for Him. Fortunately for us, He did this so that we may have salvation and eternal life with Him.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE SON OF MAN TRUSTS IN GOD'S PLAN

(MATT. 26:36-46).

+ COMMENTARY

“Four truths stand out in the Gethsemane passage. First, the disciples continued to fail to understand the danger that awaited them that night. Second, Jesus was alone in his anxiety and grief, since the disciples kept falling asleep on him. Third, Jesus was fully human, longing for the emotional support from his friends. Fourth, Jesus remained loyal to his Father’s will, in spite of his knowledge that he was about to endure the agony of crucifixion. In his death on the cross, he was to endure unthinkable separation from his Father. Jesus’ death was like no other death, heroic or otherwise. This was not martyrdom. This was self-sacrifice.”⁷

+ COMMENTARY

“As we notice the precise language of Jesus’ prayer in the garden, we see his faithfulness:

- The address is warm and trusting: ‘My Father.’
- The petition is humble: ‘If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.’ In a sense all things are possible with God (19:26) and Jesus could have avoided the cup—by not redeeming mankind. The cross was necessary if and only if he intended to redeem his people. Sin has a price—death—and either we pay it or Jesus does.
- Even as he faces the cup and asks for relief, he yields to the Father: ‘Yet not as I will, but as you will’ (26:39). . . .

We say Jesus is tempted in this place, and rightly so, but it might be better to call it a test, for this hour tests his character and it proves him righteous. We can learn how to face temptation and pass tests by following Jesus.

First, he prays. He prays, ‘Your will be done,’ with exactly the same words he told us to use in the Lord’s Prayer (26:42; cf. 6:10). He prays humbly, from a meek posture, face down. His words are submissive: he does not object to the Father’s will, he simply asks, ‘Is it necessary?’ Second, he asks for help from friends, if only for the comfort their company brings. Even if he knows they will fail him, he seeks help.”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

“Prayer is surrender—surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boat hook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.”⁹

POINT 3: THE SON OF MAN EXERCISES RESTRAINT (MATT. 26:47-56).

+ COMMENTARY

“John supplies the names of both the disciple (Peter) and the high priest’s slave (Malchus), and Luke tells of the restoration of the ear. But Matthew simply tells the bare facts in order to draw out the message of Jesus’ rejection of violent resistance, with which he will in vv. 53–54 contrast the supernatural aid Jesus could have used if he so chose. Jesus’ sovereign control of the events in which he appears as the helpless victim is thus highlighted. All who take the sword will perish by the sword is probably not just a proverbial maxim (it would in any case be untrue as a general observation), but may echo the interpretation of Isaiah 50:11 reflected in the Targum, which interprets the ‘kindling of fire’ as taking up the sword. Jesus thus lives out the principle of non-resistance which he has required of his disciples in 5:39–42. It is this issue of Jesus’ non-resistance which is the context of this statement; a blanket endorsement of pacifism requires wider support than this one specific instance.”¹⁰

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Lead the group to think of all the times Jesus could have avoided suffering that night. Make a list. There are so many, from the last supper up until the moment of His arrest. After listing the ways, share it with one another. Then consider together how amazing it is that Jesus chose the path He chose. Then ask the group which is more important: following God’s will or escaping suffering?

For Jesus, it was the former. He could have escaped suffering that night. He could have joined Peter, sword in hand, slinging and stabbing and slicing. He could have prevented His suffering. After all, He knew everything that was coming His way. We often overlook the temptation to escape suffering that Jesus must have fought. To Jesus, following God’s will was the most important thing in His life. It was His sole purpose. Fulfilling the Scriptures, completing God’s promises, and bringing many sons to glory was Jesus’s mission. He never wavered. He never failed. He knew why He was there, and no one and nothing was going to stop Him from accomplishing the will of God.

Jesus’s resilience in the face of suffering is instructive to us. We too are faced with the option to follow God’s will or escape suffering. The allure of comfort and security is strong, but the path to joy is in God’s will alone.

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THE INTERCEDING PRIEST

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus is the permanent Priest (Heb. 7:23-25).
2. Jesus is the perfect Priest (Heb. 7:26-28).
3. Jesus is the purifying Priest (Heb. 9:11-14).

Background Passage: Hebrews 4–10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus fulfills the office of priest, interceding on behalf of people and by becoming the sacrifice necessary to purify them of their sin.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

In the Old Testament, God established a priesthood among His people. The priest's role was to intercede on behalf of the people and perform regular animal sacrifices to purify their sins. Jesus is the perfect Priest, the High Priest who interceded on behalf of the people by laying down His life to be a once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus interceded on our behalf before the Father, we seek to intercede on the behalf of others for their salvation as we tell them how they can be forgiven of their sins through Christ.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is your perception of a priest?** (a priest of the Roman Catholic variety; someone who hears confessions and grants forgiveness; something unnecessary today; something pagan or from cults)

EXPLAIN: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- A priest is one who stands in the gap between God and man, bringing man's sins to the forgiving God and God's forgiveness to needy man. In Jesus, we find the perfect Priest. We have seen how His priesthood came to pass. He was anointed at Bethany by Mary. He initiated a new covenant with God's people through the Lord's Supper. He was betrayed and given over to become the sacrifice for sins. In Jesus, we have not merely a priest but the ultimate Priest. He is the fulfillment and completion of the office.

TRANSITION: As we move from the final hours of Jesus's earthly life into a study of Jesus's priesthood today, we find that Jesus is still serving as a mediator between God and us. He brings forgiveness and mercy and grace to us moment by moment. He is the fulfillment of the priesthood that we need to stand before the all-holy God above.

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTION: **When have you stood in the gap for someone else, maybe a child, a friend, or an older parent?**

(wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)



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POINT 1

JESUS IS THE PERMANENT PRIEST (HEB. 7:23-25).

INTRODUCE: The writer of Hebrews makes an argument throughout the beginning of his book that Jesus is supreme and better than all things. He is our High Priest (6:20), and being such, He is eternal and permanent.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 7:23-25** from his or her Bible.

23 Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. **24** But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. **25** Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.

DESCRIBE: Using the content below and **verses 23-24**, describe the role of the levitical priests as you explain (DDG p. 90):

Where every levitical priest failed, Jesus succeeded. He is now our eternal, permanent Priest.

- God's answer to our guilt is the priesthood. The priest's role is to bring man's guilt to God's altar and, by a sacrifice, mediate God's forgiveness to the guilty party. In Israel, the tribe of Levi was set apart to do nothing else. This was a gracious gift from God to His people to have a priesthood set apart to fulfill the holy things of the law, but on account of their own sin, the priests kept dying. The office never ceased, but it was occupied by different men. Some priests were even killed by God for their ungodliness (see Lev. 10). Even the best priests had to make sacrifices for their own sins before they could make sacrifices for the people. As such, they were prevented by sin and death from continuing in office.
- Jesus came not to end the priesthood but to fill it and fulfill it permanently (Heb. 7:24). The sacrifice we needed was one that removed our guilt and brought God's forgiveness to bear once and for all. Jesus, as the perfect Priest, was able to offer the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice—Himself. Because the sinless Savior died for us and was raised again, He now lives for us, continually interceding for His people. There is no longer any need for continual sacrifices for sin. The priesthood is not gone but fulfilled in Jesus.

DISCUSS: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 7: CHRIST AS PRIEST (POSTER)** and pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 8: CHRIST AS PRIEST (HANDOUT)**. Then discuss (DDG pp. 86,90):

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How does knowing Jesus serves as our High Priest today change the way you worship Him?** (we are never without the Priest applying His atoning sacrifice for our sin; we are washed in the blood of Christ; in our moments of sin, we can be sure that our Priest in heaven brings forgiveness to us by the power of His once-for-all sacrifice)



LEVITICAL PRIESTS

As part of Aaron's descendants, levitical priests served in the tabernacle, and then later in the temple, with sacrifices and offerings for worship. They were appointed and consecrated by God to intercede for the nation of Israel, also blessing them and instructing them in the law. Other Levites, not descendants of Aaron, aided the priests but did not serve in the offering of sacrifices.

REVIEW: Guide the group to review the key doctrine, paying attention to the role Jesus plays as Priest (DDG p. 90).

Key Doctrine #53: Christ as Priest: As our great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 25** that Jesus saves us completely and eternally as our great High Priest

- The levitical priests could not accomplish the deepest desire of God for His people. We need a high priest who is radiantly holy, completely innocent, and eternally effective to bring us to the Father.
- *Optional:* Another translation for “save completely” (Heb. 7:25) is “save at all times.” This is an expansive phrase. The more our need, the more Christ’s ability to save. The grace of God in Christ extends to all sins. No one is ever beyond saving.
- Jesus intercedes for “those who come to God through him.” One of the key responsibilities of a priest is atoning for the people’s sins to bring them back into right relationship with God the Father. Jesus does this perfectly. We go to God through the person of Jesus Christ. He is our merit. He is our entry fee. He is the One who brings us into God’s glory.
- “He always lives to intercede for them.” Jesus is alive in heaven at the right hand of the majesty on high. Jesus is interceding for you, believer. Your sins—past, present, and future—are covered because our High Priest in heaven is praying for you. So what do you do with your sense of guilt? You come to Jesus, who has taken away your guilt with His blood. His intercession on our behalf is what He lives for.

REFLECT AND ASK: Jesus saves completely and eternally. Give your group a moment to reflect on this; then ask (DDG p. 90):

How does knowing Jesus saves completely and eternally change the way you interact with God? (I know I can come to God with any confession; I rejoice that God is so gracious, and I desire to strive to please Him more; I’m so grateful for His sacrifice and mercy)

TRANSITION: Jesus’s priestly work did not stop on the cross. It extends to His present activity on our behalf now in heaven. He is not only our permanent Priest, He is also our perfect Priest.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“He always lives to intercede for them expresses all that the Lord Christ, as the high priest of the church, does for us now with God, and upon which the certainty of our salvation depends.”¹

—John Owen (1616–1683)

POINT 2

JESUS IS THE PERFECT PRIEST (HEB. 7:26-28).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 7:26-28** from his or her Bible.

26 For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. **27** He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself. **28** For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever.

INTERACT: Bring two wash rags: a clean one and an obviously dirty one. Ask group members which one they would want to use to sanitize their kitchen, and why? (Clean one because you don't have to clean it first in order to use it; clean one because the dirty one will just make everything more dirty) Jesus is the better Priest. He not only is already clean, not needing to make sacrifices for Himself, He also is always clean, thus will never be dirty, never sinning and causing others to sin as some of the priests did.

SAY: Read the summary statement for **verses 26-27** below (DDG p. 90).

Being holy and blameless, Jesus is our perfect Priest, the fulfillment of all the priesthood was intended to be.

CONTRAST: Invite the group to identify ways Jesus is the better Priest, referring them to **verses 26-27** for insight. Record the responses on a board. Supplement as necessary from the leader content.

- The levitical priests achieved some good, but they could never fulfill the need like Jesus could. We need a priest who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" (v. 26). He needs to be spotless to stand in the gap for us before God the Father.
- Jesus, our High Priest, in His holiness, can take on all our sins and stand before God to intercede for us because He is innocent, free from all sin, and does no evil. Jesus, though He ate with sinners and tax collectors, did not partake in their unholiness for He had no sinful nature. He is not tainted by sin's effects. As such, He is exalted above the heavens, being able to stand in the gap between unholy people and the holy God.
- Verse 27 points to three excellencies of Christ's priesthood in comparison with the levitical priests. The levitical priests offered daily sacrifices; Jesus offered one for all time. The levitical priests offered animals; Jesus offered Himself. The levitical priests made sacrifices for their own sins before they could make sacrifices for the sins of the people. Jesus has no sin and therefore has no need to make a sacrifice for Himself. The total effect of these three contrasts is a more perfect priest who offered a more perfect sacrifice once and for all by means of His own blood. Jesus is the spotless sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

CHALLENGE: Jesus is the only perfect Priest, so He is the only way to salvation and eternal life. In smaller groups of 2-3, discuss (DDG p. 90):

Knowing Jesus is the only perfect Priest, how does that help us explain to others that Jesus is the only way to salvation? (because of our sin, we can't save ourselves; only Jesus is perfect, so only He can intercede for us; God is holy and only holiness can enter His presence)

STATE: Using the content below, state and explain from **verse 28** the difference between the law and the oath (DDG p. 90).

The law was a good thing, but it appointed weak men to the priesthood. But God's oath, His promise, appointed a Son to be a perfect sacrifice to make unholy people holy in the sight of God.

- Though the law was good, it was entrusted to weak men. The levitical priests were not strong enough to bring us all the way home to heaven, nor were they intended to be. They pointed to the One who would come later.
- God gave something better than the law, and that was an oath, or a promise. The will of God stretched beyond the levitical priesthood. His oath overrode the law's weakness with the perfection of the Son. Jesus has been appointed our Priest now, and He is forever perfect. No more weakness for us. We have the industrial strength of Jesus. We are no longer hoping for perfection. In Jesus, we have it. We have the final sacrifice, the living Christ.
- *Application:* The great implication of these truths is a simple one. We have a perfect Priest to bring us into a perfect relationship with God. Forgiveness of sins can be ours because the perfect sacrifice has already been made. The door to heaven is wide open by the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. He stands now in heaven as our intercessor, applying His sacrifice to our sins in the sight of God. There is, therefore, never a moment when we are not forgiven, when our sins are not paid for, or when we can't come to God for forgiveness and newness of life.

DISCUSS: Individually or in smaller groups, ask (DDG p. 90):

Why would you rather live under God's oath and promise than the law? (the law only reveals our sin and doesn't help us; God's oath not only allows us to be forgiven but it helps us conquer sin; due to our sin, the law is about a set of rules, while God's promise is about a relationship)

TRANSITION: Jesus fulfilled the priesthood permanently and perfectly. He is the Holy One who offered Himself on the altar to make us right with God. So He is not only permanent and perfect, He is purifying.

POINT 3

JESUS IS THE PURIFYING PRIEST (HEB. 9:11-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 9:11-14** from his or her Bible.

11 But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), **12** he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God?

COMPARE: Lead the group in creating a comparison chart of the old covenant and the new covenant. Record this on a board. Point the group to **verses 11-12** and Day 5 in their DDG (DDG p. 89) for assistance.

SUMMARIZE: Using the chart just created and the content below, highlight the idea that (DDG p. 91):

In the Old Testament, the levitical priests offered temporary sacrifices, but Jesus offers eternal redemption through His blood.

- The old covenant ministry of the priesthood offered only a temporary fix. Temporary tents. Temporary priests. Temporary sacrifices. Temporary purification. We needed something that will last forever because we have a soul, and later a body, that will last forever. We need forgiveness that extends a lifetime warranty because we have a daily need to file a claim for our sinful wreckage and destruction. A temporary animal sacrifice from a temporary sinful priest brings only temporary forgiveness, and that's just not sufficient.
- The old covenant itself, given by God, enshrined these temporary terms. In His mercy, God established the priesthood in His law to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. The law even specified that one day a year, a sacrifice would be made to forgive unintentional sins as well. On the Day of Atonement, the levitical high priest entered the most holy place to offer the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins for the people (Lev. 16). It was gracious and merciful, but it still was incomplete on account of its limitations and symbolic purpose.
- In Jesus, we have all that is needed on an eternal scale: the holy place, the holy Priest, and the holy sacrifice for our eternal redemption.

MOST HOLY PLACE

Also called the holy of holies, this is the most inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and temple, which housed the ark of the covenant. On top of the ark was "the mercy seat," where God's presence dwelt. Only once a year on the Day of Atonement could the high priest enter this place, and only with a blood sacrifice.

ASK: God has done everything needed to redeem His people. Ask (DDG p. 91):

Knowing God desires a relationship with us and has planned everything, even the death of His Son, to save us, how should believers respond? (with awe; with gratefulness; with joy; with faith and trust; with wanting to be Christ-like; with trying to live to please God; with wanting to tell others of God's love)

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 13-14** that Jesus's sacrifice purifies us (DDG p. 91).

If the blood of animals can sanctify, infinitely more does Jesus's blood sanctify, cleanse, and purify us that we may serve Him.

- Sinful people need purification that goes beyond today and reaches into eternity. In the new covenant, God did not rewrite the rules. Instead, He provided a new kind of priest, One who could bring about everlasting purity. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, His blood purified all those who choose to believe in Him. The offering that Jesus made is better than all others because it is eternally effective.
- The law, because of our sin, stood to condemn, but under the new covenant, we can be certain of our forgiveness because we have a high priest who has made the ultimate atonement for all our sin—past, present, and future.
- Jesus is fully effective to cleanse us completely, even our consciences, because He offered Himself through the eternal Holy Spirit as a sacrifice without blemish. Mere animal blood could never bring about the kind of cleansing that we need. Man's sin requires divine blood for reconciliation.
- The perfect obedience of Christ guaranteed that His offering would be fully accepted by God as our payment. Through the blood of Christ, we are saved. By faith, we have been purified.
- *Application:* Knowing this changes the way we live. The blood of Christ purifies not only our bodies but also our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God (Heb. 9:14). No longer fearing the punishment of sin, we are free to serve God with a pure heart.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 91)

In what ways can you serve God more, knowing Jesus purifies our conscience so we can serve Him? (in telling others about Jesus; in serving at church or a nonprofit; in helping my neighbor)

TRANSITION: Jesus is our interceding Priest. He died so we can live. He shed His blood so our sins can be shed. We can now come to be in relationship with God eternally because of Jesus.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: In the Old Testament, God established a priesthood among His people. The priest's role was to intercede on behalf of the people and perform regular animal sacrifices to purify their sins. Jesus is the perfect Priest, the High Priest who intercedes now on our behalf. And because He does, we seek to intercede on the behalf of others, pleading to God for their salvation as we tell them how they might be forgiven of their sins through Christ.

HEAD:

The priesthood was not abolished with Jesus but fulfilled and perfected in Him. In Christ we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He lives to intercede for us, applying His finished work to our lives moment by moment. We can draw near to God through Jesus, knowing that we will be accepted.

What benefits of Jesus's priesthood are most precious to you?

HEART:

What do you do with your guilt? Sin creates a real rift between God and human beings (Isa. 59:1-2), and we need a solution. The priesthood of Jesus grants the perfect answer. The sacrifice He made is a perfect one that purifies believers in Christ completely, from the inside out, from beginning to end. We can go to God humbly and boldly knowing that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and He intercedes on our behalf when we sin.

Reflect quietly on what sins you would like to confess to God right now.

HANDS:

Jesus is our perfect Priest. We need no one else to mediate between God and us. God has given His people a great honor to serve as ministers of reconciliation in this world (2 Cor. 5:11-21). We get to intercede in prayer on behalf of others. We have the answer to the greatest problem in their lives, which is sin. Jesus has paid it all, and He is willing to forgive them if they simply come to Him. Our prayers may be the means by which God grants salvation to others. That's a priestly role—one we learned from Jesus Himself.

Who has God put on your heart to intercede in prayer for today?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank You that You intercede for us and allow us to intercede for others. Help us come to You to confess our sin, knowing You forgive perfectly. Fill us with Your Spirit that we may strive to be more like You in grateful response to Your redeeming love. Help us share Your love with others. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of
God; He bears them all,
and frees us From the
accursed load: I bring
my guilt to Jesus, To
wash my crimson stains
White in His blood
most precious, Till not a
stain remains."²

—Horatius Bonar
(1808–1889)

POINT 2: JESUS IS THE PERFECT PRIEST (HEB. 7:26-28).

+ COMMENTARY

“**Such a high priest meets our needs.** Unholy sinners stand in need of a holy priest and a holy sacrifice. What we do not have in ourselves we must have in him, or we will not be accepted by the holy God, who has such pure eyes that he cannot look on sin. Such a high priest is the Lord Christ. **One who is holy.** As he was holy, he does not have sin present with him as we have (Romans 7:18, 21), neither is he entangled in sin (12:1). . . . **Set apart from sinners.** . . . Being set apart from sinners declares what Christ is, his state and condition. He is holy and undefiled. He was separate from sinners in the sense that he was separate from sin, in its nature, causes, and effects. He had to be like this for our benefit. He became the middle person between God and sinners and had to be separate from those sinners in the thing he stood in their place for.”³

POINT 3: JESUS IS THE PURIFYING PRIEST (HEB. 9:11-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“In reality verses 13–14 form one long sentence, with verse 13 presenting a conditional clause that can be translated: ‘if [or since] the blood of goats . . . sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.’ Verse 14, as the follow-up ‘then’ clause, presents a theological capsule of the efficacious sacrifice of Christ: ‘How much more, then, will the blood of Christ . . . cleanse our consciences. . . .’ These two verses form an ‘argument from lesser to greater,’ which reasons: ‘If something is true in a lesser situation, it is true to an even greater degree in a greater situation.’ Here the sacrifice of animals constitutes the lesser circumstance and the offering of the blood of Christ the greater.”⁴

References

1. John Owen, *Hebrews*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 178.
2. Horatius Bonar, “I Lay My Sins on Jesus,” *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 593.
3. John Owen, 178-79.
4. George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 311.

THE KING OF THE JEWS

“This Man Has Done Nothing Wrong”

by Greg Kilgore

+

“That isn’t fair!” We’ve heard it at school, we’ve heard it on the ball field, we’ve heard it in movies, and we’ve heard it in our own homes. Likely we have even said these very words ourselves. We feel inside ourselves a need to let others know when things are not fair and complain when things we think are fair do not actually happen.

GOD’S GRACE WHEN WE DESIRE FAIRNESS

The truth is no one should want God to be fair to us. What we have often failed to realize is that our sinful rebellion has so corrupted us that we truly are not able to understand what is fair on our own. We really do not know what is fair because our sinful pride has blinded us. We think fairness is based on what we deserve. But the fact is we truly do not know what we deserve considering our sinfulness against God.

The person who says he wants God to be fair to him does not truly understand who he is and who God is! He does not understand the holiness of the Almighty God and the sinfulness of fallen man.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ shows us that we need God to be unfair to us. For everything that happened to Jesus on the way to and including the cross is what we deserve: punishment and death. In our sinful rebellion against God, we are the ones who deserve what Jesus endured. He was sinless but took our punishment for us.

Nothing is more unfair than the grace of God that He has shown us in His Son, Jesus Christ. When we understand our sin properly, against the righteousness of God—the holy God we offend—we see that we truly get what we do not deserve in Christ.

THE HORRIFIC WONDER OF THE CROSS

On the cross Jesus experienced hell—He became a curse for us. He did this so that one day we could be saved from our sin and its consequences. The death of Jesus was horrific. He was forsaken, not for anything He did or deserved but forsaken for us! Do you see the horror of the only sinless One to ever live suffering and dying on the cross? He did that all for us.

This shows us that though the cross was horrific, it was also a wonderful act of love. Romans 5:8 says that God proved His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That there is true love.

WHY JESUS DID NOT COME DOWN

Why did Jesus not come down from the cross, knowing that He could? Why did He stay? Certainly, with Jesus being divine, He had the power and the ability to come down with angels at His beck and call.

The soldiers mocked Him, dividing up His clothes and insulting Him. They yelled, “If you are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!” The irony of their mocking is that Jesus could have descended from the cross to save Himself. It was not the nails that kept Jesus on the cross, He stayed because of His love for His people. He stayed to rescue us from sin. Jesus loves His people so much that He bore our sin and punishment on the cross. He stayed because it was the only way for any of us to be saved from the eternal punishment due for our sins.

The cross
accomplishes the
payment we need to
be brought into right
relationship with our
eternal King.

WHAT THE CROSS ACCOMPLISHES

What does the cross of Jesus accomplish? Salvation! And at the heart of this salvation is redemption. Redemption is the work of Christ to bring repentant sinners back into right relationship with God.

Back at the beginning, in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned against God. They trusted the word of Satan over the word of God, and they sinned against God. Sin entered the world, and along with sin came the wages of sin: death. What did God do? He did not wipe out the human race then and there. God had every right to do that—He is the Creator—He did not have to save anyone.

God could have treated humans the same way He treated the fallen angels. In 2 Peter 2:4 it says that God did not spare the fallen angels but cast them into hell. God could have done the same thing right then and there in Genesis 3 to humanity.

Instead of casting Adam, Eve, and all humanity into hell for their sin, God promised to send a deliverer. Genesis 3:15 speaks of One who would come and crush the head of Satan. God promised redemption, He promised to restore those who have trusted in His Deliverer to a right relationship with their Creator.

Without the cross, all would be cast out of God’s presence, but now through the cross, all who place their faith in Jesus are welcomed into relationship with the Almighty God! The cross accomplishes the payment we need to be brought into right relationship with our eternal King.

ALL OF HISTORY CENTERS ON CHRIST

All of history centers on the life and death of Jesus Christ. The good news of the gospel, however, does not end with our Savior and King crucified on the cross. Yes, His life ended, darkness covered the land, the earth shook, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. But when those who buried Jesus’s body closed the tomb with a large stone, it was not the final time light would penetrate inside. Three days later, Jesus exited the tomb as the King who holds the power over sin and death! Jesus’s resurrection reveals His victory over all, which allows us victory over all as well!



THE ACCUSED KING

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus, the King of the Jews, is wrongly tried (Luke 22:66-71).
2. Jesus, the King of the Jews, is wrongly accused (Luke 23:1-5).
3. Jesus, the King of the Jews, is wrongly condemned (Luke 23:13-25).

Background Passage: Luke 22–23

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus was arrested, tried, and condemned to die, even though He did no wrong.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus was condemned to die although He did no wrong. In this, Jesus became the perfect substitute for us, bearing our sins on the cross to provide forgiveness. All who have trusted in Christ are no longer under condemnation but have been declared righteous by God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been forgiven of our sin, we cast aside guilt and shame when we sin and instead repent with assurance that we are always loved and accepted by God.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



CHRIST AS KING

Scan this QR code for a brief theological reflection on Jesus as the promised King and an explanation of the imagery in the poster.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What are some examples of situations in which you know what to expect but it's still hard to move forward?** (visiting family who are hard to be around; ripping off a bandage; getting a filling for your teeth at the dentist)

EXPLAIN: Jesus knew He had to suffer. He knew He had to sacrifice Himself. But it was still a difficult and agonizing time. Putting us above Himself, however, He endured and persevered in His mission.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- After three full years of ministry, the time had come for the promised Messiah—the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King who had been anticipated for millennia—to finish what He had started. His mission was clear and His resolve strong. Through the enabling strength of the Spirit by the unshakable will of the Father, the Son of God set His face to the cross. Much suffering awaited Jesus, some of which would be physical, but it would also be emotional as He watched His followers and friends abandon Him, betray Him, and become a part of condemning Him to death.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: Why is endurance so hard? (we can be selfish, lazy beings; endurance involves much self-denial; we tend to forget about end goals and instead get caught up with momentary desires; we are tired and weak and don't have the strength to endure)

TRANSITION: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 11: CHRIST AS KING**, specifically the left half, and say: "Jesus knew exactly what this day would entail, yet our King endured to the end for the sake of the gospel, for us, and for God's glory. Let's look at those last hours in the Gospel of Luke."



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ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS, IS WRONGLY TRIED (LUKE 22:66-71).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 22:66-71** from his or her own Bible.

66 When daylight came, the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the scribes, convened and brought him before their Sanhedrin.

67 They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." But he said to them, "If I do tell you, you will not believe. **68** And if I ask you, you will not answer. **69** But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." **70** They all asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." **71** "Why do we need any more testimony," they said, "since we've heard it ourselves from his mouth?"

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 66-68** the following idea (DDG p. 102):

After Jesus was arrested, the Jewish religious leaders didn't follow their own rules for trials as they tried to trap Jesus into the charge of blasphemy.

- Though Rome ruled the day, the Jews enjoyed much autonomy—especially when it came to religious matters. The Sanhedrin was the organization that ruled over Jewish affairs and took care of their legal matters. This group of leaders included seventy members, presided over by the high priest.¹ The role of high priest was originally established by God to be the mediator between Him and His people. By the time of Jesus, the high priests were dominated by extra-biblical rules rather than a covenant-relationship with God. The Sanhedrin opposed Jesus from the get-go and plotted against Him.
- After the last supper, Jesus was betrayed and arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. He was taken to both Annas, the former high priest and likely still a very influential religious leader (John 18:13), and Caiaphas, the current high priest (John 18:24). According to Jewish law, the Sanhedrin could not hold trials at night, but Jesus was dragged back and forth between informal proceedings with leaders after hours in hopes of settling the problem of Jesus once and for all.
- The issue at hand was Jesus's claim of being the Messiah. Jesus had previously displayed His divine nature and supreme power, but these religious rulers proved hardhearted and still did not believe. Though they wanted Jesus to make the claim that He is the Messiah, Jesus knew the truth would fall on deaf ears. Thus, Jesus chose at this point not to give them the clear-cut confession they desired.

ASK: In trying to prove Jesus wrong, the religious leaders ended up not realizing their methods were wrong. We sometimes can be like that as well. Discuss the following question (DDG p. 102):

What are some examples of Christians using wrong methods when trying to share the truth? (in the way we share the gospel without mercy; in the way we speak against homosexuality or abortion without compassion for the person; in the way we might argue about politics without grace)

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 69-71** the following idea (DDG p. 102):

Jesus's claim of divinity was punishable by death. No other accusation or testimony was needed for the religious leaders.

- Jesus rightfully claimed to be the Son of Man who will be seated at the right hand of God, a reference to being the Son of God and divine.
- The scheming leaders' response showed that Jesus's significant statement was not lost on the Sanhedrin: "Are you, then, the Son of God?" (v. 70). They made the connection that Jesus was professing to be the Son of God. It is notable that their question includes "the." Just as "son of man" is found in the Old Testament, so are mentions of "sons of God," which can also refer to angelic beings (Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; Pss. 29:1; 82:6). But in this instance, the religious leaders were trying to trap Jesus into saying that He is the supreme Son of God. Furthermore, this title also implies kingship, as it was used to refer to a king representing God's rule (2 Sam. 7:13-14; Ps. 2:7).
- Jesus is truly human and divine. He is *the* Son of Man and *the* Son of God, titles that have both human and divine connotations. He is the promised One, the Savior of the world. He is Christ, the King of kings. The Sanhedrin denied Jesus's claim of divinity and accused Him of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. They needed no other accusation or testimony.

DISCUSS: Any of us could have been in that group of religious leaders. Ask (DDG p. 102):

What reasons did the religious leaders have for wanting Jesus condemned? (anger at Him calling them hypocrites; disbelief that He really could be the Messiah; jealousy at all His followers; being undone by His orthodox way of seeing Scripture and religion)

TRANSITION: With a formal declaration of guilt in hand, the Jewish leaders set their sights on involving the local regent, Pilate. Jesus's claim to be the kingly Son of God was bound to be inflammatory to the Roman rulers. The Sanhedrin sought to seal the deal through an imperial condemnation and execution.

SON OF MAN

Jesus often referred to Himself as the Son of Man, a well-known term to faithful Jews. "Son of man" is seen over 90 times in the book of Ezekiel. Additionally, a messianic prophecy from Daniel 7:13-14 spoke of "one like a son of man" who will receive an everlasting dominion, indestructible kingdom, and glory among all peoples (all three reserved for God alone). Paired with the reference that the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of God's power (Ps. 110), Jesus claimed to be the Christ promised long ago.

POINT 2

JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS, IS WRONGLY ACCUSED (LUKE 23:1-5).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 23:1-5** from his or her own Bible.

- 1** Then their whole assembly rose up and brought him before Pilate.
- 2** They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." **3** So Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." **4** Pilate then told the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no grounds for charging this man." **5** But they kept insisting, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he started even to here."

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 1-3** the accusations made against Jesus (DDG p. 102).

The Jewish leaders made three accusations against Jesus: (1) misleading the nation, (2) opposing Roman taxes, and (3) claiming to be king—all twisted truths geared toward influencing Pilate to condemn Jesus.

- Having condemned Jesus on a religious basis, the Sanhedrin sought to have Him denounced politically as well. Jesus was brought to Pontius Pilate, who alone carried the power to order that Jesus be executed (see John 18:31).² The Jewish leaders presented three accusations against Jesus: (1) misleading the nation, (2) opposing Roman taxes, and (3) claiming to be king.
- First, they claimed Jesus was leading the Jews astray, threatening the Roman peace. Of course, this was wholly untrue. Similarly, the second indictment seems to have been a lie about Jesus's answer to the question: "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Luke 20:22). Jesus answered in favor of paying taxes, but the religious rulers needed something that might trigger a response from Pilate. Only the third allegation—Jesus stating He is the Messiah—held any sort of veracity. Jesus had claimed to be the promised Messiah, and so, Jesus did claim to be the King of the Jews.
- Pilate could not allow for any sort of threat of insurrection to go unchecked, even if he did not believe that threat existed. So he inquired about the third accusation by going to the source. But Jesus answered Pilate in the same ambiguous way He did the Sanhedrin, "You say so" (Luke 23:3).

ASK: Jesus was persecuted and wrongly accused, so we, His followers, can't expect anything less. Let groups of 3-4 discuss the following and additionally to consider why Christians might be accused of such (DDG p. 102):

What are some things Christians are wrongly accused of at times? (being bigots; not being intellectual; hating LGBTQ+ people; wanting to condemn people to hell; having a purely political agenda)

PONTIUS PILATE

Roman governor in Judea who came into power around AD 26. He was so anti-semitic that he brought "into Jerusalem military insignia bearing the image of Caesar in flagrant defiance of Jewish law. . . . He brutally suppressed protest by planting armed soldiers, disguised as civilians, among the Jewish crowds."⁴



Scan this QR code for a look at an archaeological find establishing the existence of Pilate as a Roman governor of Judea.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As our greatest good comes through the sufferings of Christ, so God's greatest glory that he has from his saints comes through their sufferings."⁵

—Thomas Brooks (1608–1680)

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below and **verses 4-5**, highlight (DDG p. 102):

Though Pilate found Jesus innocent, the enemies of Jesus continued to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing.

- Pilate saw nothing about Jesus that was deserving of death. The governor's jurisdiction was within that of legal civic matters. So his declaration of Jesus's innocence addressed the charges brought before him that pertained to Roman rule. He determined that the assembly's allegations against Jesus stemmed from a religious matter outside of his jurisdiction, issues that needed to be taken care of within the Sanhedrin, not by Rome.
- Instead of accepting this proclamation of innocence, the Jewish leaders continued to push their agenda. They presented Pilate with more "evidence" of the supposed provocation and negative influence of Jesus on the people. In the vein of accusing Jesus of misleading the people, the Jewish leaders said that Jesus was inciting the people. In a short time, their accusation against Jesus went from deceptive leader to that of an agitator and instigator of rebellion against Rome.
- By bringing up where Jesus taught, specifically Galilee (v. 5), the Sanhedrin members may have been attempting to recall for Pilate a former tax revolt led by a Galilean in AD 6.³ If Jesus was Galilean, then perhaps He held the same tendency toward rebellion. Through this new accusation, the Jewish leaders further painted a false portrait of Jesus as a man filled with dissension, chaos, and revolution.

DISCUSS: Even Pilate, a Roman governor who hated Jews, found no guilt in Jesus. Discuss the following (DDG p. 102):

How does knowing Jesus lived a holy and innocent life but still dealt with persecution and injustice encourage you when you face similar troubles? (helps me persevere in hard times; encourages me to always do right; reminds me that good does prevail)

TRANSITION: The Sanhedrin had hoped to persuade Pilate of Jesus's threat to Rome, but they were unsuccessful. Their reference to Galilee provided Pilate a way out of this pickle: Galilee was under someone else's jurisdiction. Therefore, Pilate could pass this problem to Herod. But the Galilean loophole didn't work out the way Pilate had hoped. Jesus was sent to Herod, but Herod also found no fault in Jesus and no reason to condemn Him, though Herod and his soldiers did mock and beat Him. So Herod returned Jesus to Pilate (vv. 6-12).

POINT 3

JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS, IS WRONGLY CONDEMNED (LUKE 23:13-25).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 23:13-25** from his or her own Bible.

13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, **14** and said to them, “You have brought me this man as one who misleads the people. But in fact, after examining him in your presence, I have found no grounds to charge this man with those things you accuse him of. **15** Neither has Herod, because he sent him back to us. Clearly, he has done nothing to deserve death. **16** Therefore, I will have him whipped and then release him.” **18** Then they all cried out together, “Take this man away! Release Barabbas to us!” **19** (He had been thrown into prison for a rebellion that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) **20** Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate addressed them again, **21** but they kept shouting, “Crucify! Crucify him!” **22** A third time he said to them, “Why? What has this man done wrong? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him whipped and then release him.” **23** But they kept up the pressure, demanding with loud voices that he be crucified, and their voices won out. **24** So Pilate decided to grant their demand **25** and released the one they were asking for, who had been thrown into prison for rebellion and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 13-23** (DDG p. 103):

Again Pilate found no guilt in Jesus, but because of the insistent cries of the crowd, he condemned Him.

LUKE 23:17

Omitted from early manuscripts and modern-day Bible translations, having little textual support. It was most likely added, not by Luke but a scribe, just to explain the custom of releasing a prisoner.

BARABBAS

A prisoner at the same time as Jesus. In Matthew 27:16, Barabbas was a notorious prisoner. In Mark 15:7, he was a rebel and murderer. In Luke 23:19, he was an insurrectionist and murderer. And John describes him as a robber (John 18:40).

- Pilate once again declared to the Jewish leaders that there were no grounds by which he could charge Jesus. With his declaration in verse 16 to have Jesus whipped and released, Pilate attempted to close the civil case against Jesus. But suddenly, the people joined in against Jesus as well. Those who had so recently warmly welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna!” were now calling for His crucifixion.
- There was a custom that during the time of the Passover feast, the governor of the region would release from captivity a prisoner of their choosing (see Matt. 27:15; Mark 15:6; John 18:39). The crowd demanded the release of Barabbas—the type of wicked criminal they had accused Jesus of being.
- Luke points to a third time that Pilate declared Jesus as not guilty (Luke 23:22).
- Crowd control was a real factor for Roman rulers like Pilate. The mass of people was becoming a powerful posse of demanding voices, ready to erupt. A riot was imminent, and Pilate either had to release Jesus from custody with an official ruling of “not guilty” or condemn Jesus for crimes He did not commit. The former was sure to kickstart a revolt. The latter was certain to result in an unjust tragedy, but the people’s voices had to be heard.

DISCUSS: The crowd, like sheep without a shepherd, can be dangerous. Ask the following question (DDG pp. 100,103):

From Day 4 in the DDG: **Why is mob rule so effective?** (the voice of many is exponentially more powerful than one; the frenetic energy of a mob is dangerous and unpredictable; people tend to follow the masses without reason)

READ: Without Christ, we are like sheep without a shepherd, following the masses blindly, enslaved to sin. Read the following doctrine (DDG p. 103):

Key Doctrine #43: Enslaved to Sin: Because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, all of humanity has inherited a sin nature that inclines them toward sin and rebellion. Human beings are enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17), continually living with the propensity to transgress God's commandments whenever possible. It isn't until one experiences salvation through the work of Christ that he or she is able to overcome sin's enslavement through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

EXPLAIN: Using the content below and **verses 24-25**, explain that all are guilty.

- Because human beings are enslaved to sin apart from Christ, we are all found guilty. Whether we are the religious leaders, the crowds, or Pilate. We twist truth and condemn true goodness. But Jesus doesn't leave us there. He came and died so that we would be free from sin's enslavement.
- Pilate saw no way to avert this crisis, so he acquiesced to the will of the crowd. This was a massive injustice for which he rightfully stood guilty, yet it was also part of God's holy plan set forth long ago. Regardless of the religious rulers' denial of Jesus's deity, the people's rejection of the Messiah, or Pilate's limitations to do what was right, God's sovereign will to crush His Son, the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53:4-6), for our salvation could not be thwarted.

DISCUSS: Though we as believers in Christ are no longer enslaved to sin, we still sin. Ask (DDG p. 103):

What can we do to sin less? (stay in close relationship with Jesus in prayer and Scripture reading; have someone to keep us accountable; remember that we are able to say no to temptation; rely on the Holy Spirit's power)

REVIEW: Use #4 through #8 on **PACK ITEM 2: PASSION WEEK MAP** and the events of Friday on **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE** to visualize and summarize the events on this day in Jesus's life in this session.

TRANSITION: Jesus faced an unjust trial, resulting in a guilty verdict. Yet Jesus endured so that He could free the very people who sent Him to His execution.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus was condemned to die although He did no wrong. In this, Jesus became the perfect substitute for us, bearing our sins on the cross to provide forgiveness. All who have trusted in Christ are no longer under condemnation but have been declared righteous by God. Because we have been forgiven of our sin, we cast aside guilt and shame when we sin and instead repent with assurance that we are always loved and accepted by God.

HEAD:

The only perfectly just One was unjustly treated. He obediently endured mistreatment and scorn from the very ones He planned to rescue. We too have dishonored Jesus through our own disobedient actions. Even though He knew we would betray Him, Christ provided a way out by saving us from our sin.

If Jesus suffered without sinning, how are we to try to endure our present sufferings?

HEART:

Jesus willingly walked into a stormy situation that would lead to His death. He allowed lies to run rampant and refused to set the record straight, all because of the compassionate will of His Father to save the souls of humankind. As we embrace the sacrifice of the King of the Jews, we can experience the mercy and grace of God for eternity.

Knowing Jesus suffered unjustly, how can we thank Him for His desire to do the Father's will in enduring suffering and dying for us?

HANDS:

Any one of us could have been in that angry, demanding mob. Though we believers have been saved by Jesus and the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we continue to sin. When we do, we resemble our sinful forefathers who shouted, "Crucify Him!" Our sin is what necessitated Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. His love for the Father is what drove Jesus to His crucifixion. The Father's patience and compassion for us is what sent Jesus to earth to fulfill His sacrificial mission. Praise be to God for His salvation!

Knowing Jesus has taken away our enslavement to sin, with whom can we share this good news for their salvation also?

PRAY: Jesus, thank You for enduring false accusations and false condemnation that we may no longer be condemned. May Your goodness and holiness flow in us that others may see You and believe the good news of Your salvation. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Surely corruption is ingrained in our hearts, interwoven with our very natures, has sunk deep into our souls, and will never be cured but by a miracle of grace."⁶

—Thomas Boston
(1676–1732)

POINT 1: JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS, IS WRONGLY TRIED (LUKE 22:66-71).

+ COMMENTARY

“These words aroused intense interest. All joined in the question that followed. Whereas before they had asked Jesus to say whether he was the Christ, now they ask the direct question, Are you the Son of God, then? As men are sometimes called sons of God, we must understand the definite article as important (‘the’ not ‘a’ Son of God). They are asking whether Jesus claims a special relationship to God. His reference to the Son of man and to the place of God’s right hand must have seemed to them a claim to a higher place than that which they understood the Messiah to occupy. For them a claim to be Messiah might be a mistake, but it was not blasphemy. But this was something different; it linked Jesus to deity. His reply means something like, ‘That is your word, not mine. I would not have put it like that, but since you have, I cannot deny it.’ Moffatt renders, ‘Certainly I am’, but this is too definite. I. Abrahams denies that the expression renders a rabbinic idiom, and we cannot take it as a common expression. But the context shows that it must be taken as an affirmative. The point is that Jesus’ understanding of the term differed from theirs; but he could not disown it and his answer recognizes this.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

One day, an elderly lady hosted her extended family in her home for a holiday lunch. After enjoying the food and family fellowship, many began cleaning up the aftermath. While standing at the sink, which had a clear view of the backyard, one relative mentioned how nice the grass in the backyard looked. The matriarch replied, “Rats?! In my backyard?” Several members of the family tried to explain to her that there were no rats, only good-looking “grass” in the backyard. But it took several attempts to explain the situation before this grandma could let go of the idea that rats were taking up residence behind her home.

Though this was an innocuous situation, having your words misunderstood can be frustrating for all involved. There are countless situations in which our words may be misheard, misconceived, or misconstrued. Sometimes it is the case of an innocent mistake. Other times, it is an intentional act and twisting of truth. The misunderstanding recorded here in Luke’s Gospel was a critical one—it was a matter of life and death. Instead of digging in His heels and proving His point, Jesus allowed the scene to play out. How hard it must have been to be wronged,

EXTRA

shamed, and misconceived. We must not forget that Jesus was not only fully God, He was also fully man. What we feel when we are misunderstood, Jesus felt too.

POINT 2: JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS, IS WRONGLY ACCUSED (LUKE 23:1-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“Let Us Stand on the Truth (23:1–5) Pilate’s court/state supreme court. They would have killed the Lord then, but there was a problem: The Romans had conquered Israel, and because the Jews were under Roman occupation, they could not carry out a death sentence themselves; only Rome could do that. So the Jewish court refers the case to the state supreme court. They bring the Lord to Pilate. Verse 2 says they actually change the charges. They accuse Jesus of ‘misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.’ Of course, the first two charges are not true and the last charge is manipulative. They’re trying to paint Jesus as a public menace and a threat to the Roman government. In fact, another Gospel writer tells us that they tried to put Pilate in an awkward position. They tried to say that Pilate would not be loyal to Caesar if Pilate didn’t condemn Jesus. So Pilate questions the Lord: ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ The Lord admits it plainly with the words, ‘You say so’ (v. 3). Again, another Gospel writer tells us that Pilate felt like he was the superior: he told Jesus he had power over the Lord’s life. But the Lord responds by saying, ‘You would have no authority over me at all if it hadn’t been given you from above’ (John 19:11), and, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). The Lord is not only Messiah but also King of Heaven and Earth. Pilate finishes his interrogation and actually finds Jesus not guilty (v. 4). Verse 5 says the priests kept insisting that the Lord was a threat to the government. At this point, public opinion is interfering with justice.”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

On the morning of October 7, 2016, in Izmir, Turkey, Pastor Andrew Brunson was arrested by local officials. They stated the cause of arrest was that they found him to be a threat to national security. At this point in time, Brunson and his family, U.S. citizens from North Carolina, had peacefully lived and faithfully served in Turkey for over 23 years. Pastor Andrew was detained with no official offenses charged against him. After being held for 63 days, he was transferred to a counter-terrorism center and later given a court trial with charges of being an armed terrorist group member. There was no basis or evidence for these indictments. The judge condemned Pastor Brunson as guilty of terrorism and sent him to a Turkish prison, where he remained until July 2018. He was then put on house arrest until a hearing on October 12, 2018, when he was finally released and able to return to the United States.⁹

As believers in Christ, if Jesus was wrongly accused, there will be times when we are wrongly accused for our faith as well.

POINT 3: JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS, IS WRONGLY CONDEMNED (LUKE 23:13-25).

+ COMMENTARY

“The situation was beginning to become crazy. Here were priests demanding the execution of Jesus on the ground that he was attempting to overthrow the political authorities. Yet these very priests would not themselves bow to the political authorities; and what is more, they were calling for the release of a known political activist who in a recent civil disturbance in the city had committed murder. . . . At this crucial moment in the narrative we cannot help noticing the insistent repetitions in Luke’s language: ‘But they insisted with loud voices asking that he might be crucified. And their voices prevailed. And Pilate . . . released one who for insurrection and murder had been cast into prison, whom they asked for, but Jesus he delivered up to their will . . . It is only a few verses since we were listening to the prayers of another petitioner before another authority: ‘If thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done’ (22:42). That was the king at prayer, and one day as a result of that prayer he would sit at the right hand of the power of God and have the government of the universe entrusted to him. How different the priests and the people. Standing before the properly constituted political authority (see Rom 13:1-7) whose sacred God-given task it was to protect the innocent and condemn the guilty, these priests insisted on overriding the will of the political authority and on having their own will done. Their own will was that the innocent be condemned and a murderous insurrectionist be released. But whatever becomes of people who insist on their own will like that?”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

A famous quote states, “To love is to risk not being loved in return.”¹¹ When love is true, it is sacrificial. This is the type of affectionate attachment that drives you to do that which you never dreamed you would do. It is a devotion that demands that you do what is best for your beloved, even if it includes difficult decisions, sleepless nights, relinquishing personal preferences, and choosing to serve instead of being served. When you love someone that deeply, in the face of danger, you would die to save the other. Jesus took on the condemnation due to us. He willingly walked through betrayal, beatings, and having the criminal Barabbas chosen over Him. At any point, Jesus could have said, “Enough!” But He endured it all for love. First and foremost, each step toward the cross was an act of love for His Father. Yet His journey to the cross was also love on display for all of humanity so that you and I could enjoy eternity in the loving presence of God.

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THE CRUCIFIED KING

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus, the crucified King, extends forgiveness to the executioners (Luke 23:32-38).
2. Jesus, the crucified King, promises salvation to the repentant (Luke 23:39-43).
3. Jesus, the crucified King, entrusts Himself to the Father (Luke 23:44-49).

Background Passage: Luke 23

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus gave up His life to provide salvation to all who repent of their sin.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus willingly took up His cross and suffered the judgment our sins deserve. At the moment He died, the curtain in the temple sanctuary was torn in two, signifying that sinners have access to God through the blood of Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus is the center of history, revealing God's holiness and justice, our sinfulness and unrighteousness, and Christ's humility and love.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus died in our place to pay for our sins, we not only proclaim to the world that Jesus died on the cross but also why He died.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What difficult time in your life made the day seem to last forever?** (often it is the days filled with horror or extreme pain that seem the longest to us; sheer exhaustion or hunger also make a day go by slowly; boredom can make time tick at a snail's pace)

TRANSITION: Even our longest, most horrible days don't come close to the agony Jesus experienced. Not only were His last hours before the crucifixion filled with pain, His anguish was multi-layered. Christ came to save us and endured physical, spiritual, and emotional affliction so that He could provide a perfect sacrifice.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Only a handful of hours into His last day before death, Jesus had already been falsely accused and wrongly condemned to death. He was flogged by officials, forsaken by His followers, and left so weak that He could not even carry His cross as He marched to the place of His execution. Yet the emotional anguish and physical pain He bore could not keep Him from obediently fulfilling God's purpose. Christ came to be a ransom for sinners so that those who believed could become part of the forever family of God.



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POINT 1

JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED KING, EXTENDS FORGIVENESS TO THE EXECUTIONERS (LUKE 23:32-38).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 23:32-38** from his or her own Bible.

32 Two others—criminals—were also led away to be executed with him.

33 When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.

34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided his clothes and cast lots. **35** The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: “He saved others; let him save himself if this is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One!” **36** The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine **37** and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” **38** An inscription was above him: This Is the King of the Jews.

GUIDE: Call attention to Golgotha (#9) on **PACK ITEM 2: PASSION WEEK MAP**, and guide your group to picture the scene at hand—Jesus hanging on the cross with a criminal on each side. Then using the notes below, explain from **verses 32-34** the following truth (DDG p. 110):

On the cross, Jesus’s love and mercy compelled Him to pray for forgiveness for those involved in His execution.

- Crucifixion was a form of execution carried out by the Roman Empire. The criminal was fastened to a wooden cross and left to die due to suffocation. This was accomplished either through attachment by ropes or by large spikes through the hands and feet.¹ It was a visual warning to prevent others from being criminals as they watched the punishment for crime.
- Crucifixions could be done in batches with other criminals. Jesus, the guiltless yet falsely condemned One, hung between two convicted criminals. This particular detail is a fulfillment of messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:12: “He willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.”
- We’ve seen Jesus’s willing submission to the Father’s will even though He knew it would lead to His death. Now we see that He also interceded for those who were against Him. These two actions point to the character of Jesus, His loving, merciful, compassionate character.
- But don’t think that He was calm and smiling through it all. Both Matthew and Mark describe at this similar point in time that Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), alluding to David’s prayer in Psalm 22. Jesus was truly in anguish and sorrow.
- Roman custom allowed soldiers to cast lots, akin to flipping a coin, for the clothing of those crucified. Crucifixion had become so frequent that the soldiers could attain personal gain from prisoners’ leftover articles.



THE SKULL

Also known as Golgotha or Calvary, this was the place where executions and crucifixions happened. It was near Jerusalem, outside the city walls, where travelers could see the punishment for crimes committed.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Forgiveness does not consist of remission of penalty. . . . To forgive is to restore to the old relationship . . . so the forgiveness that Christ wins for us is not chiefly a remission of penalty; it is the restoration to the affectionate intimacy of sons with their Father.”⁴

—William Temple
(1881–1944)

ASK: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 13: CROSS CONNECTIONS**, highlighting how events in Jesus's crucifixion alluded to and fulfilled aspects of David's prayer in Psalm 22. Then ask (DDG pp. 106,110):

From Day 2 in the DDG: **When in the midst of suffering and persecution, what are your prayers typically geared toward?** (if we are honest, most of our prayers are selfish ones; we ask for relief from that which is causing us pain; we long for the suffering to go away; we may even ask for justice if our suffering is due to the sin of others)

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 35-38** the following (DDG p. 110):

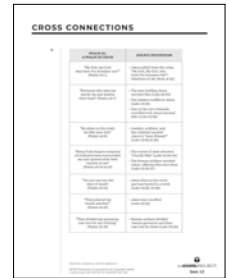
As some ridiculed Jesus on the cross, little did they know that He was there to forgive and save the world.

- As if Jesus hadn't endured enough, many began to scoff at and ridicule Him. The arrogance of the crowd was on display through their response to the crucifixion. They wanted a sign, telling Jesus to save Himself. Little did they know that Jesus was dying on that cross to save them and the world.
- Luke also noted the inscription above Jesus's head. It was common for a wooden placard, called a *titulus*, to be placed on the cross above the head of the accused.² Again, one purpose of these very public executions was to intimidate the people to avert further trouble. As people walked by, they would see the terrible suffering each criminal endured as well as the sign describing the crime committed. All of this communicated: "Don't do this, or you'll end up here."
- The statement **"This Is the King of the Jews"** (v. 38) pointed to the crime Jesus supposedly committed. It is likely that Pilate had the inscription chosen in hopes of having the last word in the power struggle he had with the Jewish leaders.³ Ironically, the statement shows what we truly know, that Jesus is the King, here to forgive and save us from sin.

DISCUSS: Jesus forgave His enemies despite their ridicule. Ask (DDG p. 110):

Why is it difficult to forgive others? (we think we want justice; we want those who wronged us to suffer too; we don't think people should get away with doing something bad)

TRANSITION: During His execution, Jesus interceded on behalf of the executioners who were ignorant of the vast importance of those passing hours. It is remarkable that He had the wherewithal to think past the immense pain He experienced. After this, Luke mentioned the criminals on the crosses on either side of Jesus. One would prove himself to be as spiritually blind and hardhearted as the crowd, while the other found salvation through faith and repentance.



SCOFF

The Greek word for *scoff* in the New Testament is used only by Luke and only twice. Once here in 23:35 and the other earlier in 16:14, where the Pharisees scoffed at Jesus. The meaning is to ridicule, sneer, and to turn up one's nose at something.⁵

POINT 2

JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED KING, PROMISES SALVATION TO THE REPENTANT (LUKE 23:39-43).

BRAINSTORM: Invite the group to call out answers to this question: “When sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, what are some possible responses we may receive?”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 23:39-43** from his or her own Bible.

39 Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” **40** But the other answered, rebuking him: “Don’t you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment? **41** We are punished justly, because we’re getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong.” **42** Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” **43** And he said to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

INSTRUCT: Use the content below and **verses 39-41** to explain the following essential truth (DDG p. 110):

Any sinner can find salvation by acknowledging that God is to be feared, we deserve punishment for our sins, and Jesus is every soul’s only hope for salvation.

- The crowd, the soldiers, and a thief on the cross ridiculed Jesus. Juxtaposed to the scoffing scoundrel, another condemned culprit saw Jesus as the Messiah. To be crucified, these thieves must have done something horrific. One commentator suggests that a better translation of the original Greek for “criminal” is that of “rebel” or “insurrectionist” (precisely what Jesus was accused of being).⁶ Whatever his crimes, instead of hurling insults, the second sinner threw himself on the mercy of the Messiah.
- There are four components of the second criminal’s response to Jesus. First, he rightly feared God (v. 40). Second, he recognized he deserved his punishment because of his wrongdoing (v. 41). Next, he understood Christ as the source of salvation (v. 42). Last, he acted on what he knew: Jesus was his only hope for deliverance from eternal judgment (v. 42). Many gospel tracts follow this pattern. This is the gospel message and what it means to trust and accept Jesus into your life.
- Through Jesus’s perfect sacrifice, God provided the only way for sinful people to be brought near to His holy presence for eternity. Jesus paid the penalty for our transgressions; more than this, Jesus gifted us His righteousness.

ASK: Looking at the previous truth, ask (DDG p. 110):

Which of these three truths do you think our culture struggles with the most, and why? (“God being feared” because some want to think God is just about love; “we deserve punishment” because some don’t feel guilty; “Jesus is our only hope” because people want to believe there are many options)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the following doctrine (DDG p. 110):

Key Doctrine #59: Christ as Propitiation: Because of God’s righteousness and holiness, humanity’s sins must be atoned for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ’s death is the appeasement or satisfaction of God’s wrath against sin. Christ’s propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God’s great love toward sinners (1 John 4:10) as well as the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).

EXPLAIN: Use the content below and **verses 42-43** to explain that the second criminal became a believer because he accepted Jesus’s sacrifice as the propitiation for his sins:

- When we tell people about the good news of Jesus, we try to end with a call to action: accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. This acceptance is a surrendering that involves repentance and acknowledging Jesus is the only way to salvation, the only way to appease God’s just wrath. This is what the second criminal did; he accepted Christ as the propitiation for his sins.
- Both thieves responded to Jesus. One offender did so in disbelief and disregard for the Messiah. The other responded in repentance and faith. The second man’s cry to Christ is evidence that even the most wicked of individuals can be saved. The second criminal recognized Jesus as supreme Lord of an eternal kingdom. His final appeal was filled with humility and desperation as he reached out to his only hope.
- Jesus’s response affirmed the sincerity of the second sinner’s plea. Paradise is a reference to the place where the righteous go after death. In contrast with Gehenna, or hell, it is one of two destinations for every person. Jesus claimed that both He and this dying, repentant lawbreaker would see each other in their new eternal home in paradise.⁷ This is only possible because Christ’s death satisfied God’s wrath against sin; His death was the propitiation for our sins. Jesus’s sacrifice turns away God’s wrath from us and reconciles us back to God when we trust in Him.

TRANSITION: With the promise of paradise on His lips, Jesus held fast to the Word of God, which held the assurance that this agony-filled day was simultaneously filled with immense purpose (Isa. 53:10a). Jesus, in His last moments, would still have His eyes fixed on the Father.

POINT 3

JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED KING, ENTRUSTS HIMSELF TO THE FATHER (LUKE 23:44-49).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 23:44-49** from his or her own Bible.

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, **45** because the sun's light failed. The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle. **46** And Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." Saying this, he breathed his last. **47** When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, "This man really was righteous!" **48** All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. **49** But all who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 44-45** the following truth (DDG p. 111):

When Christ died, the veil was torn, revealing that God's people, now being the priesthood of believers, could have direct access to God.

- During the time of day when the sun should shine the brightest, it failed to illuminate the land. As Jesus spent His last hours in anguish on the cross, an astonishing gloom fell on the earth. In a sense, the earth mourned the approaching death of Jesus. This frightening physical murkiness may have visualized the divine spiritual anguish Jesus was experiencing as He bore the wrongdoing of the world on His shoulders and suffered the eternal wrath of God against that sin being aimed squarely at Him.
- Next, Luke noted that the temple curtain was torn in two. The curtain in question had physically separated God from His people because of His holiness and people's sinfulness. On the Day of Atonement, after ceremonial cleansing and sacrifices to cover his own sins, the high priest would enter the holy of holies through the curtain as the mediator between God and His people "to make atonement for the Israelites once a year because of all their sins" (Lev. 16:34).
- The veil that separated sinful individuals from the holy presence of God was torn in two, removing the barrier between God and man. Mark states: "Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last. Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:37-38). The veil was thirty feet tall and very thick. No human could have torn it from top to bottom. This was yet another supernatural event pointing out the significance of Jesus's crucifixion. When Christ breathed His last and died, His sacrifice for sins ended the veil's protective purpose.⁸ Hebrews 10:19-20 affirms that we now "have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)."

THE CURTAIN OF THE SANCTUARY

The heavy drapery that hung in the Jerusalem temple, which isolated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. This inner sanctum is where the ark of the covenant—the symbol of God's presence—would have rested. No one was allowed in this most holy of places except once a year on the Day of Atonement lest they drop dead as sinners before the purity and power of God (Num. 18:7).

DISCUSS: Let's not take our access to God for granted. Ask (DDG p. 111):

What are the benefits of having direct access to the Father? (we can have an intimate relationship with Him; our prayer life is richer not needing earthly mediators; we can ask for and be forgiven for our sins at any time; we know a personal, almighty God who is always for us)

SAY: "Jesus constantly used Scripture to define Himself and to speak to others and to the Father."

HIGHLIGHT: Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 31:5. Then using the content below, explain from **verses 46-49** the following (DDG p. 111):

As others responded to Jesus's death in their own way, Jesus's last words were those of Psalm 31:5, committing His spirit and entrusting His life to the Father.

- Some of Jesus's last words were a quote of Psalm 31:5: "Into your hand I entrust my spirit." But the second half of that verse is pertinent as well: "You have redeemed me, LORD, God of truth." Even in Jesus's final moments, the faithfulness of His Father permeated His thoughts. This psalm was a popular Jewish bedtime prayer. As Jesus went to sleep one last time in this mortal state, He entrusted His life to the goodness of God.⁹
- Once again, Luke showcased the responses to Jesus. At least one of the soldiers understood that Jesus was innocent of the crimes for which He had been crucified. Among the crowds of people, some beat their chests. Earlier in the Gospel, Luke recounted the response of the repentant tax collector, who demonstrated the same action (Luke 18:13). It is likely this action was a sign of grief and contrition by some of the souls who sent Christ to His death.
- Lastly, we encounter the ones who knew Jesus. Though Luke mentioned their presence, he did not provide what they were thinking or feeling. We can imagine the shock they might have experienced as they watched their loved One be mercilessly beaten, wrongly condemned, and horrifically crucified. But we know that they stood at a distance watching.

CHALLENGE: Knowing Jesus filled His words with Scripture, ask (DDG p. 111):

What are ways we can fill our thoughts and words with Scripture? (more reading and study of Scripture; Scripture memorization; hang up framed verses in our homes; sticky notes with Scripture written on them in high-traffic places like the bathroom mirror or on our car's dashboard)

TRANSITION: Though His last moments before death were bleak, Jesus unwaveringly held to the faithfulness of God to finish His plan. The cross was not the end of the story. It was the dawn of a new beginning.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus willingly took up His cross and suffered the judgment our sins deserve. At the moment He died, the curtain in the temple sanctuary was torn in two, signifying that sinners have access to God through the blood of Christ. Because Jesus died in our place to pay for our sins, we not only proclaim to the world that Jesus died on the cross but also why He died.

HEAD:

Jesus knew the will and purpose of the Father, in both intention and implications. He lived a perfect life (which we could never achieve) so that He could die a sinner's death (which we deserved) and make right what was lost through the fall of humanity. This was a strategy no mere man could have concocted or completed. But Jesus in His infinite perfection and obedience fulfilled every part of the Father's plan.

What part of Jesus's perfect obedience are you most grateful for?

HEART:

The words we hold in our hands in the Bible that tell of the sufferings of Jesus are a mere shadow of the fullness of Christ's crucifixion. Our finite minds can only comprehend a fraction of the purpose-filled pain Jesus experienced so that you and I could have abundant life. There is no comparison to the amount of love that spilled out of Jesus's literal bleeding heart. It was a love for the Father and for sinners that held Him to the cross.

How can you thank Jesus today for His sacrifice on the cross?

HANDS:

God's heart is for His glory to be made known throughout the nations. Jesus endured the shame and pain of the cross so that the message of the Father's love, mercy, grace, and glory would be spread from soul to soul until all have heard of His fame. The end goal of the cross was not simply salvation for those who witnessed Jesus's death. The purpose of the crucifixion was to defeat the power of sin and death so that the salvation of God would be propelled throughout the ages to every tribe, tongue, and nation.

With whom can you share the good news of Jesus this week?

PRAY: Jesus, You endured pain and the cross for us. You also tore the veil that separated us from the Father. You did it to save us, to reconcile us to the Father, so that we may have a relationship with You. We are forever grateful. Let us show You our joy by sharing this good news through our words and actions with all those we encounter. Amen.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The cross is not just about one chapter of the Christian faith; it casts its shadow and stamps its form upon all of that theology."¹⁰

—Alister E. McGrath

POINT 1: JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED KING, EXTENDS FORGIVENESS TO THE EXECUTIONERS (LUKE 23:32-38).

+ COMMENTARY

“Then Jesus spoke and said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (23:34). Jesus utters a prayer from the cross asking the Father to bestow his grace, mercy and forgiveness on those who at that very moment were killing him. . . . They had the Scriptures and the prophets and the signs and miracles that Jesus performed. They had no excuse, but Jesus is pleading with his Father to take their ignorance into consideration and be merciful to them and forgive them. He doesn’t ask for them to be exonerated—he acknowledges their guilt and asks that they be forgiven. The same statement is made later on in Paul’s writings when he talks about the people who delivered up the Lord of Glory out of ignorance; they should have known, but they did not understand fully. Jesus is concerned about the eternal destiny of his tormentors even though he is close to death.”¹¹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Sibling rivalry is a real struggle. If you’re a skeptic, throw a few kids in a car for a long period of time and you’ll see the strife erupt before the first pit stop. There is something about that environment that showcases conflict. “He’s kicking my seat and bothering me on purpose!” “She’s breathing too loud to annoy me!” “It’s my turn to choose a song. He always gets to pick.” We are innately selfish beings. We are also, by that same trait, superb at believing the worst about people. In the earlier car scenario, one sibling takes the simple swinging of a leg as a vendetta. Another takes routine and necessary respiratory activity as a personal attack. Brothers and sisters excel at misinterpreting someone’s actions—at a melodramatic level!

Believing the worst about people comes naturally to most of us. As adults, hopefully we have grown out of the silliness of familial in-fighting, but it is still easy to take offense from some of the smallest things. This is especially true when it comes to people we don’t know. Just look at any heated social media discussion—Exhibit A on worst-case-scenario thinking, and sometimes toward someone who had zero ill intentions.

We see the opposite through the example of Jesus. He was quick to forgive, slow to anger, and unceasingly full of mercy. Instead of putting up walls and hurling insults, He prayed for those who put Him to death. He showed compassion on them, interceded for them, and died for them.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED KING, PROMISES SALVATION TO THE REPENTANT (LUKE 23:39-43).

+ COMMENTARY

“The changed thief goes on to make the point that they two are punished justly. They have broken the law and their suffering must be seen in the light of that. Not so Jesus: he has done nothing wrong. Such a recognition of Jesus’ innocence must have been widespread. . . . Then the thief asked Jesus to remember him, i.e. remember him for good. . . . It is not easy to see how fully the penitent thief could have entered into an understanding of Jesus’ Person and work. But these words show that he realized at least that death would not be the end of everything for him and that beyond death was the kingdom. Jesus’ words of reassurance gave him more than he had asked for. Not only would he have a place in the kingdom, whenever that would be established, but that very day he would enter Paradise. Truly marks the following words as emphatic and important . . . Today is occasionally taken with the preceding words, but there seems no reason for this. Almost all scholars agree that it refers to being in Paradise.”¹²

+ ILLUSTRATION

Through the interaction between Jesus and the repentant thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43, we are given the essence of the gospel: repentance, faith, and grace. A guilty thief, who was staring down death, encountered Jesus and saw Him for who He really is: the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Through a repentant heart and a faith-filled proclamation, this condemned sinner was completely saved. He never had the chance to do anything in response to His salvation. His entire Christian life happened in mere moments. Like all of us, he went from sinner to saint instantly. But unlike us, he directly went from earthly sinner to heavenly, glorified soul.

Whereas most of us get a lifetime to live out our faith, this man’s justification, sanctification, and glorification occurred in an almost immediate sequence. He had no time to show off his salvation with the fruit of the Spirit, be a part of the Great Commission, or prioritize the gathering of believers. Yet Jesus was clear that the thief on the cross would get to spend eternity with God. Jesus promised this man that paradise was around the corner for them both. Death that day would not be the end. They would see each other soon.

The thief was given eternal security from the very lips of God, even though the only things this fellow had time to do were repent of his sins and trust in Jesus to save him. That’s it. A sinner repents of his sins and trusts in Jesus. Then Jesus freely lavishes grace on that undeserved sinner. What a gift!

POINT 3: JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED KING, ENTRUSTS HIMSELF TO THE FATHER (LUKE 23:44-49).

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus was unjustly crucified and killed by wicked men (Acts 2:23; 7:52). Yet he was holy and righteous (3:14), God’s holy Servant (4:27, 30), the Righteous One (22:14). He was totally innocent

as Pontius Pilate confessed three times before all (Luke 23:4,14,22). Herod Antipas, who was familiar with Jewish customs, also confessed his innocence (23:15). But others who were in a position to know also confessed this. A criminal crucified with Jesus admitted that although he himself was guilty and deserving of death, Jesus was innocent (23:41). Finally the centurion who witnessed all that took place also confessed Jesus' innocence (23:47). Luke's readers therefore need not be embarrassed or confused because the Object of their faith died a criminal's death, for all who were in a position to know witnessed to his innocence. Why Luke emphasized this theme is not clear, even if the fact that he did so is.

This account also stresses the eschatological nature of Jesus' death. This was not just a prophet's death, although it was that. This was the death of God's Anointed, the Messiah/Christ, the King of the Jews, the Son of God, the Lord, the Son of Man. The eschatological nature of this death is seen by darkness coming upon the land, for this was a sign of God's entrance into history to fulfill his purpose . . . Added to this is the report of the tearing of the temple curtain in two. These portray Jesus' death as the eschatological event that inaugurates a new covenant (22:20). Luke did not describe fully how Jesus' death brings all this about. He presented no developed theory of the atonement. What he did say was that Jesus came for the lost (19:10) and that because of his death he was able to forgive sins."¹³

+ ILLUSTRATION

In an iconic scene, Indiana Jones, on a frantic search for the Holy Grail, finds himself at a dead end. Through the guidance of his father's diary, which is filled with notes of his research about the Holy Grail, Indiana has so far been successful in deciphering the clues to help him navigate creepy cave puzzles and avoid booby traps. Next, he faces an impassable chasm, a gap so vast even an Olympic long jumper would fall short to his death. But the hand-drawn instructions tell him to leap. With his father's life on the line, he is forced to push through his fears and step out in faith. About twelve inches into his descent, he stops. Jones opens his eyes in wonder and discovers a land bridge concealed by an optical illusion. Donning his dusty brown hat, and a renewed hope in his ability to save his father, Indiana Jones crosses the impassable canyon and continues his crusade.

Though Jesus's faith in God was not a blind one, He still had choices to make. Every step toward the cross was an exhibition of the confidence He had in the Father's plan. Even as Christ hung on the cross, facing a sense of abandonment from His Father, He steadfastly endured the pain and shame, knowing that a faithful God would make a way for sinners to be saved.

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THE RISEN KING

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Resisting the Possibility of Jesus's Resurrection (Matt. 27:57-66)
2. Encountering the Reality of Jesus's Resurrection (Matt. 28:1-6)
3. Sharing the News of Jesus's Resurrection (Matt. 28:7-10)

Background Passage: Matthew 27–28

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus's resurrection from the dead on the third day is the linchpin of the Christian faith and is news to be shared with the world.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

On Easter Sunday, God vindicated His Son's perfect sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. Through faith, we are united to Christ and share in the promise of being resurrected in His likeness. Sin's curse has been removed, death has been defeated, and we are assured of everlasting life with God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we worship a risen Savior who has raised us to new life, we tell others the good news of Christ's victory over sin and death that they may trust in Jesus and receive resurrection life.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is the largest sports comeback you've witnessed?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- After a grueling trial and gruesome crucifixion, the beaten, lifeless body of Jesus hung on the cross. With Friday sundown and the approaching Sabbath, there was a rush to dispose of the deceased. Determined to honor their rabbi, some of Jesus's followers arranged to provide Jesus with a proper burial. But they didn't know that the borrowed tomb would only be needed for a very short time. Jesus would not be dead for long. God was about to make His most powerful move yet to fulfill His promise to rescue His people.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: What are some pleasant surprises you've experienced that came out of times of darkness? (people you didn't know well came out of the woodwork to provide for you; we may see our personal limits go way beyond what we thought possible; the removal of things from our lives can provide a simpler, more satisfying existence)

TRANSITION: Though the Jewish leaders thought they had the downfall of Jesus in the bag, they were about to witness the biggest comeback of all. Death would be defeated. The debt due to our sin would be satisfied. The path to eternal life would be paved for all who would trust in Jesus for salvation. The resurrection of Jesus was about to change the spiritual landscape for all humankind. And no one saw it coming.



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POINT 1

RESISTING THE POSSIBILITY OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION (MATT. 27:57-66)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 27:57-66** from his or her Bible.

57 When it was evening, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph came, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. **58** He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus's body. Then Pilate ordered that it be released. **59** So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in clean, fine linen, **60** and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut into the rock. He left after rolling a great stone against the entrance of the tomb. **61** Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were seated there, facing the tomb. **62** The next day, which followed the preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate **63** and said, "Sir, we remember that while this deceiver was still alive he said, 'After three days I will rise again.' **64** So give orders that the tomb be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come, steal him, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." **65** "Take guards," Pilate told them. "Go and make it as secure as you know how." **66** They went and secured the tomb by setting a seal on the stone and placing the guards.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 57-61** how Joseph honored Jesus (DDG p. 118).

Because of his devotion, Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus in a family tomb to honor Him.

- We learn from John 19:38 that Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus, but he also feared the Jews. Somewhere along the line, though, this man from Arimathea broke free from his fear of his Jewish cohorts and publicly claimed Jesus as the Messiah they had been waiting for.
- All four of the Gospel writers record that Joseph arranged for Jesus's burial. If he hadn't, the body of Jesus would have been cast into a common grave. Not only did Jesus escape a criminal's shame-filled burial, it was a sign of esteem and devotion to be placed in a family tomb.¹
- Furthermore, criminals were not supposed to be placed in family graves. Through the act of allowing Jesus to be buried in his new tomb, Joseph likely rendered his new, expensive tomb repulsive. No family member of Joseph's would want to be buried with a convict.² This was a generous and worship-filled response of caring for and honoring the body of Jesus.
- Matthew tells of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary being there when Joseph rolled the stone over the entrance of the tomb. Matthew was recording the witnesses even though they were women, who at that time would not have been seen as viable witnesses. But either way, he was recording the truth.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, must have been rich and also influential to be able to approach Pilate with a request.³ Both Luke and Mark record that he "was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43). Luke adds that though Joseph was part of the Sanhedrin, he "had not agreed with their decision and action" (Luke 23:51) to put Jesus to death.

ASK: Joseph put Jesus in a place of honor at a great cost. Ask groups of 3-4 to discuss this question and then share answers with the whole group (DDG p. 118):

How can you put Jesus in a place of honor in your life? (thanking Him daily, more than just at meals; prioritizing studying His Word; giving generously to Christ-centered causes; turning to Him first when in need)

INSTRUCT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 62-66** how Jesus's enemies tried to resist the possibility of His resurrection (DDG p. 118).

The chief priests and Pharisees asked for tomb security to stop possible attempts by Jesus's followers to furnish fake evidence of a resurrection.

- Though Jesus's body was in the tomb, the religious rulers could not yet let down their guard. They knew Jesus had claimed that He would rise from the grave. Even dead, Jesus was still a threat to them. So they took off to Pilate to appeal to him once again. Whether he wanted the Jewish power-struggle to be over or feared how the crowds would react if Jesus's body were stolen, Pilate granted the Jewish leaders' request for tomb security.
- The tomb was already closed with a large stone (v. 60). But with Pilate's declaration, a seal was placed on the entrance to the tomb to deter any tampering. Pilate also allowed guards to be stationed there to wait and watch for any threat of intrusion.
- For these stubborn religious leaders, the reality that Jesus was the Messiah was still not in the realm of possibility. Thus, an actual resurrection wasn't even on their radar. With a sealed tomb and watchers secured, the Jewish leaders likely slept soundly that evening. The troublesome movement of Jesus's followers was about to be stopped forever. Little did those unbelieving men know that the very preparations they took to prove Jesus a fraud would lead to mounting evidence that pointed to the reality of Jesus's power over death.

DISCUSS: The religious leaders, like many people today, did not believe Jesus could resurrect. Discuss (DDG p. 118):

How can someone try to explain why he or she believes in Jesus's resurrection? (the Bible and extra-biblical writings confirm its truth; archaeology reveals evidence of biblical events surrounding Jesus's last days; personal testimony of Jesus in one's life; logical forensics of how it could be possible)

TRANSITION: We humans think we know more than God. With our limited perspective, finite knowledge, and fallible reasoning, we often fail to realize our ignorance. The story of Jesus's death and resurrection continues on with more evidence.

A SEAL

Similar to the wax seals used to prove the authenticity of the sender of a letter, and that the correspondence had not been tampered with, this seal was probably much larger, sealing a tomb, not simply a letter.

POINT 2

ENCOUNTERING THE REALITY OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION (MATT. 28:1-6)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 28:1-6** from his or her Bible.

1 After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. **2** There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. **4** The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. **5** The angel told the women, "Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 1-3** (DDG p. 118):

Just as angels announced the birth of Christ, a messenger from God appeared to proclaim the victorious resurrection of Jesus.

- From nightfall on Friday through Saturday's sundown, the Jews would have been abiding at home, observing the Sabbath. First thing Sunday morning—the first chance they had—Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were found at the tomb. Both Mark's and Luke's Gospel accounts add that they brought spices with them to anoint the body of Jesus. This could have been for preservation purposes as well as an act of honor.⁴
- As they approached, however, the earth shook, and they saw the exposed entrance to the tomb. An angel of the Lord—blazing in glory—was sitting on the stone that had sealed the tomb. The soldiers were frozen in fear. The earth, once again, joined Jesus on His journey. On Friday, the sky turned dark in the middle of the day in solidarity with Jesus as He hung on the cross. In response to His resurrection, an earthquake reverberated through the land that glorious morning. Just as the heavenly hosts were there to announce the birth of Christ, a glorious messenger from God was present to proclaim the victorious resurrection of Jesus. What was to be a quiet, somber trip to pay tribute to Jesus ended up being a pivotal moment for these women—as well as for all humanity.

CHALLENGE: Throughout the Bible, we see angels doing God's bidding. Challenge your group with the following question (DDG p. 118):

What other times has God used heavenly messengers to give authoritative, divine news? (when He announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Christ; one came to Joseph in a dream to bring the command that he should not divorce Mary; an angel came to Zechariah to announce the coming of his son, John; angels appeared to the shepherds)

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Our Lord Himself deliberately staked His whole claim to the credit of men upon His resurrection. When asked for a sign He pointed to this sign as His single and sufficient credential."⁶

—B. B. Warfield
(1851–1921)

INSTRUCT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 4-6** (DDG p. 118):

Much skepticism surrounds Jesus's resurrection, but the soldiers and the women witnessed the angel and the empty tomb.

- The frightened soldiers are an important element to the veracity of Christ's resurrection. The soldiers had nothing to gain and everything to lose by allowing Jesus to escape their grasp. They were stationed at the front of the tomb to ensure the body of Jesus stayed put. Yet here they were found "like dead men," in utter terror in response to the angel. Furthermore, if they had not witnessed the events that the women testified about, these soldiers had much to gain to correct the story.
- This marvelous scene lends credibility to the resurrection story in many ways. First, there is no record that the women spoke of their mission to visit the tomb, yet the angel knew who they were and what they were doing. This radiant being announced the fulfillment of Christ's own words: He would rise on the third day. Then the angel invited the women to see with their own eyes the empty tomb.
- Additionally, a woman's testimony held little to no weight in those days. Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, chose these humble servants to be the first to receive the joyous news that Jesus is alive! Not only did they get to receive the news, they were charged to go tell the news to Jesus's inner circle (v. 7). If men were behind this fabricated story (as some claim), they certainly would not have chosen women to be such an integral part of this pivotal event, as the testimony of women held no bearing in society.⁵

DISCUSS: In smaller groups of 3-4, ask participants to share their answers to the following question (DDG pp. 115,118) and then to share their thoughts with the large group:

From Day 3 in the DDG: **How does the reality of Jesus's resurrection impact your life?** (since He is alive, I know He has the power to do anything; since He is alive, I'm excited to see Him one day; since He died and rose for my salvation, I am eternally grateful for His mercy and grace)

SUMMARIZE: Use **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE** to show that on Sunday, Jesus rose from the grave, victoriously ending a week of much agony and suffering. But He did it! He was raised from the dead like He said He would be, revealing His identity as God and His power over death, sin, and everything else.

TRANSITION: Jesus has risen! The soldiers and the women were witnesses. The angel was there to proclaim Jesus's resurrection. But the angel also was there to instruct them on what to do next.



POINT 3

SHARING THE NEWS OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION (MATT. 28:7-10)

BRAINSTORM: Invite the group to call out news, ideas, and events that they would feel responsible and/or privileged to share with others.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 28:7-10** from his or her Bible.

7 “Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.’ Listen, I have told you.” **8** So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news. **9** Just then Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They came up, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 7-8** the following truth (DDG p. 118):

The angel commanded the women to go and tell the disciples, for the good news of Jesus's resurrection needs to be told.

- Though Christ had triumphed over sin and death, there was still work to do. Without faith in the work of Christ, people cannot be saved. Romans 10:14-15 says: “How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” These women became the first beautiful messengers of the good news about Jesus's resurrection.
- “He has risen.” The original Greek shows that this is a passive verb. It was not the Son who did the raising. It was God the Father,⁷ though it should also be noted that Jesus said He would take up His life again by the command of His Father (John 10:17-18). That the resurrection was three days after the crucifixion removed any doubts about the reality of Jesus's death. His body remained in the tomb from Friday evening to Sunday morn. All biological processes had ceased: no heartbeat, no brain activity, no breath in His lungs. This was truly a miraculous resurrection, not a simple resuscitation.

DISCUSS: The women did not hesitate to obey the angel's command to tell the disciples the good news. Thinking of our own sense of urgency, ask (DDG p. 119):

How can I keep myself accountable on prioritizing telling others the good news of Jesus? (asking a friend to remind me; asking my small group to brainstorm ways to do so; praying for opportunities; involving myself in evangelism ministries)

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 9-10**, explain what happened next as Jesus appeared to the women:

- On their way to take the good news to the disciples, the women encountered the living, breathing Jesus Christ. Their response to their Savior was worship. Taking hold of His feet was an act of exaltation. The women recognized this man who stood before them was not just the man whom they had seen crucified. This was King Jesus, the Lamb of God who had been slaughtered to save sinners. This Son of God had risen from the grave, was victorious over death, and was the promised Messiah they had been waiting for.⁸
- Once again, this order of events was very countercultural. Significant moments happened with men, not women. It would seem logical for Jesus to appear first to His disciples. Instead, He revealed His resurrected glory to the women who had planned to anoint His dead body.
- Jesus's commands to the women echoed those of the angel: Don't fear, and go and tell my brothers (v. 10). The same men who said they would follow Jesus forever but they abandoned and denied Him, Jesus considered them His brothers, and He promised to see them in Galilee. Jesus spent most of His life and ministry in Galilee. It is fitting that this is where He would go to wrap up His time on earth in His newly resurrected bodily form.
- Because Jesus was raised, we know that all who believe in Him will be raised as well to eternal life with Him. There is joyful life after death for the believer, but the unbeliever will also be raised, except to eternal punishment. Eternal life with Christ in joy or eternal life without Him in suffering are the two options we have in choosing for or against Jesus.

READ: Invite a volunteer in your group to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 119).

Key Doctrine #95: Life After Death: The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Luke 23:43). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).

ASK: (DDG p. 119)

How might the reality that every person will live on for eternity—either with Christ or without—change our everyday moments? (be a better steward of resources and use them for eternal impact; greater sense of urgency to the time we have available to proclaim the gospel; more need for prayer for opportunities and boldness to obey)

TRANSITION: Just as Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, so will we leave this earth. We must choose to make the most of our time on earth so that when Christ returns, more souls will spend eternity with Him.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: On Easter Sunday, God vindicated His Son's perfect sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. Through faith, we are united to Christ and share in the promise of being resurrected in His likeness. Sin's curse has been removed, death has been defeated, and we are assured of everlasting life with God. So because we worship and serve a risen Savior who has raised us to new life, we tell others the good news of Christ's victory over sin and death, calling people to trust in Jesus and receive resurrection life.

HEAD:

God is more powerful than we can ever imagine. There is nothing more final to us than death, and every one of us is marching closer to it each day. But God has the final say. And God demonstrated complete victory over death so that those who trust in Jesus could have eternal life, one full of joy and victory.

What does eternal life with God and without God look like?

HEART:

Even through the resurrection event, we see the tenderness of God toward humankind. He knows us and understands our humanity. We need comfort in the face of fear, instructions when overwhelmed, and repetition to stay on track. His compassion for us permeates His interactions with us. This was true before the resurrection and continues to be true to this day.

What about Jesus's resurrection can you thank God for?

HANDS:

The angel and Jesus commanded the women to go and tell. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave the same command to His followers. It is clear throughout the New Testament that we have been given this same mission: go and make disciples of all nations. We are still here on this earth so that we can bring the good news to as many people as we can about the salvation God offers only through Jesus.

How can you better align your life to be a greater part of helping to fulfill the Great Commission?

PRAY: Father, thank You for Your Son. Thank You for His death. Thank You for raising Him to life so that we might have life. Put in our hearts a passion to tell others the good news of Jesus and the eternal life with You waiting for us. Thank You for the hope You give us through Your Son. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We must declare the message of the Word of God regardless of its popularity. The Word of God is our message and we must preach it faithfully regardless of whether the world esteems it or not—and today the world does not esteem it."⁹

—John G. Butler
(1826–1909)

POINT 1: RESISTING THE POSSIBILITY OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION (MATT. 27:57-66)

+ COMMENTARY

“Were it not for the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38), the body of Jesus might not have had a decent burial. Joseph and Nicodemus had come to believe in Jesus, even though they had not openly testified of their faith. God kept them hidden, as it were, that they might care for the body of Jesus. Since Joseph was a rich man, and he prepared the new tomb, he helped in the fulfillment of prophecy, Isaiah 53:9—“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death” (NIV).

It is not likely that Joseph prepared that tomb for himself. He was a wealthy man and certainly would not want to be buried so near a place of execution. He prepared that tomb for Jesus, and he selected a site near Golgotha so that he and Nicodemus could bury Christ's body quickly. Joseph and Nicodemus could very well have been in the garden waiting for Jesus to die. When they took Him from the cross, they defiled themselves and were not able to eat the Passover. But, what difference did it make? They had found the Lamb of God!

In contrast to the loving care given by Jesus' friends, notice the plottings and maneuvering of the Jewish leaders. The disciples had forgotten that Jesus promised to rise from the dead on the third day, but His enemies remembered. Pilate permitted the leaders to set a guard at the tomb. This guard put an official Roman seal on the stone. All of this was of God, for now it was impossible for anyone—friend or foe—to steal the body. Without realizing it, the Jewish leaders and the Roman government joined forces to help prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

Villains in stories and movies are somewhat comical. They try and try their best to thwart the plans of the hero, but it never works. Goodness always prevails. Whether it be the coyote against the roadrunner or the White Witch against Aslan, we get a picture that even when it seems like the villain is winning, in the end, the hero does.

Despite all the schemes and conniving of the chief priests and Pharisees to make sure Jesus and His followers didn't win, their efforts were to no avail. Jesus was going to win either way. He would be victorious in every way—over His enemies, over Satan, over death, and over sin.

EXTRA

POINT 2: ENCOUNTERING THE REALITY OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION (MATT. 28:1-6)

+ COMMENTARY

“28:2–4 This could conceivably be the same earthquake as in 27:51b–52a, if those verses are meant to be taken as concurrent with vv. 52b–53. More likely, however, this is a severe aftershock following that earlier quake. NIV’s ‘violent’ is simply great. As before, the quake attests to the cosmic significance of the events. It probably preceded the women’s arrival, since Matthew seems to link it with the coming of the angel, who is already in place when they get to the tomb (cf. Mark 16:3–4). The angel’s sitting (v. 2) perhaps indicates a note of completion or triumph. The earthquake dislodges the rock but was not needed to enable Christ to be raised. Jesus’ resurrection had already occurred, notwithstanding the massive stone barrier (v. 6). The resurrection itself is never described anywhere in Scripture, presumably because no one ever saw Jesus leave the tomb. The appearance of the angel in v. 3 matches similar angelic appearances which surrounded Jesus’ birth, as do the words ‘don’t be afraid’ in v. 5 (cf. esp. 1:20) and combines with chaps. 1–2 to frame the whole Gospel. Mark calls the angel a ‘young man’ (Mark 16:5). Luke adds that a second person/angel was present (Luke 24:4). Neither detail contradicts Matthew. The young man’s appearance and garb are appropriately angelic: brilliant, glorious, and pure. The whole scene terrifies the guards and temporarily paralyzes them, so that they cannot intervene. The verb ‘shook’ in v. 4 comes from the same root (seis-) as the ‘earthquake’ in v. 2.”¹¹

+ ILLUSTRATION

Many geographic wonders are nearly impossible to describe. From majestic mountain waterfalls to towering redwood trees, the magnitude of a moment with these physical wonders is difficult to capture in words. In the 1800s, as the American nation spread west, a new age of exploration occurred. Descriptive reports of a variety of vistas were sent back home to the east. But those who made it to what is now known as Yellowstone National Park had their work cut out for them. There was so much to behold and unique to the area. Mere words couldn’t do it justice.

In 1871, through the Hayden Geological Survey, a team of surveyors and explorers went into the Yellowstone area (then known as Wonderland) to explore the area and send back reports. One man, Thomas Moran, painted many scenes throughout the area. What Thomas was able to capture through brush strokes and color was a more powerful portrayal than words could express. Through the influence of Mr. Moran’s artwork, Yellowstone National Park was born. In his honor, a bench is still set in the place where he captured the beauty of the Yellowstone Grand Canyon.¹²

The biblical writers have attempted to paint a picture of something so magnificent they could hardly describe it. Yet the only canvas and colors they could pass down were words. This is why most descriptions of God and heavenly beings involve simile and symbolism—we need pictures to better understand the experience. Matthew describes the angel who arrived after the resurrection to be like lightning, his clothing like the bright white of snow. Thanks to Matthew’s imagery, if you’ve beheld the glory of lighting or the allure of a fresh blanket of snow, you are better able to comprehend the bright beauty that accompanied the angel.

POINT 3: SHARING THE NEWS OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION (MATT. 28:7-10)

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus apparently was not going to spend a lot of time with them at this point. He accepted their worship and then proceeded to reassure them and to repeat the angel’s command. ‘Don’t be afraid’ is a word of reassurance in the exciting but highly unusual situation in which the ladies found themselves. They had been told by the angel that Jesus was alive, and now they had had this confirmed by seeing and hearing him for themselves. They could recognize something of what all this meant and gladly accept it. But it was still something outside human ken; it is a natural thing to be at least a little frightened of the supernatural. Jesus addressed himself to this natural feeling and told them not to be afraid. Just as the angel had done, he told them to take the good news to his followers. Here he calls them ‘my brothers.’ It is just possible that he is referring to his human brothers, but this is not likely. He had spoken of those who gave their allegiance to him as his family (12:50; 25:40), and it seems that it is this kind of thinking which underlies these words. Jesus is asking the women to go to the disciples and tell them to go into Galilee. Most of Jesus’ ministry had been exercised in Galilee; thus it was natural that he would expect his followers to go there and that he would be ready to meet them there.”¹³

+ ILLUSTRATION

In the days before digital communications, it took a long while for news to be carried from place to place via written communication. Depending on how the letters were sent and how far they needed to travel, it could take months or years before an announcement reached its intended recipient. Systems like the Pony Express and the telegraph sped up communications. With each innovation, messages spread faster and cheaper than ever before. Services such as telephone, the internet, email, and social media, have played a part in spreading knowledge exponentially faster. Over the centuries, communication has gone from a selective, slow crawl to a constant stream of instantaneous information.

In our fast-paced world filled with headlines, it is hard to imagine that there are reports yet to be spread. However, there is still one memo that needs to be moved. There are many who have not heard the gospel proclaimed. Though there are many ways to proclaim it, the best way is probably given one on one, face to face, alongside lives that follow the model of Christ. It is up to believers to magnify the message to every corner of the world so that as many as possible can be freed from their sin before it’s too late.

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THE CONQUERING KING



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus is the eternal King, ruling the cosmos (Heb. 1:5-9).
2. Jesus is the resurrected King, directing the church (Col. 1:18-20).
3. Jesus is the returning King, rewarding the faithful (Rev. 22:12-13).

Background Passages: Colossians 1; Hebrews 1; Revelation 22

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus fulfills the office of king, ruling over all of creation and guiding and directing His people, the church.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

In the Old Testament, when God's people demanded a king like the nations around them, God warned them but gave into their demands. All of the kings of Israel failed to lead the people as they needed. Jesus is the King of kings, the One who rules perfectly over His people. One day King Jesus is returning for His church and to establish His perfect, eternal kingdom.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus is our King, we seek to submit to His perfect leadership in all areas of our lives, knowing all He does is for God's glory and our good.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **How do you feel when someone you don't like tells you what to do, and is it different when it's someone you do like?** (unsolicited advice and authoritarian commands are not typically taken well; it is hard to obey bad leaders; a trustworthy, beloved boss, however, is easy to follow; a caring friend's advice is easier to follow; sometimes it's difficult to do what people tell us even if we like the person)

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- We have been looking the last few weeks at Jesus as King, accused, crucified, and risen. And to sum up, He is the conquering King. He oversees the universe, guides the church, and rewards the faithful when He returns. He is sovereign over all and sovereign over us. As King, He is victorious over all. Therefore, Christians should respond to His mighty sovereignty and majestic grace through faith-filled obedience.

TRANSITION: The more clearly we see Jesus, the more easily we can trust in His work and His ways. He is better than anything we can imagine. He is worthy of our allegiance, love, and obedience. Not only is He powerful and good, righteous and holy, He is the supreme Sovereign. He is the glorious King of kings whom we can follow with complete confidence, knowing He is working all things for our good and His glory.



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POINT 1

JESUS IS THE ETERNAL KING, RULING THE COSMOS (HEB. 1:5-9).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 1:5-9** from his or her own Bible.

5 For to which of the angels did he ever say, You are my Son; today I have become your Father, or again, I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?

6 Again, when he brings his firstborn into the world, he says, And let all God's angels worship him. **7** And about the angels he says: He makes his angels winds, and his servants a fiery flame, **8** but to the Son: Your throne, God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice. **9** You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; this is why God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy beyond your companions.

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 5-6** (DDG p. 126):

Jesus is the Son of God, the firstborn of all, who was given a supreme status that all would worship Him, including the angels.

- The author of Hebrews began his letter with a four-verse thesis, a stunning look at the character of Christ. The bottom line of Hebrews is this: Jesus is supreme. He is better. He is worth it. Keep following Him in faith.
- Verse 5 kickstarts a section that uses citations as well as allusions from the Old Testament to point to Christ. In these two short verses, there are four different Old Testament quotes of God speaking. The writer of Hebrews brought God's authority in the Old Testament into the present.
- In verse 5, it seems odd for God to say, "Today I have become your Father," but this is a quote from Psalm 2:7. This doesn't mean that God the Son was a created being, for just a few verses earlier, the author of Hebrews stated that the Son is the exact expression of the nature of the Father, which would include being immortal and infinite, with no beginning or end (Heb. 1:1-3).
- Psalm 2:7 is also quoted later in Hebrews 5:5, where the author teaches about Jesus being exalted to become a high priest through the appointing of the Father. In a similar use, Luke quotes Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 to explain a change of status for Jesus regarding His resurrection. Within all three usages, the statement that God has become the Father of Jesus is about a shift in position. This is ascension talk.¹ Through the resurrection, Jesus was given a new place of prominence. Paul put it this way: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:8-9).
- The Hebrews writer shows how and when God officially presented His Son and bestowed on Jesus a kingly title and royal honor. Verse 6 connects the dots: Jesus is the begotten Son of God, the firstborn of all humankind. When this supreme status was bestowed on Him, the Father declared that all the angels should worship Jesus.

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

The book of Hebrews is a thoroughly Jewish book, likely written by a Hebrew to second-generation Christians with a Hebrew background. Though we don't know who penned this letter, the heart of the work is pastoral. It often reads like a sermon, filled with many theological teachings about Jesus. This theology, though, is meant to shape how we put our faith into action.

ASK: Given Jesus's supreme status, angels worship Him, and so should we. Ask (DDG p. 126):

What are some ways we should worship Jesus? (with praise and song; with our lives; with our resources, finances, skills, time; with our service)

HIGHLIGHT: Using the content below, explain from **verses 7-9** (DDG p. 126):

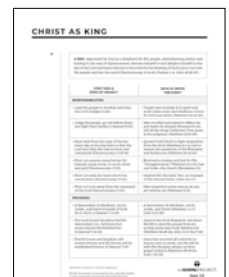
Key Doctrine #54: Christ as King: God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

- Next the author provides a contrast of roles between Jesus and the angels. In verse 6, the Father declared Jesus's royal status and commanded the angels to worship Him. Through the quote in verse 7 (taken from Psalm 104, highlighting God's creative acts), the place of the angels is made clear: they are created beings. The Son, however, is King—the angels are His servants.²
- Next, quoting from Psalm 45—a song of praise to the King of kings—the author emphasized Jesus's royal dominion. Throne and scepter each denote the ruling power of a king. The throne of Jesus is an eternal one, and His ruling scepter is that of perfect justice. The angels are to bow to the throne of "God" the Son and follow His rule because Jesus is divine.
- Jesus's just rule is consistent with His righteous character as God. Because of the everlasting and righteous rule of Jesus, God anointed Him. God's anointing of Jesus is one of exceeding joy.

DISCUSS: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 11: CHRIST AS KING (POSTER)** and pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 12: CHRIST AS KING (HANDOUT)** for the group to review. Then ask your group (DDG p. 126):

What characteristics make Jesus the greatest King? (He is the God-man; He taught with authority; He sacrificed Himself for His people; He is holy, good, and blameless; He is righteous, just, and merciful; He is loving, faithful, and eternal)

TRANSITION: Jesus is better than any being that exists, whether human or angelic. He not only rules the cosmos, but with truth and all wisdom, He leads the church, God's people.



ANOINTING

Anointing in the Old Testament was used as a sign of divine favor and subsequent consecration, such as for a priest (like the anointing of Aaron) or a king (like the anointing of David), or a prophet (like the anointing of Elisha). Oil was usually used in anointing.

POINT 2

JESUS IS THE RESURRECTED KING, DIRECTING THE CHURCH (COL. 1:18-20).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Colossians 1:18-20** from his or her Bible.

18 He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. **19** For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

ILLUSTRATE: On a board or large sheet of paper, draw a body and label it “The Church.” Then summarize the following as you draw a head for the body and label it “Jesus Christ”:

- Christians are both individual and corporate. We each have unique and specific qualities and gifts by our creation and from the Holy Spirit, but these are to be used along with the rest of the members of the body. One believer cannot do or be everything the church is to be or do. Together, we make up one unified body to love, support, and encourage one another. But just as a body cannot exist without a head, neither can the body of the church live and thrive without its head—Jesus.

EXPLAIN: Say the statement below (DDG p. 126), and then explain the theology of the phrases in **verse 18**.

Jesus is the head of the church and first place in everything.

- Not only was the Son—the Word—in the beginning (John 1:1), He is the new “beginning.” Through His death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated a new age of redemption. All of history revolves around that moment. Thus, Jesus is the commencement of this new era as well as the source of salvation.
- Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead.” Throughout antiquity, the firstborn received unique obligations, rights, and authority within the family. In the case of Christ, this is a title given to the God-man who was raised from the dead to a new life. Taken in tandem with the earlier point, Jesus is the firstborn of the new age that He installed through His resurrection.
- All of this culminates in the last phrase: Jesus is “first place” in everything. He is preeminent over all. There is none greater than Jesus (Ps. 89:27).

ASK: (DDG p. 126)

If Jesus is the head of the church and first place in everything, how should we submit our lives to Him? (asking Jesus for guidance and instruction; doing what He tells us; filtering all things by His Word and character)

LOCAL VERSUS UNIVERSAL CHURCH

There are two senses of “church”: local and universal. The local body of Christ is the specific gathering of a defined group of Christians who live in the same geographic vicinity during the same time in history. The universal church is that of the entire corpus of Christ followers throughout all the world and all of time.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“The living Christ is the head of a living organism, and identifying Christ as the church’s head denotes that he has sovereign lordship and supreme authority over her.”³

—Dustin Bengé

REFLECT: Read the following summary on **verses 19-20** (DDG p. 126), and invite the group to share their thoughts and reflections to understand this idea. Use the content below to help guide the discussion as needed.

Jesus's blood shed for us brought peace and reconciled our relationship to the Father.

- Throughout the Old Testament, there is a theological thread about God's presence. In the garden of Eden, God dwelt with Adam and Eve. They experienced the fullness of God. However, their rebellion against God ended that access. From then on, the presence of God came and went, a pillar of fire, a burning bush. He came down on Mount Sinai and then dwelt in the tabernacle and subsequent temple. But in each, He was veiled and accessible only to a chosen one, the high priest.
- Then came Jesus, in whom the fullness of God dwells. Paul asserted this with a bit more detail later in his letter to the Colossian church: "For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ" (Col. 2:9). The word "dwell" is in the present tense, suggesting an ongoing residence of God.
- Not only was the Godhead pleased to dwell bodily in the person of Jesus, there was also a joy to accomplish the work of reconciliation through the Son. This reconciling work will be complete. Sin has stained everyone and everything, including all of creation (Rom. 8:22). The atoning work of God includes a restoration of God's creation.
- This work of reconciliation was accomplished through the blood Jesus shed as He was crucified. The purpose of these pains was to make peace. Through the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the fellowship between God and man that was marred in the garden has been restored. Our sin and offenses against the holy God have been atoned for in the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Son of God, on our behalf. By faith in Jesus, we are now reconciled to God: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

DISCUSS: Jesus is the head of the church and brings us peace. Ask (DDG p. 126):

Where in your life are you experiencing peace because of Jesus?
(wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: Though Jesus has already inaugurated the age of the new covenant, the work of bringing many sons to glory is ongoing. As the head of the church, Jesus leads the body of Christ in fulfilling the Great Commission. Until the day Christ appears again in His second coming, we must be good stewards of the glorious grace we've been given.

POINT 3

JESUS IS THE RETURNING KING, REWARDING THE FAITHFUL (REV. 22:12-13).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Revelation 22:12-13** from his or her Bible.

12 “Look, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me to repay each person according to his work. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

GUIDE: Lead your group in seeing Jesus as the eternal King, the resurrected King, and the returning King. Using the content below, explain from **verse 12** (DDG p. 127):

Jesus is coming back soon, and when we face Him on His judgment seat, we will be evaluated according to the kingdom work we accomplished.

- Christ’s sacrifice paid the punishment for our sin, so when Jesus comes back, we will be allowed to stand before the great white throne, where we will wear the righteousness of Christ and be rewarded eternal life. For those who have not trusted in Jesus for the payment of their sins and the imputation of His perfection, God will judge their sins and pour out His wrath on them (John 3:36).
- Though God will save believers from the white throne judgment, there also will be another judgment for all of Christ’s followers to receive rewards due to them. In 2 Corinthians, Paul exhorted us to “make it our aim to be pleasing to him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:9-10). This is the event Revelation 22:12 refers to, and it is different from that of the great white throne judgment discussed in Revelation 20.
- The Greek word Paul used for judgment in 2 Corinthians is *bēma*. In the famous Greek Olympic games, officials of the games would watch and evaluate the competitions from a *bēma*, a judgment seat. Paul and his contemporary audience would have understood this depiction to be an assessment of accolades, not condemnation. The judges in the *bēma* were the bestowers of rewards. Likewise, Jesus will grade our performance as stewards of God’s grace and reward us accordingly.⁴
- After Paul mentioned this judgment, he provided an application point: “Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people” (2 Cor. 5:11). We will be rewarded for the endeavors we carry out that are of eternal value. In Paul’s earlier letter to the Corinthian church, he taught that we are God’s coworkers, and we are to be busy with eternal employment because our efforts will be evaluated. “Each one’s work . . . will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one’s work. If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:13-14).

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus referred to this as storing up treasures in heaven. He also taught that we must be ready for His return. The grace God grants us in Christ is meant to be passed along to others through evangelism and discipleship. When we face Jesus on His judgment seat (*bēma*), He will evaluate us according to the kingdom tasks we completed. Then He will give out rewards for deeds that held eternal value, and we in turn will use them as part of our worship of the great God who saves (Rev. 4).

ASK: (DDG pp. 125,127)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **How do we live our lives knowing Jesus is returning soon and will reward those according to their work?** (with urgency in telling others the good news of Jesus; with serving others for kingdom purposes; with readiness to see Jesus)

EXPLAIN: Jesus is everything. Using the content below and **verse 13**, explain (DDG p. 127):

Jesus is the origin and sustainer of all things. He is supreme, finishing all that He started, including the good work in us.

- Through a threefold completion, Jesus declares Himself to be the be-all and end-all. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, representing the beginning and the end. We can look forward to a great reward because Jesus is the origin and sustainer of everything. From the first to the last, He is supreme. He is not only the beginning and end, being infinite, He begins all things and ends all things. He is in full control of everything, including us, His people. Therefore, like Paul, we can declare our confidence in Jesus: "I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6).

DISCUSS: To recap and review, ask your group (DDG p. 127):

How is Jesus the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end? (He is eternal; He has been there from the beginning and will be there at the end; He sustains all things; He holds all things together; He is our everything, our God, our Savior, our salvation, our purpose and meaning, our source of life and eternal life)

TRANSITION: This world is not our home. God has bestowed many blessings on us, yet these are not meant for us to stockpile but to share. This life is a layover. As we wait for our final flight, we get to steward the godly gifts of grace we possess to bring as many souls as possible with us to be with Jesus for eternity.



MY RESPONSE

PACK ITEM 14: LOVE CHRIST: Pass out copies of this bookmark to remind your group of the importance of Jesus's roles as Prophet, Priest, and King.

SAY: All the kings of Israel failed to lead the people as they needed. But Jesus is the King of kings, the One who rules perfectly over His people. One day King Jesus is returning for His church to establish His perfect, eternal kingdom. Because Jesus is our King, we seek to submit to His perfect leadership in all areas of our lives, knowing all He does is for God's glory and our good.

HEAD:

In a world filled with self-centered messages, it is easy to begin seeing ourselves as the ultimate ruler of our lives. Dependency is weakness. Submission is an abomination. But Jesus is King, whether we recognize it or not. When we live life remembering who is in charge and in control, it brings a peace no amount of self-love or self-sufficiency can provide.

How is Jesus King in various areas of your life?

HEART:

The affections of our heart can be easily swayed. There is much that vies for our attention, and with our devotion goes our dedication. We may state that Jesus is Lord and wherever He leads we'll go. But often we are driven by our feelings—fear, pleasure, anxiety—instead of our allegiance. So we forget the majesty of our Master and the urgent seriousness of our assignment. We drift from our mission to take the gospel message to the lost world we live in.

How can we stir up our affections for the urgency of spreading the good news?

HANDS:

God has supplied us with every spiritual blessing so that we can share those gifts of grace with others. As a part of the body of Christ, we get to bless our brothers and sisters in Christ with the gifts bestowed on us. As the bride of Christ, we are to partner with Jesus to be satellites of the glory of God. The world is filled with darkness, but we can bring the light of Jesus to the souls who still need saving, and as we do, we store up treasures in heaven—divine accolades that will be rewarded to each according to our deeds.

How can you bring light to a world filled with darkness?

PRAY: Jesus, You are King of kings, head of the church, the Alpha and Omega. We praise You and thank You that You rule the world and our lives. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Heaven is more than a destination; it is a motivation. Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now."⁵

—Warren Wiersbe
(1929–2019)