



 **ATTHEW**

**PART FIVE
RETURN AND RECKONING**





WELCOME TO MATTHEW

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

MALACHI 4:4-5

The above verse is the last portion of scripture found in the Old Testament. It is a closing of an era, but also a looking to the future. What is fascinating is that in one turn of the page, a reader goes from Malachi in the Old Testament to the first page of the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. What is hidden to many readers is the massive gulf between the page turn—between Matthew and Malachi. In that one turn of the page 400 years transpire.

For 400 years the people of God lived in this silence. In this time, there was much violence and war. Invaders from far off lands, evil tyrants, rulers who have no right to rule, exercised their power. Although at times it seemed as if hope was lost, the faithful clung to promises of old, promises that one day a good King would come to rule over his people. This King would exercise wisdom and implement the will of God. This King would be more than a King... he would be a Messiah.

Matthew tells his story in this context. When hope seems all but lost, when dictators rule, and when the promises of God seem like a long forgotten hope, Matthew introduces us to a man named Jesus of Nazareth. This is his story.





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ENTERING JERUSALEM

MATTHEW 20:29-21:11

²⁹ And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. ³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³³ They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." ³⁴ And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. ¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you,

you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."





INTRODUCTION

Jesus' journey picks up pace toward his ultimate location, Jerusalem itself. It is interesting that he travels through Jericho, the same place Israel crossed over into the Promised Land. For a reader of Matthew's Gospel, it almost begs the question, what can this mean? Can Jesus do what Israel could not? This "coming" of the King brings an anticipation of what he will do and how the powers in Jerusalem will respond.

DISCUSSION

- 1 What was one of the most significant turning points in your life? Did it seem that important at the time or is it obvious only after looking back?
- 2 What was the original intent for the Israelites as they entered the Promised Land? What were they supposed to do?
- 3 Read Matthew 9:27-31. The similarity of these two stories is interesting. What's different this time and why might it be important for this journey?
- 4 The blind in this passage and the Gentiles in the previous section use messianic terms to identify Jesus using terms like "Son of David." What might be the significance? What do you think is required to truly recognize Jesus as Messiah? Why?

- 5 How many miles do you think Jesus traveled from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem? How much of that distance does Matthew want us to know was on a donkey? Why?
- 6 Read Genesis 49:10-11 and 1 Kings 1:28-40. The image of a donkey and colt calls back to some important echoes for Israel. How would these images come together for those that are experiencing Jesus' coming to Jerusalem? What are the titles that are used in Matthew 21:4-11?
- 7 Read Zechariah 9:9-17. What is the tone of this passage? How does the passage lead us to imagine what the king is coming to do? Is there tension in the description? Explain.
- 8 Read Psalm 118. This is where the "Hosanna" and "blessed is he" come from. What is the Psalm about? What is its tone? What has been happening to the crowds around Jesus? Considering the Zechariah and Psalm passages, does the crowd's response seem reasonable?
- 9 Considering the royal acclamation Jesus receives coming into Jerusalem, how might the crowds be viewing the nature of his kingship? Go back and read Matthew 20:25-28. Have you ever wanted Jesus to be the immediate insurrectionist in your life when he chose to take a different path? Explain.



GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Imagine the scene—thousands of Israelites flocking to Jerusalem for the Passover. They are arriving from all over the region and from greater distances. It is estimated that the city may have swelled six times its normal population during this festival. All the while, there is One in their midst who is different. Whispers among the traveling families and clans would pulsate through the throngs of Israelites about his authoritative teaching and his working of the miraculous. Blind are healed along the way. The crowd is enamored. A prophet like the prophets of old was with them. The Passover was a living, breathing symbol of Israel's salvation, but also a memory that blood was required. Something had to die for Israel to live. Your King entered what should have been "home turf," the place where heaven and earth met to voices of "Hosanna" meaning "save us!" They had no idea what they were asking for and how it would find resolve. We do.



CONFRONTING JESUS

MATTHEW 21:12-46

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." ¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, " 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" ¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

¹⁸ In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. ²⁰ When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" ²¹ And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but

even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. ²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

²³ And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴ Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. ³¹





Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

³³ "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants

saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

INTRODUCTION

Authority is important in this section. Jesus arrives and acts with the same authority that Matthew has been revealing throughout his Gospel. If Jesus does not have this authority, then he is either an enemy to the establishment or a madman. The elders and chief priests seem less than impressed with this so-called "prophet" from the backwoods region of Galilee.

DISCUSSION

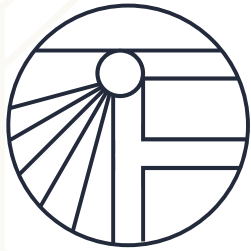
- 1 What is the most difficult journey you have taken? What made it difficult? Who was against you?
- 2 In Matthew 21:13 he says “you [plural] make it a den of robbers.” Toward whom are Jesus’ actions in the Temple Courts directed? How might you support your answer?
- 3 Consider the three images from the most recent context: Riding a donkey, driving buyers and sellers from the Temple courts, and the fig tree. What does Matthew want the reader to understand about Jesus and what he is doing?
- 4 How does Jesus use John the Baptist in this session’s text? Has Jesus’ view of John been consistent across Matthew? Explain.
- 5 Read Micah 7:1-6. Who does Micah speak of? How might the fig tree be connected to Israel?
- 6 Matthew consistently has Jesus teaching about prayer. Read Matthew 5:43-45, 6:5-8, 7:7-11, 9:36-38, 17:18-21, 18:15-19, and 21:21-22. How would you define the core attributes of prayer so far in the Gospel?
- 7 Out of each of the two parables, the chief priests and elders are asked questions (vv. 31, 40). Do they answer correctly? What does this tell us about them?



- 8 How are fruit and fruitfulness tied through this session's text? Give an example of something that looks beautiful on the outside, but does not bear fruit?
- 9 Consider all of your skills, gifts, and experiences (good and bad). What does fruitfulness look like for you? Are there places where you look like a healthy tree, but are bearing no fruit?

GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Jesus challenges the establishment—the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees. This is where the foundation of earthly power seems to rest. But just as the fig tree is full of leaves, but lacking fruit, Jesus goes after that which looks good on the outside but lacks true productivity. Such trees die and leave nothing worthwhile. Fruit satisfies hunger and provides seed. From the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) we remember that seed is meant to reproduce, it is meant to be fruitful. It may seem awful to see the fig tree destroyed, but Jesus is the one who dies. The Fruitful One is destroyed by those that are fruitless, so that his goodness would reproduce. Thus, we are called to bear fruit. Pray that you would be full of good fruit.



EAST

MATTHEW 22:1-14

¹ And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'" ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants,

'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."





INTRODUCTION

Can you imagine being invited to a wedding by a King? This parable contains some shocking responses to such a royal celebration. Even in our own culture, we know that such a party would be attended by dignitaries and the elite, but this King's plan has a broader scope. Would your attendance to such an event come with some forethought?

DISCUSSION

- 1 What are the typical reasons for not attending a wedding? What is your most common excuse?
- 2 Parables have been used to teach. Do a quick review of some of the lessons that Jesus has taught through parables. Are some more general and others more specific? How about this one?
- 3 In Matthew 22:3-12, there are five different responses to the invitation to the feast. Find them and discuss the possible theological implications of each.
- 4 If you look back on your life before you were a Christian, which response did you give? What made you change your mind? What might change the minds of those that you know?

- 5 Matthew 22:9-12 seems to interject a parable within the parable that is unexpected. What should we take away from it? What might it say about the king? What might it say about those invited to the feast? What are other elements of the parable that are unexpected?
- 6 "Outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" are images Matthew has used previously. Read Matthew 8:5-13, 13:37-43, and 13:47-50. How are the uses similar? Do you think the use here in Matthew 22 is the same?
- 7 This is that last of three parables presented in a row. How might you summarize the meaning of the three parables? What are your main clues that bring your conclusion?
- 8 Read Revelation 19:6-16. This section is sometimes called "the marriage supper of the Lamb." Is it consistent with Matthew's parable from this session? Explain.
- 9 After looking at this parable of the feast, which of the responses from question 3 have you aligned most with? Has it changed, and if so, why?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Thinking of a king's feast as an illustration for people's response to God (and his Son) can be helpful. Some ignore the invitation. Some would prefer to continue their current affairs more than attend the great banquet. Some come for the food with no consideration of the one who is honored by the event. And some, respond with violence against the King and his Son. They do not accept his sovereignty and want to throw off the shackles of his reign. Humanity at its worst will choose to feast on the death of this Son. Ironically, this great feast is for the Son, and it is the Son who is not dressed. In one sense, his royal robes and crown laid down, and in another, taking on the flesh of humanity, he is denied even his peasant clothing and crucified. The truth is, the King pays the great price for this banquet. He is the only One who can afford it. He throws open the royal banquet doors to those who do not belong and asks them to love and honor his Son. As Christians we have been saved, invited to the royal table, and have received the message that the feast is ready. Are we shocked at our own reaction to the Son? Are we living in light of this banquet? What are ways you can show this love to the Son this week?



AESAR'S TAX

MATTHEW 22:15-22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why

put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.



INTRODUCTION

Across cultures and generations, the subject of taxes has always come with controversy. It usually comes down to the perceived misuse of the money involved, how it is unjustly levied, or who is not paying their fair share. The Pharisees have felt the sting of Jesus' challenge and want to capitalize on this contentious subject to catch Jesus offending someone else.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Do you scoff at taxes or are you more indifferent? Why?
- 2 Have you ever had someone try to entangle you in words? Have you done the same? Describe a situation. What is the typical goal of such a strategy?
- 3 Several strategies are at play. We really don't know much about the Herodians, but why might they be important in this conversation? Have you ever had a conversation with someone who wanted you to do something and they brought another person along for affect? Explain.

- 4 Much of the meaning of the word “hypocrites” identifies what is happening behind the dialog in Matthew 22 and 23. What is Jesus saying that his challengers know they should do, but are failing to do?
- 5 Read Genesis 1:26-31. Discuss what is meant by “image” and “likeness.” What is the job of God’s image bearers? Try to be exhaustive using this Genesis text. What is at the center of the vocation?
- 6 Read Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:1-4. How is Jesus’ image related back to the Genesis 1 passage discussed earlier?
- 7 Read Romans 8:26-30. How does the Apostle Paul describe our image-bearing? What are the implications?
- 8 Think of all those whose image you bear, for example, your mother and father. Or maybe you had an influential grandparent, teacher or coach that really made an impact on your life. What makes those lives influential to you? How is it you bear the image of these examples?
- 9 What does it mean for you to bear the image of God? Identify specific actions that are part of your vocation.





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

While taxes are the topic, image is at the center of this passage. The Pharisees think they can bring down Jesus' public image either by his offending Rome and Caesar, or by embarrassing himself in front of his disciples and those who have been following him. Jesus points to humanity's failure to take up their rightful vocation as vice-regents in Creation, a failure to carry God's creative and good will and ways into it. Jesus takes up the mantle of humanity's calling and fulfills it by letting the violence, evil, and failure of humanity and the entire cosmos fall on him. He bears the weight. He suffers the collective consequence of our sin, rebellion, and laziness. Is there some part of God's call on your life where you have become lazy? Something you have been neglecting? Confess to someone today, and pray that in remembering Jesus' gift of salvation, you will regain your footing and be conformed to his image more and more every day.



ORE QUESTIONS

MATTHEW 22:23-46

²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.'²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her." ²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the

resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. ³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the





Prophets.”⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question,⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.”⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,⁴⁴ “ ‘The Lord said to

my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet” “?⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

INTRODUCTION

Questions about taxes. Questions about marriage. Questions about commandments. Even though the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians don't see eye to eye, they have unified to disqualify Jesus in any way possible. When it is his turn to ask the questions, all the religious elite offer is silence, even when discussing the Messiah. Cue the crickets.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever taken an oral test, you know, the kind where you need to answer questions out loud instead of writing them down? Are they easy or difficult? Explain.
- 2 Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Matthew 22:34. What is the purpose of the law in Deuteronomy? What can we deduce about the Sadducees' goals and values? What seems more important than resurrection?

- 3 Consider the theology of the Sadducees. They only considered the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) to be scripture. If they don't believe in resurrection but simply Sheol as the place of the dead, what are the theological implications? How might a Sadducee live out their life?
- 4 Where is Jesus quoting from in Matthew 22:32? How are the scriptural location and who the story is about appropriate for the audience? Try to trace the logic of Jesus argument.
- 5 Read Deuteronomy 6:4-6 and Leviticus 19:17-18. Now read Exodus 20:1-17. How do the passages that Jesus uses connect to the Exodus passage? Do you find it easier to follow a general rule or a more specific one?
- 6 Law and prophets have been brought up before. Read Matthew 5:17 and 7:12. Is the use here similar? Why might Jesus' use of the phrase with this particular audience be meaningful?
- 7 Read Psalm 110. What is the purpose of the Psalm? Who is it about? Why might Jesus use this Psalm to bring his point across?
- 8 What are you better at, loving God or loving people? Explain. How do the two commandments go together? What can happen if a person gets them out of balance (i.e. do one without doing the other)?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Loving God and loving others is no small task. In today's text you can see how the different tribes of the religious elite in Jesus' day failed to do it and if we look at ourselves we can witness our own failures. We needed someone to save us from our folly, sin, and failure. Thankfully, just as Jesus can silence the Sadducees and Pharisees, he also has silenced death by going into the heart of it and making a way through it for us. Take time this week to memorize Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-40. As you memorize, consider how your actions this week fulfill these commandments. Also, remember those moments when you fail, lean into Christ for more faith, and consider the weight of Jesus' act of loving his Father and loving us through his life, death, and resurrection. He knew what to do, and by his Spirit we can too.



OES

MATTHEW 23:1-39

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. ¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. ¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For

you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. ¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? ¹⁸ And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁹ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰ So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. ²² And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. ²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! ²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the





outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. ²⁹ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. ³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how

are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

³⁴ Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, ³⁵ so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. ³⁶ Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. ³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

INTRODUCTION

The verdict is in. After the questions from the religious elite and their inability to understand the true roll of the Messiah, the authority that Jesus has wielded throughout Matthew's Gospel now speaks in judgment. The consequences of this failure are vast, both for humanity and especially for the Christ.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever said “practice what you preach”? Describe the situation. What prompted it? When you have used it, did you ever consider your own failure to do so?
- 2 Here Jesus is describing those that know the good that they ought to do, but somehow fail to do it. Read James 4:17. This is a condition that goes beyond the Pharisees and scribes. What is something good you are failing to do?
- 3 Read Isaiah 5. What are the accusations? What is the tone of the text? How might it be compared to Matthew 23?
- 4 How many “woes” do you count in Matthew 23:13-39? Take each “woe” section and boil it down to two or three words that describe the core of Jesus’ accusation.
- 5 Thinking back through the Gospel so far, try to map Jesus’ previous teachings that would support his judgment against a particular “woe.” For example, compare Matthew 23:16-22 and Matthew 5:33-37.
- 6 These could be some of the strongest words Jesus has used in all the Gospel accounts. Collect all of the “names” Jesus uses in Matthew 23:13-39 (e.g. “hypocrites”), and consider their weight. Is it hard for you to see Jesus being so harsh? How might you respond to hearing them?





- 7 When you read these “woes” just as Matthew’s original audience experienced them, do you think they were also intended to caution the early Christian church? Explain. Which ones are good cautions for you?
- 8 What are the things that you are most likely to do visibly for others to see? Give a recent example. Is it a bad or a good thing? Explain.

GOSPEL MOTIVATION

It is ironic. Jesus has been revealing all the facets of the fullness of his authority over the course of Matthew and the onlooking masses have been amazed. Whether experiencing his teaching or miracles, it has been clear that Jesus has authority over every aspect of creation. Here he judges the religious elite and explains why they are distorted, and their teaching twisted. The irony is that Jesus’ authority is ignored. His creatures, including those who would say they know God best, shake their collective fists at him in rebellion and send him to death. But the greatest twist of that irony is that this King’s authority is also revealed in the whisper of his last breath. He defeats our greatest enemies—Satan, sin and death—to save a humanity that has treated him as the enemy. We deserve woe but those that are “in him” receive grace and eternal life in his presence. Take a moment each day this week to thank God for his grace, mercy, and forgiveness toward the specific ways you can be hypocritical or even make a show of our faith.



ATASTROPHE AND APOCALYPSE

MATTHEW 24:1-51

¹ Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the

whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. ¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ "Immediately after





the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ³² "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were

unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. ⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

INTRODUCTION

A large and challenging chapter stands before us and it is often called a "little apocalypse." Many scholars and commentators have sat at the edge of these deep waters and come to multiple conclusions. It is important to note real history. Jerusalem was sieged and the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by a Roman General named Titus, which is about 40 years after Jesus. Can this explain all that Jesus says in this text?

DISCUSSION

- 1 Consider the content of last session and read Matthew 23:37-24:3. Discuss the importance of the Temple in Jewish thought. What is Jesus doing that Matthew wants us to understand?
- 2 How many questions are the disciples asking in Matthew 24:1-2? About how many events could these questions point to? Explain.
- 3 The word "parousia" means "coming" and is used four times in Matthew, all in this chapter (vv. 3, 27, 37, 39). Read each of the occurrences and discuss what seems certain about this "coming." Are there other times the word "coming" is used outside of these occurrences?
- 4 Read Daniel 7:13-14. This text has been critical to understanding the title "Son of Man" as we have read the Gospel. What is the Daniel text describing? Is it the same or different from what is described in Matthew 24? Explain.
- 5 Daniel is also important to the discussion of "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15-16. Most scholars agree that the vision in Daniel 11:31-35 can point to Antiochus IV Epiphanes who desecrated the Temple in the 2nd century B.C., and Matthew includes the hint "let the reader understand" to bring the idea into the present. Where was this abomination to occur? Where were the people to flee from? How can these answers help us to understand and interpret the passage?
- 6 What are the possible meanings of "this generation" in Matthew 24:34? In context, what do you think Jesus meant?
- 7 Read Matthew 24:38-40. How is the imagery of Noah likened to the coming of the Son of Man? Who would seem to be judged? Those taken or those left? How might this challenge some beliefs today?





- 8 Read Ezekiel 10:18-22 and 11:22-23. Do you see any similarities in these Ezekiel texts and Matthew 25? Explain. Now read Ezekiel 11:16-21.
- 9 Read Matthew 26:59-61 and 27:39-40. What is the accusation that led Jesus to the cross? Did Jesus say these words? How might the readers of Matthew see the words of this threat?
- 10 Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. How does the Apostle Paul understand the idea of temple and how might it relate to Matthew 25? Does it shock you to know that most people date the writing of 1 Corinthians around 50 A.D.? That is almost two decades before the Temple is destroyed in Jerusalem.

GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Conclusions can be hard to nail down perfectly, but one thing is certain. The Jewish Temple no longer exists. It was no longer serving its intended purpose—sacrifice after sacrifice, but injustice and moral failure in the streets. The glory that once resided in Solomon’s Temple, was no longer present in the super-sized Temple built by the puppet-king Herod. The wonder of it all is that God still wanted a place where heaven and earth met. This time it was not only transportable like the old tabernacle, but the new temple became flesh and dwelt among us. In the beautiful and unexpected glory of the cross, the temple curtain was torn in two, and through the Spirit of the Living God, Christians have become the people of God, and by his grace, the new temple. Even with all the turmoil that exists in our world, we can look expectantly for his return to make all things right. Do you ever pray for God to return and make things right? Do you then live through your days knowing that you are supposed to be a small echo of the place where heaven and earth meet? How can you make this a reality in small ways this week?



INGDOM PREPARED

MATTHEW 25:1-13

¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of

your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.





INTRODUCTION

Much like the thief coming to steal in the previous chapter, this text speaks to preparation. However, in this case it is positive. Rather than awaiting something bad (a thief) it is taking part in something good, a wedding.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever been woefully unprepared for something important? What happened?
- 2 Read Matthew 13:24, 18:23 and 22:2. These are all the beginning of parables. What do they have in common? What is different here in Matthew 25:1? Why might this be significant?
- 3 What does this parable have in common with Matthew 24:45-51 that directly precedes it? Do they both speak to some level of moral responsibility?

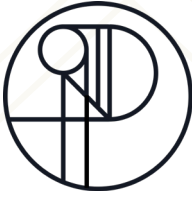
- 4 What is the meaning of folly in your mind? Is it different from sin? Explain.
- 5 Read Matthew 7:24-27. What does this text from the Sermon on the Mount have in common with Matthew 25:1-13?
- 6 What are the things that you do that don't accomplish anything, but take a lot of time? Why do you do them?
- 7 Compare Matthew 24:36 with Matthew 25:13. The event is certain; the timing is not. How easy is it for you to plan for events that have no specific timing? What is motivating in a scenario like this?
- 8 How is it that Christians are supposed to prepare? What would be the equivalent of being watchful for a coming thief or trimming wicks in readiness for a late night wedding celebration?
- 9 Have you ever seen someone who seemed ready, slowly fall away? What do you think happened? How can we inoculate ourselves from the same breakdown?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

You have been invited to the greatest wedding feast of all time. You have the invitation in hand and know that the creation-altering event is coming. It is as close as your next breath, but it also may require some waiting. Waiting is a rough business. We can waste time, pay too much attention to secondary matters, and become downright unmotivated. Isn't Jesus' life and work beautiful enough? Was it not powerful enough? What we can neglect is the vision of our gracious King who promises the hope and good that only he can provide. Do not forget that all of your woes, all of your brokenness, all of your unfaithfulness has been made right upon a Roman cross by the only One who could accomplish the task. It was given freely, so let us give back freely even as we wait. Find a quiet time this week to sit and imagine the moments at the cross. Consider the abandonment by his disciples. Consider the physical pain. Consider the mocking of his majesty. Above all, know the Love that was required. That is why you have been invited inside.



PREPARED FOR JUDGMENT

MATTHEW 25:14–46

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping

where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 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 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the 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 food, I was thirsty and





you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the

devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

INTRODUCTION

Many of us know the parable of the talents, but do we recognize what follows it? What does the person who does the will of his master look like? What is the real-life equivalent of good stewardship of the master’s wealth? The following section seems to say a lot about it, and the consequences are massive. Daniel 7 comes into the picture once again, but it is important to recognize who has been given the throne.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Do you ever “talk a big game”? You know, does your speech about something in your life outmatch the reality of it? If so, why do you think you do it?

- 2 How does the parable of the talents speak to “readiness” from the previous session?
- 3 This parable includes an idea that the master is expecting something. Do you think God expects too much or too little of you? Explain. How does the treatment of the first two slaves affect your thinking?
- 4 Read Matthew 20:1-16. Taking the image of the master there and here in Matthew 25:1-30, how would you describe the master? How does he treat his slaves?
- 5 Does it bother you that the slaves were entrusted with different amounts? Why/why not? Do you think of the third slave saving and not losing the master’s money as a good thing? Do you feel like that slave didn’t deserve the master’s punishment? If so, why?
- 6 Read Proverbs 19:17. How does this proverb fit both the parable and the judgement in Matthew 25:14-46?
- 7 Read Isaiah 58:6-12. How does this Old Testament passage compare to Matthew 25:34-39? List the actions that Jesus claims are good. What do they have in common?
- 8 You have heard that your salvation is about faith in Jesus and not works. How do you reconcile Jesus’ words about the actions of the righteous in Matthew 25:34-40? How do you reconcile that neither of the groups knew what they were doing (Matthew 25:37, 44)?
- 9 As uncomfortable as it may be, Matthew 25:31-32 is a picture of Jesus coming in judgment. What judgment does humanity deserve? What do you deserve? Explain.





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Have you ever thought about your skills and talents coming from the will of God? You have been given things from God and they have a purpose. Now, suppose what it means to do nothing with them. God wills it, you have it, and you do nothing with it. Think of it this way. You buy someone a crazy expensive gift that fits their lifestyle and personality perfectly, but they put it in a closet and never even use it, or worse yet, they give it away to someone else. It is offensive. Humanity from the first pages of Genesis forward does exactly that. They take God's good gift and refuse to use it for its intended purpose—his glory. In fact, history shows we often attribute his gifts to some other god or claim them as our own creation. Jesus is the deserving King and he shows us what being the True Human and True King looks like. But, even more, his sacrificial life and death brings us back to our real vocation as royal stewards of Creation with his Spirit empowering us to do his will. Doesn't this make him the perfect judge? Righteous. Like us. Ready to give when others take. This week, pray for God's justice, maybe in your own life or around the world, but the whole time remembering that his justice is perfect compared to your own.



BURIAL PLANS

MATTHEW 26:1-13

¹ When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, ² “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” ³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴ and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵ But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” ⁶ Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive

ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. ⁸ And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? ⁹ For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”





INTRODUCTION

Passover, which is a celebration of God's faithfulness and vindication before Pharaoh, is why Jerusalem is literally packed with Israelites from all over. The idea of Jesus finishing all these sayings is ominous. Somehow a new corner has been turned and the reality of Jesus' death is upon the reader and will soon loom over the city.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever been in a room at school or at work when a plot was happening? Whether a simple practical joke or a plan to get someone fired, how did it feel? Was the plot carried out?
- 2 Read John 11:45-53. What Matthew states in two verses, John provides with more background and detail. What more do we learn? Identify the irony and the theological implications in John's account.
- 3 The passage today says that Jesus is in the house of a leper. While it seems like an unimportant detail, what does it tell us? In our culture who do you consider like a "leper" and do you avoid them or spend time with them?

- 4 Passages in the previous chapter spoke to being ready and prepared. How does the woman from Bethany and what she does carry the preparations forward?
- 5 What is the most exorbitant thing you have done for someone else's good? Why did you do it? Was it hard or easy? Why?
- 6 Compare the plan of the high priests and elders to the actions of the woman at Bethany. Describe the stark differences.
- 7 Consider the disciples' reaction to the woman at Bethany. Why are they upset? Why are they misguided?
- 8 Have you ever met someone who called themselves Christian but seemed more interested in doing Jesus-y things than actually worshipping Jesus? Explain.
- 9 Do you ever feel like you give Jesus your "seconds" rather than your best? Are you ever distracted by secondary things? Explain.





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Jesus announces a very specific “two days” and he is anointed for burial. While Matthew doesn’t record the disciples’ response to the former, it is clear they have a distaste for the latter. It is a “sign” act that is lost on them. They still don’t quite get it. Jesus knows where the road ends and is preparing for the glorious, though horrific, end. Is this lost on us as well? In his effort to chase down his unruly and rebellious creation—that’s you and me—he also must chase down death itself. He grabs death by its throat and makes sure that it no longer has a hold on his people. Death the intruder is undone. Are we to fear death anymore? Do you? The promise of our King’s life, death and resurrection is that we no longer fear the intruder. Maybe this week is a good time to consider your fears that relate directly to death, and ask Jesus to put them to death.



BETRAYAL AT THE LORD'S TABLE

MATTHEW 26:14-29

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. ¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.' " ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. ²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him

one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" ²³ He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me." ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so." ²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."





INTRODUCTION

The Passover meal is a central part of the Passover celebration, and Jesus gives a new way to look at the event. All the while, an informer is in their midst and is ready to give the religious elite and Temple leadership what they want. Think about it. The Lord's Supper is prepared as Jesus is secretly betrayed, and Jesus knows it.

DISCUSSION

- 1 How often do you think "what's in it for me"? When does this thinking happen most often?
- 2 Read Exodus 12:1-28. Passover is important. What are the key things that Christians should understand about the Passover, and what are the implications of Jesus linking it to his crucifixion?
- 3 How is Jesus' betrayal a simple example of how God has been treated since Genesis 3? Think back through the Old Testament and give specific examples.
- 4 Read Exodus 21:32. How might Matthew be using the amount in Matthew 26:15 to further develop the picture of Jesus?

- 5 Read John 12:1-8 which is about Jesus' anointing and contains more details about Judas. Judas' objection contains another number. What is the further irony about how these numbers compare? Do you ever devalue Jesus? Explain.
- 6 Would you willingly share an intimate meal with someone who betrays you? Why/why not?
- 7 Is participation in the Lord's Table something you look forward to? How much weight should Christians place on this sacrament? Explain.
- 8 When is the last time you confessed a sin personally to someone else? How deep was the confession? Was it a good experience?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

As a reader of Matthew, those who know the whole story come to this point and recognize that this is the moment Christians re-enact consistently. Whether in the 2nd century or the 21st century, communion has been the ongoing practice where we participate in an embodied act that mysteriously includes the very presence of our King. Do we give the moment the weight that it deserves? Matthew tells us that even in the moment of Jesus' betrayal, he gives his people the grace of sharing this sacramental sign act. He welcomes us to the table—sinners, rebels, betrayers. Confession is a practice that we have lost or internalized. This week find a Christian brother or sister that you trust and confess a way that you may still be rebelling against your gracious King. Then on the coming Sunday remember this confession, repent before the Lord and take communion in recognition of God's mighty presence and his gracious work on our behalf.



ENIALS AND GETHSEMANE

MATTHEW 26:30-46

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."³³ Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray."³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."³⁹ And

going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?"⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."





INTRODUCTION

If there was ever a time that we can see Jesus' humanity, it is here. Knowing that his disciples will "fall away," knowing that he will be abandoned, even denied, he is overcome with what he is about to experience, and just like we might expect from our own response, he prays for relief. Ultimately, he bows to his Father's gracious will.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever been told you were going to fail? Describe the situation.
- 2 Read Zechariah 13:7-9. This section of Zechariah speaks of a messianic shepherd figure. Who strikes the shepherd? How does Jesus use this passage and what is Matthew reinforcing?
- 3 Jesus gives three predictions. The disciples will fail, Peter will do worse, and he will meet them in Galilee. If you read forward, you see that all come true. What do these predictions highlight about the disciples and about God?

- 4 How do you respond to Jesus saying “my soul is very sorrowful, even to death”? What does Jesus’ apparent emotion reveal?
- 5 Read Matthew 26:38. Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to “watch with him” but the same word here was used in Matthew 24:40-42 and 25:13 in the sense of “stay awake.” Compare the context. How does it end? What is the irony?
- 6 Go back and read Matthew 6:9-13. Find similarities to the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 26:39-41. Who is Jesus telling his disciples to pray for? Why is this important?
- 7 What is the tone of Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 26:39, 42? What are the key details? When was the last time you prayed in this way?
- 8 How would you feel if you experienced all the failures of the disciples that Jesus did?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

The pattern is obvious. Jesus prophetically speaks of his disciples' failure. He couches the whole discussion using an Old Testament narrative about a messianic shepherd who will be struck by God himself. Humanity fails. God is in control. Humanity betrays. God fulfills. In the middle of this seemingly impossible situation, we see Jesus accepting that he will have to go it alone to rescue us all. The weight is unbearable. When you think about your redemption, how often do you remember this scene—the King of the universe on his face asking if there is another way? This week take time to think through your redemption from a different perspective. Your failure and betrayal are real, and Jesus felt that weight. But he also carried that weight willingly, for you and for me.



REACHERY FULFILLED

MATTHEW 26:47-68

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must

be so?" ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled. ⁵⁷ Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.' " ⁶² And the





high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy."⁶⁶ What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him,⁶⁸ saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

INTRODUCTION

All of the pieces have fallen into place. The religious elite have found their moment to collect this "robber" of sorts and they will take every necessary step to silence his unsubstantiated authority and his sentiment against the Temple. Ultimately, two opposing forces collide right here, and a claim is made that is either the truth or blasphemy.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever witnessed someone choose not to react in a violent or otherwise heated situation? What happened? Was the choice bad or good from your perspective?
- 2 Compare Jesus' demeanor in Matthew 26:38-42 (last session) and Matthew 26:50-64. What seems clear to Jesus at this point? Should we take anything away from these two scenes or is this simply showing the power and resolve of Jesus?

- 3 Read Matthew 21:8-11 and compare to Matthew 26:47. Describe the difference in the crowds.
- 4 Consider the titles that have been used for Jesus in Matthew's Gospel so far and the stories in which they were presented. How does Judas greet Jesus in this situation? How does this compare with other titles and what might be the point?
- 5 Read Matthew 16:21-22 and 26:35. We know that the disciple in Matthew 26:51-53 is Peter by reading John 18:10-11. How does this fit with Peter's previous inclinations? Does he understand what Jesus is doing?
- 6 Though one biblical statement is not enough to develop a full ethical stance, what do you think Jesus' words in Matthew 26:52 mean in the context? Do you think they have weight beyond this specific situation with Peter? What does Jesus' further statement in Matthew 26:53 add to the discussion?
- 7 What "scriptures" is Jesus speaking of in Matthew 26:54, 56? Explain.
- 8 Identify the aspects of Jesus' arrest and trial before the Jewish religious leaders (known as the Sanhedrin) that make his conviction suspect.
- 9 What was Jesus finally accused of? How was the Sanhedrin able to substantiate this verdict?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Before the high court of Israel, Jesus is presented like any other brigand. Jesus speaks of his adversaries coming after him and treating him like a petty thief though he was with them openly and never intended resistance. Though they could not gather true evidence to back their claims, Jesus himself gives them the ammunition they desperately needed. Christ. Son of God. Daniel 7's Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. Blasphemy! It is no wonder that Matthew reports Jesus being crucified with a couple of thieves. He receives a thief's death. Think about it. False accusations and bogus proceedings by counterfeit leaders pretending to bear the image. The King of All goes almost silently into the grip of torture, pain, and death, looking nothing like a King, but a criminal—all to save a bunch of criminals when considering the verdict from the Highest court. Bless his name this week. Sing of his praises, because you were dead in your rebellion, and now you live in him. Amen.



JESUS DENIED

MATTHEW 26:69-75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not

know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.





INTRODUCTION

Peter follows when the rest scatter. Truthfully, there was no indication that Jesus' disciples would be arrested since Jesus was the primary target. Now, Peter with his blood-stained sword follows. We should give him credit. He remains braver than the others, but this scene reminds us that Jesus is truly abandoned by all who would call him Lord . . . or Rabbi.

DISCUSSION

- 1 How brave are you? What allows you to make such a claim? Is courageous faith the same? Explain.
- 2 In Matthew 26:30-35, what three things did Jesus predict? Which came true and which remain unfulfilled? Should there be a positive expectation? How should we look to the future based upon Jesus' prophetic success? What would create greater expectation?
- 3 Compare Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin with Peter's accusers. What is the irony? Is there foreshadowing for Peter? For us?

- 4 “Certainly you too are one of them.” A challenge rings out from these words. Have you ever had an experience like this where someone accused you of being a Christian in an environment that seemed unsafe? Explain.
- 5 Peter invokes a curse on himself. What can make someone change so quickly? What are the fears that would make you change your mind like Peter?
- 6 From this text and earlier, what would tell you that Peter did not plan to fail? What’s the difference between remorse, sadness caused by failure, and repentance? How might we be able to differentiate between them?
- 7 Compare the stories about Judas and Peter. How are they different? Is this comparison helpful?
- 8 Though Peter will not be mentioned again in Matthew’s Gospel, how do we know that this is not the end of Peter’s story?





GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Peter fails. No matter how courageous when push comes to shove, Peter falters like the rest of us. Maybe that is the point of this text. Jesus does everything right and is put to death. Peter fails to do the right thing and by God's grace not only is he let go, but he also has new purpose and resolve. Read John 21:15-19 and you will find Jesus restoring the one who denied him. Peter experienced Jesus' grace and goodness and came to realize that his own failures paled in light of what was accomplished on the Cross. That's the beauty. God has conquered Satan, sin and death. It is done. We can take up our own crosses daily, no matter how imperfectly, and know that the King goes with us. Have you ever asked God for the strength to live and die well for his namesake? Even the faith you have is a gift. Like a beggar enjoying a morsel of bread, why not ask for more?



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