

Studies in Matthew

Part Two



Santa Barbara Community Church

Spring / Summer Calendar

Teaching Date	Study	Text	Topic
5/9	21	13:53—14:36	Five Responses
5/16	22	15:1-20	Clean hands, Clean Heart
5/23	23	15:21-39	Gentiles!
5/30	24	16:1-12	The Arithmetic of Faith
6/6	25	16:13-28	Who Do You Say I Am?
6/13	26	17:1-13	Glory!
6/20	27	17:14-27	Mustard Seed Faith
6/27	28	18:1-20	Little Children and Lost Sheep
7/4	29	18:21-35	How Many Times?
7/11	30	19:1-15	The Matrix of Marriage
7/18	31	19:13-30	The Eye of the Needle
7/25	32	20:1-34	Grace and Greatness
8/1	33	21:1-27	The Final Week Begins
8/8	34	21:28—22:14	Three Parables of judgment
8/85	35	22:15-46	Three Stories of Controversy
8/22	36	23:1-39	Woe to You

The artwork for this study was provided by Ron Davis (even numbered studies) and Micah McWilliams (the cover¹ and the odd numbered studies). The text was written by Reed Jolley. Many thanks to those who proof-read this study.

May God bless us as we study his Word!

¹The Cover: This depicts Peter, James, and John's witness of Jesus' transfiguration. Moses, on the left, and Elijah, on the right, are lifting up hands in praise. Trumpets are in the side spandrels.

SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

Barclay	William Barclay, <i>The Gospel of Matthew</i> , Volume 1. Westminster Press, 1975.
Boice	James Montgomery Boice, <i>The Gospel of Matthew</i> Vol. 1. Baker, 2001.
Brunner	Frederick Dale Bruner, <i>Matthew</i> , 2 volumes. Baker, 1987.
Carson	D. A. Carson, <i>Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , Volume 8. Zondervan, 1984.
Green	Michael Green, <i>The Message of Matthew</i> . IVP, 2000.
Gundry	Robert Gundry, <i>Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art</i> . Eerdmans, 1982.
Hendrickson	William Hendrickson, <i>Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew</i> . Baker, 1973.
KJV	King James Bible
Morris	Leon Morris, <i>The Gospel According to Matthew</i> . Eerdmans, 1992.
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Ryle	J. C. Ryle, <i>Expository Thoughts on Matthew</i> . Banner of Truth Trust, 1856, 1986.
Stott	John Stott, <i>Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount</i> . IVP, 1978.
Tasker	R. V. G. Tasker, <i>The Gospel According to St. Matthew</i> . Eerdmans, 1961.

All Scripture passages are taken from the *New International Version* unless otherwise noted.

The Pattern of Matthew's Gospel*

Part 1: In and Around Galilee (1:1—13:58)

Part 2: To Jerusalem (14:1 — 28:20)

A. Beginnings (1:1—7:29)	B. Discipleship (8:1—11:1)	C. Accepting or Rejecting Jesus (11:2—13:58)	D. Foreshadowing the Future (14:1—19:1)	E. Judgment —By Jesus, Of Jesus and the Final Judgment (19:2—26:2)	F. The End —And the Beginning (26:3—28:20)
<p>1. Jesus' family tree (1:1-17)</p> <p>2. Birth and childhood (1:18-2:23)</p> <p>3. The beginning of Jesus' work (3:1-4:25)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Basic teaching for disciples (5:1-7:27)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority. . . .</i> 7:28-29</p>	<p>1. The disciples see Jesus' power to heal (8:1-17)</p> <p>2. Jesus discourages some, but leads the disciples on. They see his power over nature, demonic forces and sin, and his disregard of convention (his call of Matthew) (8:18-9:13)</p> <p>3. Those who see, and those who don't (9:14-34)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Instructions to disciples as they are sent out to do the work of Jesus (9:35-10:42)</p> <p><i>After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach.</i> 11:1</p>	<p>1. Grounds for accepting (11:2-30)</p> <p>2. The Pharisees reject Jesus (12:1-14)</p> <p>3. Acceptable to the Father a. Healings – leading to quotation from Isaiah b. Jesus accused of working in power of Beelzebub c. Jesus refuses to give sign d. <i>Whoever does the will of my Father. . . is my brother.</i> (12:15-50)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Parables about the kingdom (13:1-52)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on. . . to his hometown. . . "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."</i> 13:53-54; 57</p>	<p>Introduction: the death of John the Baptist</p> <p>1. The future for Israel a. Feeding 5,000 b. Jesus and Peter (who will be leader of new Israel, the church) walk on water c. Healings d. True worship (14:13-15:20)</p> <p>2. The future for the world a. Healing a Gentile girl b. Feeding 4,000 c. Interpreting signs of the times d. Peter's declaration about Jesus (15:21-16:20)</p> <p>3. The more immediate future—Jesus must go to Jerusalem and suffer (16:21-17:27)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: The kind of behavior expected of those entering (on earth) the kingdom Jesus is about to set up (18:1-35)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.</i> 19:1</p>	<p>1. Reversal of human values a. On divorce b. On children brought to Jesus c. on the rich young man d. Parable of labourers in the vineyard "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (19:3-20:16)</p> <p>2. <i>Many are invited, but few are chosen.</i> (20:17—22:14)</p> <p>3. The Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus into condemning himself (22:15—23:39)</p> <p>4. TEACHING: Predictions and parables about the time of the final judgment (24:1-25:46)</p> <p><i>When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."</i> 26:1-2</p>	<p>1. Events leading to the arrest of Jesus (26:3-56)</p> <p>2. The trial of Jesus (26:57-27:26)</p> <p>3. The crucifixion (27:27-66)</p> <p>4. The resurrection (28:1-20)</p> <p><i>"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."</i> 28:19-20</p>

* This chart is found in Michael Green's commentary on Matthew, pp. 32-33. He borrowed and adapted it from *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, by Elizabeth and Ian Billingham.

Study Twenty-one

Five Responses

Matthew 13:53—14:36

Before beginning this study take a few moments to review the introduction to Matthew (pp. 1-4) in our previous study guide. Notice also where Matthew 14 fits in the chart titled *The Pattern of Matthew's Gospel*.

With chapter 14 we begin the second half of Matthew's story. The narrative will move from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus, who has the adulation of the crowds in Galilee will be rejected and crucified in Jerusalem. It is quite probable that beginning in Matthew 14 we have Book Two of the Gospel. Just as Book One began with John the Baptist so also does this second installment. In Matthew 2 we found Herod (a Jew who opposes Jesus) and the Magi (Gentiles who embrace Jesus). In Matthew 14 we meet Herod Antipas²— who rejects Jesus by killing John the Baptist—and the people of Gennesaret (14:34)—Gentiles who welcome Jesus without reservation. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (5-7) is paralleled by what some have called the Short Sermon on the Mount in chapter 18. Book One ends with Jesus' rejection in Galilee (Nazareth) and Book Two ends with Jesus' rejection in Jerusalem.



The nature and scope of Jesus' ministry is changing. With Matthew 13 we notice a change in the teaching of Jesus. He now speaks in cryptic parables that even his disciples don't understand. His teaching becomes less public and is, increasingly, directed toward the 12 disciples. Peter will play a more prominent role in the second half of the gospel.³ The opposition to Jesus grows more intense. Our Lord's stunning popularity in Galilee will soon come to an end as he sets his course toward the cross in Jerusalem (16:21).

¹ Note on the art: The left panel shows the feeding of the 5000. Note the bread and fish in the left arch. The right panel depicts Jesus walking out on the water, and Peter's doubt. Also note John the Baptist's head in the spandrel and the seed of faith at the bottom of the frame.

² This is not the king we met in Matthew 2. The *Herod* of Matthew 14 is Herod Antipas, one of the four sons of Herod the Great. Notice he is called *the tetrarch*. The word comes from *tetra*, which means four in Greek. He received one fourth of the kingdom of his wicked father. The title also indicates his status was less than that of a king.

³ See 14:28-31; 16:16-23; 17:1-5, 24-27; 18:21-22; 19:27; 26:31-46, 58, 69-75.

Carson summarizes the flow of the narrative in the second half of Matthew's story.

Over [these chapters] is the contrast between Christ's glory, goodness, and grace, and the blind misunderstanding of the disciples (15:15-16, 33; 16:22; 17:4, 19; 18:21) and Jewish leaders (15:2, 8; 16:6, 12; 17:24) alike. And rising less ambiguously now is the shadow of the Cross (16:21-22; 17:22-23). (Carson, p. 334)

Take a moment to review the parable of the soils in Matthew 13:1-8. What Jesus teaches about four soils (four different receptions to the Word of God), Matthew now illustrates in five different stories from the life and times of Jesus.

Read Matthew 13:53—14:36. Make note of any initial thoughts and questions which come to mind as you read these five stories.

1. The rejection of Jesus in Nazareth (13:53-58)
2. The murder of John the Baptist (14:1-12)
3. Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 (14:13-21)
4. Jesus' walking on water (14:22-33)
5. Jesus' healings in Gennesaret (14:34-36)

Brunner offers the following comment on Matthew's intent in this section.

[W]e see five different receptions of God's Word. In a sense, the quality of the receptions escalates. In the first two stories, which can be understood together, Jesus and John are rejected, illustrating the truth of the first soil in the Parable of the sower. In the next pair of stories, the disciples and Peter both believe and yet do not believe—illustrating the truth of the distracted, divided, or choked middle soils. And finally, the pagan people of Gennesaret—of all people!—receive the coming of Jesus enthusiastically and wholeheartedly and so are healed, illustrating the truth of the fourth soil. (Brunner, p. 519)

13:53-58 The Rejection at Nazareth

Jesus never enjoyed a receptive audience in his hometown of Nazareth. Luke records a visit to Nazareth right after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The hostile crowds attempted to throw Jesus off a cliff! Now, after Jesus has attained a good deal of notoriety (4:23-25), he again returns to his hometown.

What is the initial response to Jesus teaching?

Notice the objections posed by the people. They ask a series of questions. What is the answer to these questions? Are the people's objections true or false?

13:57 says *They took offense at him*. Why? Why do people take offense at Jesus today?

14:1-12 The Murder of John the Baptist

Look at the first and last verse of this section. Notice how Matthew frames the issue for the reader. Herod's reaction to John the Baptist is centered in Jesus.

The portrait of Herod Antipas in this section is a portrait of a man captivated by sensual pleasure. By the time this story begins, Herod has divorced his first wife, in order to marry his brother's wife, Herodias. But Herod's first wife was the daughter of Aretas, the king whose land bordered Herod's territory. The political situation was volatile. John the Baptist, the prophetic voice from the desert, could have kept his message confined to *spiritual matters*. Instead, he attacks the immorality of Herod Antipas. Verse 4 indicates in the Greek text that John was repeatedly denouncing Herod.

Herod's sensuality gets the best of him again at his birthday banquet. Herodias sends her daughter, by Philip, to dance for the men who are, by this time, well under the influence of their drinks. Pleased with the young girl's dance, Herod makes a promise and backs himself into a corner. John the Baptist's head is displayed on a platter and his disciples bury his body.

Why would Matthew include the detail that Jesus was told about John's death? Many think Matthew originally wrote his Gospel to encourage a church that was suffering persecution. How would this story be an encouragement to such a church?

How does John's critique of Herod inform the message we should preach as Christians? What does this story teach us about *Christianity and politics*?

Explain how your Christian convictions influence your approach to politics. What changes should you make in your thinking and practice in this area?

14:13-21 Jesus' feeding of the 5,000

14:13 What is Jesus' immediate response to the news of John's death?

This section is often called *The Feeding of the 5,000*. What other title could you give this section of Matthew?

How many people did Jesus feed?

This is the only miracle recorded in each of the four Gospels. This may be because this miracle touched so many people directly. But there is probably a deeper reason the four Gospel writers include this story. One of the shaping events in the life of Israel was God's provision of manna during her period of wilderness wandering before entering the land of promise. By the time of Jesus

there was an expectation that Messiah would again provide heavenly bread for the people to eat.¹ The multiplication of bread was such a stunning miracle that the people want to make Jesus their king *by force* (John 6:15)!

Notice where this feeding is placed in Matthew. It comes right after Herod's banquet. What contrasts is Matthew making between the two banquets? Think carefully about the two dinner parties. How are they different? What does each meal reveal about Herod and Jesus.

Herod's Banquet

Jesus' Banquet

What lessons do we learn about God the Father, Jesus and ourselves from this miracle?

Respond to the following:

The supreme lesson for the disciples was to learn to trust God to supply what seems impossible. Even after pondering all day over Jesus' instruction for them to feed the crowd themselves², the thought of turning to Him did not enter their heads. Like most of us, they were still inclined to look everywhere but to Him, even after having experienced so many previous miracles. (MacArthur, p. 432)

Share an example of this from your own life.

¹ 2 Baruch 29:8, a book from the apocrypha, reads, *It shall come to pass at that time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of the ages.*

² In John's Gospel Jesus gives the prompt to feed the crowd in the morning.

14:22-34 Jesus Walks on Water

Why does Jesus put his disciples in a boat and dismiss the huge crowd which has gathered? Compare Mark 6:31-32 and John 6:15.

What kind of temptations might Jesus have felt after he performed this miracle? Again, see John 6:15.

By the time Jesus makes his way to the disciples, walking across the Sea of Galilee(!), it is between 3:00 and 6:00 A.M. The disciples are stuck in a storm and along comes Jesus!¹

What is the initial response of the disciples?

When you think of Peter in this story do you see great faith or weak faith? Why did Peter sink? Was his request to Jesus appropriate or presumptuous?

Charles Spurgeon said of this text, *Peter was nearer his Lord when he was sinking than when he was walking.*

How have you found this to be true in your own life?

14:33 What is the result of this miracle in the lives of the disciples? Notice their growing faith. Compare their reaction here with 8:27.

14:33 is the first mention of the disciples *worshipping* Jesus. Thus far the Magi have *worshipped* Jesus along with the leper in 8:2 and the synagogue ruler of

¹ Mark's Gospel adds a humorous note, *He was about to pass them by. . .* (6:48).

9:18. Now the disciples join the company of those who bow before the King of kings.

14:34-36 Jesus' Healings in Gennesaret

The fifth response to Jesus in this chapter illustrates the *good soil* of Jesus' parable in chapter 13. These short verses are loaded with irony. It is not the Jews of Galilee or the disciples in the boat who exercise true faith. It is the pagan Gentiles of Gennesaret who place their unqualified faith in Jesus! Brunner points out the *five excited absolutes in the story, all of which illustrate faith*:

They recognize Jesus, summon the *whole* area, and *all* the sick are brought to him with the entreaty that they might *only* touch the hem of his garment; and *all* those who did touch were *thoroughly* healed. . . .

All these stories have been preparing us for *the Great Transfer* that will climax this Gospel—the transfer of the kingdom from the old people of God to the new (21:43; 28:18). “Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (19:30; 20:16). (Brunner, p. 537)

Spend some time in your group worshipping the Son of God. Give him your praise and thanks for his healing touch, for the heavenly bread of his own body and for his including you as one of his sons or daughters.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty-two Clean Hands, Clean Heart Matthew 15:1-20

And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them.
And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart
of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and
do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.
Ezekiel 11:19-20

Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev once said, *I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like. But I do know what the heart of a good man is like. And it is terrible.*

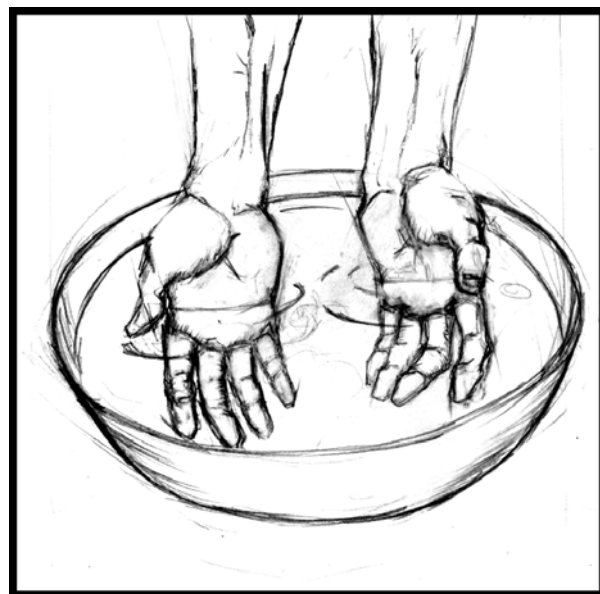
Turgenev's comment is something of a commentary on the first half of Matthew 15 for here Jesus shows that our sin comes from within not from without. Our problem, he says, is a dirty *heart* which needs to be cleansed not dirty *hands* which need to be washed.

We ended our last study with a quotation by Dale Brunner referring to the *Great Transfer* in Matthew's Gospel. All of chapter 15 illustrates this transfer.

- In the midst of the faith of the Gentiles of Gennesaret, Pharisees arrive from Jerusalem and provoke Jesus' ire
- A Canaanite (gentile) woman has faith to be healed
- Jesus feeds 4,000 Gentiles

These stories coalesce to show the kingdom of God is for everyone who has faith. No longer are the people of God bound by Jewish ceremonial law (15:1-20). The healing of the Canaanite woman shows that the whole world has access to the Messiah (15:21-28) and the feeding of the 4,000 Gentiles shows Jesus reaching out to those outside the fold of Israel.

Read 15:1-20. Make a list of the details which stand out on your first reading. How many conversations of Jesus does Matthew record? In what way does the Pharisees' question to



Jesus miss the point of all that Jesus taught?

15:1-2 Pharisees and teachers of the law from Jerusalem were not in the habit of making the long journey to rural Galilee. Their effort to find and confront Jesus is testimony both to Jesus' spreading fame and their increasing hostility toward this well-known rabbi. It is clear that the Pharisees are not coming with a sincere question. To the contrary, they want to show that Jesus is in clear violation of Jewish ceremonial law. Their purpose is punitive, not inquisitive.

What might not be clear is that Jesus and his disciples are not violating Old Testament law. The Pharisees were in the habit of *building a fence* around the law, that is, they made the law more strict to protect the devout from accidentally breaking a command.

15:3 How does Jesus answer his interrogators? Why doesn't he answer the question directly?

What do you think his tone of voice conveyed when he answered?

Do you ever catch yourself *building a fence* around God's commandments and Jesus' teaching? In what areas?

15:4-9 contain a biting accusation. Jesus refuses to debate the traditions of the elders. Instead he moves to one of the Ten Commandments which the Pharisees were violating. Jesus alludes to Exodus 20:12 and Exodus 21:17 and interprets these verses to mean that children have a responsibility to take care of their parents when their parents are in need. In other words, children were the Social Security plan of their parents in ancient Israel.

But the Pharisees had cleverly, and cruelly, bypassed this God-given responsibility. A man could declare his money and possessions as *Corban* (see the parallel version of this story in Mark 7:11), that is, *devoted to God*. Such money was no longer available to be used for a man's parents. But *corban* tradition was thoroughly hypocritical in that the money did not have to be given away at all. The declaration was sufficient to neglect the parents who were in need.

15:7-9 With the above in mind, consider the sharp retort Jesus gives the Pharisees. Read the quotation from Isaiah carefully. What specific criticism does Jesus (Isaiah) apply to the Pharisees' worship?

What *religious* practices do you follow that might be subject to these same criticisms? How do you honor God with your lips and not with your heart? Does this section of Matthew indicate that you should abandon these practices? Explain your answer.

15:10-20 record two more conversations on this same topic. First, Jesus teaches the crowd something which is directly contrary to what they would have heard from the Pharisees. Then he explains his teaching more fully to the disciples.

The Pharisees were consumed with ritual purity. They washed their hands before eating to protect their holiness. Jesus says, in effect, *Worship is a matter of the heart*. The Pharisees should not have been surprised. Consider the following Old Testament passages.

- Psalm 15
- Psalm 24

Why did Pharisees, and why do we, find it tempting to *externalize* their religion?

15:13 in context would have been shocking. Jesus has just told the parable of the weeds and given it an explanation (13:24-30; 13:36-43). Here it is the devout Pharisees and teachers of the law who will be *pulled up by the roots*. A *great transfer* indeed.

15:16-20 might be called *the great reversal*. Jesus says *Diet won't help!* It is our heart which needs to be purified.

Compare this list with Mark 7:21-22.

Which of these vices do you see in your own heart?

Compare the following verses and sections of Scripture. What do we learn about the natural state of our *heart*.

- Romans 1:28-32.
- Romans 2:5
- Ephesians 4:17-19

Johann Bengel (1687-1752) produced a commentary on the Greek New Testament which is often cited to this day. He captures the shock of 15:19 when he writes, *The filth of the [toilet] is not so great as that of a human heart not yet cleansed.*¹

How have we come to view those outside of Christ in our time? Does the American church (and SBCC) have a right understanding of the *filth* of the *human heart not yet cleansed*?

J.C. Ryle summarizes,

What is the first thing we need in order to be Christians? A new heart.—What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring him? A broken and a contrite heart.—What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart.—What is genuine obedience? To obey from the heart.—What is saving faith? To believe with the heart.—Where ought Christ to dwell? To

¹ From Brunner, p. 549.

dwell in our hearts by faith.—what is the chief request that Wisdom makes to everyone? “My son, give me thine heart. (Ryle, p. 174)

Of course, if our hearts are already corrupt we will find it impossible to bring to God a *broken and contrite* heart on the strength of our own efforts. The grace of God is such that He supplies us with a *new heart* through the work of Jesus.

The *new covenant* promised by God through Jeremiah has become a reality in Christ.

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”
Jeremiah 31:33

When Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples he pointed to himself as the fulfillment of this new covenant.

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”
Luke 22:20

Notice the very practical side to these truths in our interactions with one another. Read and rejoice over the following statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Dare to be sinners together in your homegroup. Spend time praising God for his provision of a clean heart!

The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is. Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of men. And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this. In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother, I can dare to be a sinner.¹

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1954, p. 119.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty-Three

Gentiles!

Matthew 15:21-39



Matthew is often called the *Jewish Gospel*. He includes no fewer than 40 Old Testament quotations to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets' expectations. Jesus is likened to both Moses and King David in the pages of Matthew's portrait of Christ. But as we study Matthew we continue to notice what Dale Brunner calls *the Great Transfer*. The kingdom of heaven is not only for the Jews, it is for the nations, for the Gentiles! Jesus comes to fulfill Isaiah 49:6 where God says to Messiah,

¹ *It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*

This *great transfer* is seen in the instructions of Jesus to his disciples. In 10:5-6 Jesus sends his disciples on a mission saying, *Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.* At the end of the Gospel Jesus tells his disciples to go to the Gentiles, *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations², baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . .* (28:19)

Our text for this lesson has been called a *half-way house* between 10:5-6 and 28:19. Our eyes move down the page and we find Jesus in Gentile territory. First Jesus in southern Lebanon (Tyre and Sidon) and then, according to the parallel account in Mark³, he is in Decapolis, an area of ten Greek cities.

¹ Note on the art: Most significantly, this is about a gentile woman's faith, and healing her demon possessed daughter. Note Christ's compassionate heart, his authority crown in the spandrel, and the disciple's indignation. Arches are again bread and fish, for the 4000. The seed of faith is at the frame bottom.

² This could be translated *all Gentiles*.

³ Mark 7:31.

15:21-28 Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

William Barclay says of this story,

The supreme significance of this passage is that it foreshadows the going out of the gospel to the whole world; it shows the beginning of the end of all barriers. (Barclay, vol. 2, p. 133)

15:21 would have been shocking to Jewish readers in Matthew's time. Tyre and Sidon¹, are code names for *Paganland*. (Brunner, p. 551) This is Greek territory. Jesus is in Las Vegas! What's more, a *Canaanite* woman approaches Jesus. In calling the woman a *Canaanite*, Matthew draws attention to the historic distinction between Jews (the covenant people of God) and Gentiles. The Jews were instructed to *totally destroy* the Canaanites when they took possession of the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:2).

Read 15:21-28.

- Why do you think Jesus is no longer in Galilee?
- What two responses do Jesus and the disciples give to the woman?
- What do you make of Jesus' initial answer to the woman (vs. 24)? Is he testing her? Does he really mean it?
- 15:24 sounds very harsh to many readers. What do you think the tone of Jesus' answer was? Was he stern? Smiling?
- In light of how this story turns out, what lesson could we learn from the disciples' response to the woman?

The interchange between Jesus and the woman is, if anything, a great object lesson of faith. Jews were fond of calling the Gentiles *dogs*. What English readers might miss in this interchange is that Jesus does not use the normal word for *dog* as he addresses the woman. Instead he substitutes the word for a house-dog or a puppy. The distressed woman seems to pick up on this pointing out that even house-dogs are amply fed from the scraps at the table.

She is desperate for her daughter and begs Jesus to help regardless of her status as a child of God.

¹Tyre and Sidon are coastal cities about 30 and 50 miles from Galilee. See 11:20-24.

She does not stay to argue that her claims are as good as anyone else's. She does not discuss whether Jew is better than Gentile, or Gentile as good as Jew. She does not dispute the justice of the mysterious ways by which God works out his divine purpose, choosing one race and rejecting another. All she knows is that her daughter is grievously tormented, that she needs supernatural help, and that here in the person of the *Lord*, the *son of David* is one who is able to give her that help; and she is confident that even if she is not entitled to sit down as a guest at the Messiah's table, Gentile "dog" that she is, yet at least she may be allowed to receive a crumb of the uncovenanted mercies of God. (Tasker, pp. 151-152)

In what ways is the faith of this Canaanite a model of all faith?

When have you approached Jesus in the same way as this woman? When have you been most desperate for the healing touch of Jesus?

James Boice finds in this story an indictment of the way in which we pray. Respond to the following quotation.

I do not think there is much of this strong persistent prayer in our day, at least not in affluent Western lands. We are too busy to pray and too self-confident. It was different in previous centuries. The Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards began with his famous call to prayer, and it was carried forward by prayer. The work of God among the North American Indians under David Brainerd, Edward's friend, began in the nights Brainerd spent in prayer asking God to effect that great work. In the eighteenth century a revival began in a small town in Ireland that eventually spread through the entire country. It started with seven ministers who committed themselves to pray regularly, fervently, and persistently for revival. When John Wesley and George Whitefield began their work, England was in spiritual stupor, a moral abyss, but a little group of believers began to pray, and God sent a revival that transformed England and even spilled over into the New World. One reason we do not

have great blessing today is that there is not much of that dogged prayer and persistent faith seen in the Canaanite woman. (Boice p. 291)

How is it with your prayer life? Do you pray *dogged prayers* when you come before the Lord? Is your homegroup praying the kind of prayers to which Boice refers?

15:28 It is the Canaanite who has *great faith*¹. How many statements can you make about the faith of this woman from these verses? What parallels do you see in your own faith?

15:29-39 Jesus Feeds 4,000 Gentiles

By this point Jesus is in Decapolis, an area of ten Greek cities on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists have found in this area the remnants of Greek culture: amphitheaters, pagan temples etc. Here the people worshipped Zeus, Aphrodite, Artemis, and Hercules. Jesus, again, is on foreign soil.

15:29 In the context of Matthew's Gospel we have a hint that Jesus is doing more than a healing ministry in Decapolis. What is it (see 5:1)?

15:31 offers the reader another irony. Here the Greeks *praised the God of Israel*. Jesus finds un-faith in Galilee and faith in Decapolis.

Green offers helpful insight into Matthew's purposes in this section (15:1-39).

A strongly Gentile flavor is present throughout. First the Jewish food laws are annulled. Then Jesus journeys up into Gentile country and heals a Gentile girl. Gentile crowds are taught and cared for, healed and shown the signs of the Messiah's presence as prophesied long ago. . . And now

¹ This the second reference to *great faith* in Matthew. Compare 8:10 and note the irony. Faith is found in the least likely of people.

Gentiles are fed with the same heavenly bread that Jesus had made available to the Jewish 'children of the kingdom'. (Green, p. 174)

15:37 Notice Matthew's editorial comment, *They all ate and were satisfied*. What evidence does your life show of the satisfaction you have experienced in Jesus?

One of the great lessons of this chapter is that those whom we would least expect are the ones who embrace the Gospel. Name two people whom you would like to see become Christians and yet seem unlikely to do so. Pray for these people in your homegroup.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty-Four

The Arithmetic of Faith

Matthew 16:1-12

Miracles + Messiah = Faith. Does the equation work? Hardly. In fact, Scripture teaches the opposite. The state of our heart is predisposed against the things of God. The natural person doesn't and can't understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). Those whose minds and hearts are not redeemed have a darkened understanding and a hard heart (Ephesians 4:18). Paul speaks of God giving sinful humanity over to *futile thinking*, to *sinful desires* and to *shameful lusts* (Romans 1:20-27).

16:1-12 is Matthew's warning against obstinate unbelief. The chapter opens with an unlikely coalition of partners, Pharisees and Sadducees. The two groups were not bedfellows. On the contrary they generally hated one another. The Sadducees had grown theologically liberal by the time of Jesus. They were what we might call *secularists* insofar as they denied the resurrection of the dead. They were rich, powerful and corrupt. They controlled the priesthood of the Temple and were not above taking a bribe from an aspiring rabbi.



The Pharisees, on the other hand, were super-spiritual *purists*. They were the righteous ones. Separated from the world, the Pharisees were convinced they were the ones with true devotion to the Lord. Could two groups of Jews be more different from one another? Nevertheless their opposition to Jesus unites them as they oppose the messiah.

As we come to Matthew 16, Jesus' Galilean ministry is coming to a close. Soon he will set his face toward Jerusalem and the cross (16:21). Before going on in this study, read Matthew 16. Catch a glimpse of the whole before moving on to the particulars. Make a note or two on anything that stands out.

16:1-4 A Sign from Heaven

How do you interpret Jesus' brief response to the Pharisees / Sadducees request?

The word *tested* in 16:1 is the same word Matthew used for the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (4:1-3). And this is the first occurrence of this Greek word since Jesus' testing in the desert. Do you think Matthew is trying to signal the reader with the use of this word? If so, what is his point? Respond to the following:

Both here (16:1) and there (4:1-3) the tempting is in the form of the sensational, the spectacular, and the special. The tempting here with a sign is not the temptation of Jesus to do something evil; it is the temptation of Jesus to do something supergood. Similarly, Adam and Eve in their classic temptation were not to be like devils; they were tempted to be "like God" or "angels" (Gen 3:5). *Real* temptation is when we are tempted to go up; all "down temptations" are minor in comparison.¹ (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 562)

Think about this in your own life. When and where have you been tempted *to go up*? When have you been tempted with Eve *to be like God*? How did this temptation play itself out?

Jesus says *the sign of Jonah* is the only sign that will be given to an adulterous generation. Matthew has already explained this *sign*.

[Jesus] answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a

¹ The very language of the band of Pharisees and Sadducees confirms Brunner's comment. Jewish thinking held that demons could perform earthly miracles. Only God could perform a heavenly miracle. The request is for something sensational and spectacular.

huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.” (12:39-41)

With this in mind, explain the *sign of Jonah*. What is Jesus saying to the Pharisees and Sadducees?

Why would Matthew include the last part of Jesus’ quotation in 12:41? Hint: Think about Matthew’s gentile emphasis in light of the story of Jonah. (Those more familiar with the story of Jonah will have to help the others here.)

The Pharisees / Sadducees want the excitement of a sensational sign without the commitment of faith. Brunner sees a parallel with today’s church. Respond to the following:

We might think that people who seek signs are spiritual people because great signs are, by definition, unusual, superhuman, and therefore, we think, more likely to come from God. But Jesus teaches that such seekings are the seekings of the sensual, who can see God only in the dramatic.

The lesson for the church is to give up sign-seeking. We have our sign in the cross and resurrection. (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 563)

16:5-12 The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

This section contains a change in venue. Jesus warns his disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Read this warning in both Matthew's and Mark's Gospel.

Matthew 16:5-12	Mark 8:13-21
<p>5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread.</p> <p>6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."</p> <p>7 They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."</p> <p>8 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? 9 Do you still not understand?</p> <p>Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?</p> <p>11 How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.</p>	<p>13 Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.</p> <p>14 The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.</p> <p>15 "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."</p> <p>16 They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."</p> <p>17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?</p> <p>And don't you remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" Twelve," they replied. 20 "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven."</p> <p>21 He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"</p>

What different emphases do you detect in Matthew and Mark? What is the *yeast*?

The Sadducees took away from the revelation of God by naturalizing it. They denied the resurrection, the miraculous, etc. The Pharisees added to God's word. They added law upon law to ensure their righteousness. They were legalists who thought they could please God with their flawless behavior. Which type of *yeast* is more appealing to you? Give an example or two of how this works out in your Christian life.

What *yeast* confronts us as Christians in twenty-first century America? What are the sources of that yeast?

Carson summarizes the *yeast* Jesus speaks of when he writes,

Jesus is surely not telling his disciples to beware of *all* the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. . . . The "teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" to which Jesus refers (vv. 5-12), therefore, is an attitude of unbelief toward divine revelation that could not perceive Jesus to be the Messiah (vv. 1-4) but that tried to control and tame the Messiah they claimed to await. The disciples are to avoid that. That is why the next [section] (vv. 13-20) is so important: Peter makes the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, not on the basis of manipulative signs, but by revelation from the Father. (Carson, p. 362, emphasis added.)

Describe *the attitude of unbelief* you have observed in a non-believing friend?

What did the *arithmetic of faith* look like when you became a Christian? Were you persuaded to become a Christian based on evidence? What, if any, were the external components, that softened your heart toward God?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty-Five

Who Do You Say I Am?

Matthew 16:13-28



Everything in the Christian faith comes down to the identity and the work of Jesus. The two questions, *What did Jesus do?*, and *Who was Jesus?*, lead us to the heart of our faith.

Thus far in Matthew’s Gospel we have seen an emphasis on the work of Jesus, his teaching, preaching and his miracles. But the question of his identity had crept up over and over from 1:1 where Matthew introduces our Lord as *Jesus Christ*.² On several occasions Matthew quotes an Old Testament verse about God and applies it to Jesus of

Nazareth!³ The miracles themselves compel the disciples to ponder their rabbi’s identity. After the calming of the storm we read in 8:27,

The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

In Matthew 16:21-28 Jesus compels his disciples to wrestle with his identity and theirs. *Who do people say that I am? Who do you say I am? Who am I? I am going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Will you come along? Are you willing to follow me, even to the cross*

Before going on in this study read these 15 verses from a few different translations.

¹ Note on the art: The Holy Spirit has revealed Jesus as Messiah to Peter. His eyes are open. Note the pillar (trumeau) on top the flat rock on which Jesus stands. The foundation of His church is this Truth which Satan can neither overpower nor undermine. In the spandrels are Keys of the kingdom. The seed of faith is at the frame bottom.

² Recall, *Christ* is not the last name of Jesus. It is a title, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Messiah*.

³ Consider, for example, Matthew 3:3. Matthew quotes Isaiah 40:3 with a dramatic change.

Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:3
A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God .	A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him .

- Why should we see this as the turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus?
- What questions does this section of Matthew bring to mind?
- What is the most comforting verse you find in this passage?
- What verse is most troubling?

This section is a dialogue between Jesus and the disciples, with Peter as the chief representative of the Twelve. Write a point-by-point outline of this dialogue.

16:13-16 Peter's Confession:

The location of this conversation is identified with precision. The disciples are in Caesarea Philippi, a small town where the headwaters of the Jordan River come together. Caesarea Philippi is about 25 miles northeast of Capernaum, Jesus' headquarters during this part of his ministry. It is quite near the Old Testament city of Dan which was thought to be the northernmost boundary of Israel. As one commentator put it, Jesus has taken his disciples to the *boundary between Israel and the world*.

The town was so named to honor Tiberius Caesar. The name Philippi was added to distinguish it from Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast.¹

More important than its name and location were its religious practices. Jesus takes his disciples to a center of pagan worship. Caesarea Philippi had temples to Baal, Caesar and, most importantly, to Pan (the everything-god, or the all-

¹ The town was built by Herod Philip the tetrarch, the brother of Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist in Matthew 14.

god). Against this backdrop of pagan worship and devotion Jesus asks his leading question, *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*¹

The disciples respond,

John the Baptist (this was Herod's guess in Matthew 14:1-2).

Elijah (the Jews expected Elijah to precede Messiah; see Malachi 4:5 and Matthew 11:14).

Jeremiah (some Jews expected Jeremiah to arrive before Messiah).²

One of the prophets (some unknown resurrected prophet; see Luke 9:19)

What is noticeably missing from the list of answers the disciples give?

16:16 What two answers does Peter give Jesus?

16:17 Peter has come to see Jesus as he really is. What was it that produced this insight? Why is it that you are able to recognize this same truth? Compare the following:

- 1 Corinthians 2:14
- 1 Corinthians 12:3

16:17-20 On This Rock!

In light of the greatness of Peter's confession, and the shocking prediction Jesus makes about his own cross and the crosses each of his followers must bear, it is unfortunate that the interpretation of these verses has dominated the discussion of this passage of Scripture. Literally hundreds of books and articles have been

¹ The title Son of Man is Jesus' favorite self-description. It is used by Jesus or of Jesus over 80 times in the New Testament. Michael Green likes it because it is deliberately vague. On the one hand it can be a claim to deity, on the other it can be a formal way of saying "I." *The ambiguity of the title matched the ambiguity of the person of Jesus. That is why he liked it. It could mean nothing—or it could mean everything.* (Green, p. 178)

² See the apocryphal book 2 Maccabees 2:4-8.

written trying to make sense of Jesus' proclamation that he will build his church *on this rock*. Interpretations abound yet they fall into three broad categories.

1. Peter is the rock. The Roman Catholic Church has favored and fostered this interpretation claiming Peter was the first Pope and he established a succession which endures until our own time. Many Protestants share this view (Carson, Hendricksen, Morris and others) yet they point out that Jesus says nothing of *Peter's successors, infallibility, or excessive authority*. (Carson, p. 368)
2. Peter's confession of Christ is the rock. Tasker writes that because of Peter's confession, Jesus therefore pronounced him highly favored, addressed him directly as Peter, the man of rock, and made it clear that the faith that was expressed by him was the rock upon which He would build his Church. . . (Tasker, p. 158)
3. Christ himself is the rock.

What do you think Jesus meant when he addressed Peter? What is the rock?

The important part of Jesus' proclamation is that he will build his *church* on the rock (whatever that rock may be). In the four Gospels the word *church* (*ekklesia* in Greek) occurs only here and in Matthew 18:17. The word means, literally, *called out ones*. Jesus promises to build a community of his *called-out-ones*, his church.

Notice what Jesus didn't say. He did not say, *On this rock I will save individuals*, or, *On this rock I will build an organization*. He promised to build his *church*.

What should this teach us with regard to the place of the *church* in our Christian life?

How would you respond to someone who said, *I love Jesus but I don't have any time for the church*?

What difference has *the church* made in your Christian life? How have the members of SBCC impacted your discipleship? Be prepared to give a succinct answer to each question.

What is the promise in the second half of verse 18? What does this mean, practically, for the church throughout the ages of history?

16:19 is a promise to the church which Christ will build.¹ As Peter, the disciples and later the church take the gospel outward, the church will *bind* and *loose* the nations. Michael Green explains:

The power of *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, here entrusted to Peter. . . means that Peter, along with the other disciples, can make access to the kingdom of God available or unavailable through their witness and preaching. They can admit people into the kingdom or exclude them. . . If people respond to the conditions of the gospel, and repent and believe, then they can be confidently assured that God has indeed forgiven them. Jesus made that very plain. If they refuse those conditions, their sins are emphatically not forgiven by God. Jesus made that very plain too. And of course we find the apostles doing just that in Acts. They confidently announce divine pardon to all penitent believers on the day of Pentecost and thereafter. They clearly remind Simon Magus that he is still in the prison of sin and has not yet met the Liberator. His sins are not forgiven. (Green, pp. 180-181)

16:20 Why would Jesus give this warning? Consider the context.

16:21-28 Bearing Crosses

What a shock it must have been for the disciples to hear that Jesus was Jerusalem bound and cross bound. And how terrifying it must have been for them to hear that they, too, must take the way of the cross.

¹ As one might guess, there are many interpretations of this verse.

The Romans alone had the prerogative of crucifying those condemned to die. The punishment was designed for its cruelty. Insurrectionists were often subject to this punishment. Some estimate that upwards of 30,000 executions took place during the lifetime of Jesus.

When the disciples and the crowd heard Jesus speak of taking up the cross, there was nothing mystical to them about the idea. They immediately pictured a poor, condemned soul walking along the road carrying . . . the instrument of his execution on his own back. A man who took up his cross began his death march, carrying the very beam on which he would hang. (MacArthur, vol. 2, p. 49)

What does Peter's objection to Jesus' announcement tell us about Peter?

Why would Jesus respond so strongly to Peter's protest? See Matthew 4:1-10.

How can the American church, which is largely free of persecution, be a church that takes up its cross?

What do verses 24-27 mean to you personally?

Respond to the following quotation. What would cross-bearing look like in your life?

At a time when a substantial part of evangelicalism wants a domesticated Jesus who blesses, satisfies, prospers, fills, thrills, and strengthens His followers, we need to hear again of a Jesus—the real Jesus—who insists that His genuine followers die to self-interest, deny themselves, and follow their Master in the way of the cross.¹

¹ D. A. Carson, *God With Us*, 1995, p. 97.

Study Twenty-Six Glory! Matthew 17:1-13

Probably about thirty years had passed between the event described in Matthew 17:1-13 and the writing of 2 Peter. Nevertheless, three decades later, the Apostle Peter had not gotten over his glimpse of the glorified Christ.

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

2 Peter 1:16-18¹



Consider the chronology of events in this section of Matthew. Jesus has just announced to the disciples that he *must* go to Jerusalem and suffer the shame of the cross. *Six days later* the glory of Christ is revealed². It is important that the disciples, Peter, James, and John at least, have a view of Jesus' greatness, of his splendor, of his glory.

In one sense 17:1-13 explain a difficult verse we left out last week. How would you (or did you) interpret 16:28? It sounds as though Jesus is predicting what we call *the second coming* within the lifetime of some of his followers. But in this text we see at least a partial fulfillment of Jesus prediction. Within a week of 16:28 some of the disciples see the glorified Christ.

¹ John is probably testifying to the same event in John 1:14: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

² Telling us the specific time of this event is highly unusual in Matthew. By doing so Matthew is making a point. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53, alluded to in 16:21 and the glorious Messiah predicted by the prophets are one and the same. Michael Green points out the conversation the resurrected Jesus had with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:25-26). Green comments, *The transfiguration, coming as it does here after the bleak predictions of rejection, emphasizes the link between self-sacrifice and glorious vindication in the economy of the God who reigns and yet suffers.* (Green, p. 185)

Read Matthew 17:1-13. Compare Luke's version of the same event. What differences of detail do you find between the two. What initial questions arise when you read these verses?

Matthew 17:1-13

Luke 9:28-36

Before going on in this study have some fun with the following questions.

- Why do you think Jesus left nine disciples behind, taking only Peter, James and John?
- How do you think the other disciples felt missing out on this event?
- How long do you suppose the whole journey (up and down the mountain) lasted?
- Try to paint a mental picture of 17:2. What does the transfigured Jesus look like?

The reader is not told what mountain Jesus ascends.¹ We are only told that the event takes place *after six days*, and that the mountain is *high*, and that they are *by themselves*.

Jesus is then *transfigured* (NIV) or *changed from the inside out* (The Message). The Greek word will sound familiar. It is *metamorphoō* from which we get our word metamorphosis. Whatever he looked like, Jesus is completely transformed before the sleepy eyes of the disciples.

¹ Several candidates: Mount Tabor (1,900 ft.), Mount Miron (3,926 ft.) or the towering Mount Hermon (9,232 ft.).

Here is the greatest confirmation of His deity yet in the life of Jesus. Here, more than on any other occasion, Jesus revealed himself as He truly is, the Son of God. (MacArthur, vol. 2, p. 63)

17:2 Notice the description of this *transfiguration*. What might we learn about Jesus and about God the Father from this description? Compare the following verses with care. Read and discuss these together in your homegroup.

- Colossians 1:15
- Hebrews 1:3
- Revelation 1:13-16

Notice also how this event anticipates the second coming of Christ in Matthew's Gospel.

- 16:27
- 24:30
- 25:31

17:3 Why are Moses and Elijah present? Both are key figures in the Old Testament. Moses received (and gave) the law. Elijah strove to promote obedience to the law. It is probably best to see them as representatives of *the law and the prophets*.

What were Moses and Elijah talking about as the disciples woke up? See Luke 9:30-31. How does this help us understand the transfiguration? Compare John 12:27-28.

17:4 Peter, predictably, is the one who speaks. Notice how Matthew is the most gentle with Peter of the Gospel writers. Compare Luke 9:33 and Mark 9:5-6.

Poor Peter. He's had a week to recover from his verbal blunder in 16:22. Do you struggle with saying the wrong thing at the right time? How does this passage speak to you?

What do you think Peter is trying to do in his offer to build tabernacles for Jesus, Moses and Elijah? How might Peter's offer to build tabernacles parallel his rebuke of Jesus in 16:22?

17:5 What would *the cloud* bring to mind in a Jewish reader of Matthew? Compare the following verses:

- Exodus 13:21-22
- Exodus 14:19-20 (!)
- Exodus 40:34-35
- 1 Kings 8:10
- Acts 1:9 (?)

The transfiguration provided Peter, James and John with a deep, memorable experience of Christ. Describe for your group one of your more deeply felt experiences with Christ. What was its lasting effect on your life?

17:5b Notice the emphasis of the voice of the Father. *This is my Son. . . listen to him.*

First, examine the Old Testament background for the quotation:

- Psalm 2:7
- Isaiah 42:1

Notice the command *listen to him*. This comes from Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18. There God promises to send a prophet like Moses who will intercede for the people.¹

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

Deuteronomy 18:15

What do we learn from this word of instruction? It is instructive that at the moment of Christ's glorification the Father says, *Listen!*

When commenting on this verse Charles Spurgeon said, *It is better to hear the Son of God than to see saints or build tabernacles.*²

Spurgeon's point was that it is better to listen to the voice of God revealed in Scripture than to chase after intense religious experiences.

What are your habits of *listening* to Christ? What changes would you like to make in this area?

17:6 What does the posture of Peter, James and John tell us about the glory of Christ?

¹ See introduction, p. 1. In this Gospel which has drawn many parallel between Jesus and Moses, we see the Son of God radiating the glory of God in a greater, more direct manner than Moses (see Exodus 34:29-30).

² Cited in Boice, p. 323.

17:6 What happens when the disciples recover from their fear? What should we make of the absence of Moses and Elijah?

The seventeenth-century Puritan John Owen wrote one of the greatest books ever written on the glory of Christ. It was called, *Meditations on the Glory of Christ* (1684). Ponder and enjoy the following quotation. Let it take you into the presence of the glorified Christ.

The revelation of Christ deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations and our utmost diligence in them, . . . What better preparation can there be for [our future enjoyment of the glory of Christ] than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory in the revelation that is made in the Gospel?

John Owen

Study Twenty-Seven Mustard Seed Faith Matthew 17:14-27



The instruction from God on the mountain where Jesus was glorified was *listen. This is my Son. . . listen to him.* In the next section of Matthew the instruction could be reversed. *I am God. Talk to me!* The disciples, we will see, are crippled by a lack of faith, which turns out to be an absence of prayer in their lives. They have come to the point of thinking they can do the work of God without God, as if such work were a magic trick. Their attempted exorcism-trick doesn't work and the disciples want to know why.

Read Matthew 17:14-21. Compare the more detailed version of this same incident in Mark 9:14-29. Notice two details Matthew leaves out. The boy was the father's *only son* (Luke 9:38) and he has been afflicted with epilepsy *from childhood* (Mark 9:21).²

What details from these two accounts stand out? What questions do these two versions of the same story bring to your mind? Be prepared to read both lists to your group. What do you think the boy looked like in light of 17:15?

Matthew 17:14-21

Mark 9:14-29

¹ Note on the art: Jesus heals a demon possessed boy in the left panel. These arches are made of chains and shackles being broken. Between the panels is the Seed of Faith at the bottom and the tree of the kingdom in the middle spandrel. In the right panel Peter finds the 4 drachma coin to pay for his and Jesus' temple tax.

² The word is translated *lunacy* in the NASB, KJV, Phillips and the Jerusalem Bible. The Greek word is connected to the word for moon. Our word lunatic is connected to the word lunar. The boy is a *moonie*, or *moonstruck*. Translators opt for the word epileptic because in the first century epileptics were said to be *moonstruck*.

17:20 contains a play on ideas. The disciples *little faith* is to be replaced with *mustard seed faith*. Mustard seeds are tiny. What is Jesus saying?

In this section Jesus is showing his disciples the way of true faith. Jesus is looking not so much for *big* faith, but for *genuine* faith. As a matter of fact, it only takes a little bit of genuine faith to do great things. How little? Mustard seed little. The key word in this section, which is missed in translation, is *unable*¹.

- The disciples were *unable* to heal the boy (17:16)
- They ask why they were *unable* to do so (17:19)
- Jesus says that with faith nothing is *unable for you* (17:21)

One commentator defines the faith Jesus is looking for with the following. *Mustard seed faith is persistent faith. It continues to grow and become productive because it never gives up.* (MacArthur, vol. 2, p. 80)

Think of your own life of faith. Distinguish between times when you have had *little faith*, and *mustard seed* faith. Give an example or two of both.

What was the difference between the two? How can you pursue *mustard seed faith* in your future?

What can you learn about mustard seed faith from the following passages?

- Luke 11:5-8 (notice how this parable comes on the heels of the Lord's prayer).
- Luke 18:8

¹ The Greek words *ouk êdynêthêsan* and *ouden adynatêsei* are used. Each could be translated *not able*. See Brunner, vol. 2, p. 617.

17:17 Looked at from one perspective, this section is Jesus' condemnation of *prayerless* faith. Our Lord uses two words to describe a generation in which he is deeply disappointed.

- *Unbelieving*, literally is *apistos*. The Greek word for faith is *pistos*. This generation is a-faithful, without faith.
- *Perverse*, could be translated *twisted, crooked, distorted, deviant*.

The generation Jesus addressed was *perverse* because it was *faithless*. It was *faithless* because it was *prayerless*. This becomes clear when we allow Mark's version of the story to fill in for Matthew's brevity.

17:20 Notice the difference between Matthew and Mark in the way Jesus answers the question, *Why couldn't we drive it out?*

In Mark 9:29 Jesus attributes the disciple's failure to a lack of prayer.

. . . the two answers are complementary, each shedding light on the other. At a superficial level the disciples did have faith: they expected to be able to exorcise the demon. They had long been successful in this work, and now they are surprised by their failure. But their faith is poor and shoddy. They are treating the authority given them (10:1, 8) like a gift of magic, a bestowed power that works *ex opere operato*.¹ In Mark, Jesus tells them that this case requires prayer—not a form or an approved rite, but an entire life bathed in prayer and its concomitant faith. In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that what they need is not giant faith (tiny faith will do) but true faith—faith that, out of a deep, personal trust, expects God to work. (Carson, pp. 391-392)

Respond to the following quotations on prayer.

Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to the body. How a person can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a person can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too.

J. C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer*

¹The Latin phrase means, *from the work already done*.

Prayerlessness—not bringing need to the Lord himself—is a disloyalty, a treason against God. . . .The [small number] of prayer meetings among the people of God may be the single most deviant behavior in a perverse world.

Brunner, vol. 2, p. 618

Describe the priority you give to prayer (in groups and alone). Are you growing in this area of your Christian life? Explain. As you discuss this question in your homegroup take a note or two on what other people are saying with regard to their prayer lives. What would you like to borrow for yourself?

Compare 1 Samuel 12:23 (consider the context). Do you ever think that failing to pray is a sin?

Name a person whose faith you admire. What role does prayer play in this person's Christian life?

17:22-23 It is important for Matthew that his readers understand that the cross is not an *accident* of history. Jesus' passion (suffering) takes place according to the plan and providence of God. Notice how what is to come is subtly and then specifically revealed to the reader. Compare the following texts in Matthew.

- 9:15
- 10:38
- 12:40

In 16:21, as we have seen, Jesus becomes quite specific. Here in 17:22-23 Jesus is more specific still. Compare these last two predictions of Jesus' death. What is the emphasis of each. What detail of the passion do we learn here for the first time?

Matthew 16:21	Matthew 17:22-23
From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.	When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is <i>going</i> to be betrayed into the hands of men. They <i>will</i> kill him, and on the third day he <i>will</i> be raised to life."

Notice how Jesus' predictions become even more specific in latter chapters.

- 20:18-19
- 26:1-2
- 24-25

17:24-27 is unique to Matthew's Gospel. The Old Testament background for this story is the temple tax imposed on all Jews regardless of income or wealth (Exodus 30:11-16). By the time of Jesus the Romans allowed the Jews to tax each male two drachmas a year to pay for the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple in Jerusalem. Rabbis, however, were exempt from this tax.

With the above in mind read these verses again. How do you interpret Jesus' dialogue with Peter in 17:25-27? What analogy is Jesus making between *the kings of the earth* collecting taxes from their *own sons* or others?

Why would Matthew include this seemingly bizarre tale? Possibly to encourage Jewish believers to continue to pay their Temple tax even though they had come to know Jesus, the fulfillment of the Temple. After all, if the Lord himself paid this tax shouldn't Matthew's readers. As we noticed in the introduction, Matthew is more than likely writing to a persecuted Jewish church. By including this story he encourages compliance to both Jewish and Roman law and thus eliminates one possible flash point for hostility.

What is the lesson from this 17:24-27 for us? How would we apply this text in our twenty-first century lives?

Spend some time praying for one another's practice of the spiritual disciplines (prayer, solitude, worship, Bible study, fasting, etc.). Pray that the mustard seed of faith in one another's lives would grow.

Study Twenty-Eight Little Children and Lost Sheep Matthew 18:1-20

Frederick Dale Brunner calls Matthew 18—20 *The Little Sermon on the Mount*. He shows the parallels between Matthew 5—7, the Sermon on the Mount, and this section of the Gospel. Consider the similarities.¹

Mathew 5—7	Matthew 18—20
The Beatitudes of humility. 5:3-6	The call to be humble as a child 18:1-5
The call to sexual purity and marital fidelity. 5:27-32	Teaching on marriage and divorce. 19:1-12
Warnings against pseudo-discipleship. 7:13-27	Warnings against false pride and ambition. 20:1-16, 20-28

While the original sermon was, in a sense, for the world,² the *Little Sermon on the Mount* is for the church. By clumping these stories together Matthew is calling to church to live the ethics of the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus teaches on topics of great relevance to the church (the call to seek the wandering sheep, confrontation, church discipline, forgiveness, etc.).

Take a moment and, at least, look over chapters 18-20. If time allows, read them thoroughly. In either case, make note of the topics Matthew presents.



¹ See Brunner, vol. 2, p. 625. Another way to view chapter 18 is simply to see it as the 4th sermon in Matthew's Gospel (see the chart at the beginning of this study). Certainly there is a major turning point in the midst of these chapters. In 19:1 we find Jesus finally leaving Galilee and beginning his trek toward Jerusalem.

² It was delivered on the mountain and the *crowds* are amazed at his teaching when it is finished.

Carefully read Matthew 18:1-20. Keeping the following outline in mind, make a few notes of what stands out in these paragraphs.

1. The call to be like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (18:1-4)
2. The call to care for the children who have entered the kingdom of heaven (18:5-14)
3. The call to discipline the children who are in the fold of the kingdom of heaven (18:15-20)

What in these verses is confusing? What is your most and least favorite verse in this section. Why?

1. The call to be like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (18:1-4).

18:1 In light of the beatitudes which uphold the upside down virtues of humility, meekness, poverty of spirit, mourning, etc., the question of the disciples is quite surprising. They want to know who will be the greatest. What do you think Jesus thought about their question?

- Does Jesus answer the question directly?
- What did Jesus mean when he says, *be like a little child*? See verse 4.
- When you came to Christ, what did it take for you to become *like a little child*?

Should we construe Jesus' answer (18:2ff) to mean that we should never seek positions of leadership or authority? Consider Archbishop William Temple personal comment; *I have never sought and never refused a position of greater responsibility.*

2. The call to care for the children who have entered the kingdom of heaven (18:5-14).

What does Jesus mean in these verses? Green explains that Jesus probably has in mind both literal children, and people of little social or intellectual stature.

The church should be a place where both are honored. Children matter. They mattered to Jesus. They matter in any congregation. The services should be arranged with their needs in view. They need to be befriended, understood and taught. The way we behave to children is one of the indicators of the way we behave to Jesus. That is quite a thought!

It is the same with the apparently unimportant people: the visitors, the strangers, the poor, the elderly, the odd. Do we bother more about the rich and monied than about the poor and ignorant? (Green, p. 191)

Evaluate your own life with both the words of Jesus and the above quotation in mind. How do you honor *children* and the *apparently unimportant people*?

Evaluate SBCC in these areas. What are the *subtle* ways in which we might be *bothering about* the *rich and monied* to the neglect of the *poor, the elderly and the odd*? How and where can we grow as a church in these areas?

18:7-9 indicates that in a fallen world evil and temptations are inevitable. But there is great punishment in store for those who cause *little children* to fall.

Parents, apply these verses to your raising of children. What can you do (What are you doing?) to protect your children from temptation and sin? What is the *hand* or the *foot* you have cut off in your family life to protect your children?

18:10-14 is a parable. *A parable is a story drawn from real life that makes a single or at most a few spiritual points.* (Boice, vol. 2, p. 384)

Unpack this parable.

- To whom is it addressed? (see verse 10)
- What is the analogy to the *little ones* in verse 10?
- What does this parable teach us about God?
- What are the pastoral (shepherding) implications of this brief parable?

3. The call to discipline the children who are in the fold of the kingdom of heaven (18:15-20).

Being a part of the *church* (16:18; 18:17)¹ that Jesus died to establish was not intended to be a casual, unilateral arrangement. Jesus did not see the *church* as a *place* where people show up, sit for a while, sing, listen and then leave. *The church* in the New Testament was understood to be a community of people who had been transformed by Christ. Accordingly they shared an identity in Christ that fused them into a tightly-knit family of believers.

In the church we are called to look after one another. And, as this passage shows, we are called to discipline those who refuse to give up their sin.

Notice the *steps* of church discipline iterated in these verses. What are the steps Jesus outlines?

¹ These are the only two times any of the Gospel writers use the term *church*.

When we say the words *church discipline* they are usually said with a low voice and an heavy intonation: CHURCH DISCIPLINE! But look again at step one (18:15). Have you ever received a word of correction from another brother or sister in the church? If so, you have received (or given) church discipline. Share from your own life an example of giving or receiving of church discipline. How did it go? Was this painful, joyful or both?

Hudson Taylor, the famous nineteenth-century missionary to China had a high view of the value of discipline. Respond to his following statement. How does this statement encourage you to both give and receive the discipline Jesus speaks of in this passage?

A man can be spiritually consecrated and dedicated, and of little use to God because his life is not disciplined.

18:17 The final step of church discipline is to put the unrepentant sinner out of the assembly of believers. Biblically this has at least a three-fold purpose.

1. Church discipline is for the purity of the church. The community of believers is called to holiness and the inclusion of unrepentant people is a threat to the entire Body of Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 5:1-6
- 1 Peter 1:16

2. Church discipline serves to warn others.

- Acts 5:1-11 (especially verse 11)
- 1 Timothy 5:20

3. Church discipline is for the salvation of the unrepentant.

- 1 Corinthians 5:5

18:17 Jews hated *pagans* and *tax collectors*. The former worshiped false gods and the latter collected money for an illegitimate government. So the Jews had as little contact with these two groups as possible.

But how did Jesus treat the two groups? See 9:10-13; 21:31. How should this inform our understanding of the teaching of this passage?

With these sections of Scripture in mind, describe how you personally have both contributed to and benefited from being a part of a church community.

Spend a few moments in your homegroup praying for Santa Barbara Community Church in these areas. Pray that the discipline of the church would be both loving, protective and remedial.

Study Twenty-Nine How Many Times? Matthew 18:21-35



Nothing smells so sweet as the
dead body of your enemy.

King Louis XII of France

Perhaps the king was right. We
love to win and we hate to lose.
When violated we lash out. When
wronged we become angry.
Vengeance comes naturally to our
fallen nature. The French artist
Paul Gauguin was correct when he
said, *Life being what it is, one
dreams of revenge.*

Forgiveness is an aberration. It is
unnatural. So it was quite
understandable that Peter wanted

to know how many times he was required to forgive his *brother* when he sinned. The rabbis of Jesus day taught that one was required to forgive an offense three times². Peter's framing of the question is, therefore, generous. *How many times Lord? Seven times?*

Before reading on in this study and before reading the text from Matthew, take a few moments to think over your experience of forgiving others. Can you think of a person whom you had difficulty forgiving? What happened? Have you yet forgiven this person? If possible, share these stories with your group.

¹ Note on the art: Jesus teaches Peter about forgiveness and condemnation. Note the distant cross showing the great cost of our forgiveness, the broken chains, and a compassionate heart in open hands in the left side arch. Compare with the manacles and fists on the right. The cactus symbolizes bitterness that grows upon itself in a calloused heart.

² This rabbinic teaching probably came from Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6. There God is said to bring his wrath for three or four transgressions.

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

- Is anything in this section unclear?
- What is the most frightening verse in this passage?
- Why would Matthew place this story right after 18:15-20?

18:24 How much is 10,000 talents? More than we can imagine. A talent was a unit of weight equaling about 75 lbs. Here a man is in debt for 750,000 lbs. of gold!¹ The Old Testament temple was adorned with 8,000 talents of gold (1 Chronicles 29:4, 7) and the expenditure was seen to be extravagant. Rome collected from Galilee, Judea, Samaria and Idumea combined, 8,000 talents of gold in taxes on an annual basis. How much is this man in debt? Our word *zillions* would best describe his financial predicament.

That incalculable, unpayable debt represents the debt for sin that every man owes God. When the Holy Spirit convicts a person of his sin (John 16:8), that person is faced with the fact that the extent of his sin is beyond comprehension and humanly unpayable. Like Paul when he saw his sin in the clear light of God's law, every convicted sinner has a glimpse of the utter sinfulness of sin (Rom. 7:13). (MacArthur, p. 148)

Describe in your own words your awakening to the sinfulness of your own sin. When and how did you come to acknowledge your debt of 750,000 lbs. of gold? To help, consider the following verses.

- Ezra 9:5-7
- Job 42:4-6
- Psalm 51:4
- Isaiah 6:1-5

¹ Jesus does not specify that the talents were gold, but we can assume this to be the case because the parable is trying to show our hopeless condition before God.

18:28 One denarii was one day's wages for a common laborer. One hundred denarii, therefore, would have amounted to almost a third of a year's wages for a worker. This second debt is not a pittance, but neither is it millions and millions of dollars.

What is the point of the comparison between the two debts? What does this comparison teach us with regard to those we have a difficult time forgiving?

Why is forgiveness important in the church? Consider the following passages.

- Proverbs 19:11
- Matthew 6:12-15
- Ephesians 4:29—5:2
- Colossians 3:13-14
- Hebrews 12:15

18:35 is a strong verse. Does Jesus really mean that our unwillingness to forgive another will keep us out of heaven? James Boice lends insight when he writes,

What we need to recognize is that Jesus is not giving the whole of the gospel message in one story. What he says is true enough, that there is an unbreakable connection between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of other people. Such a word is intended to snap us out of our lethargy and confront us with the life-changing power of the gospel. But it does not mean we are saved by forgiving others or that salvation, once acquired, can be lost. Jesus is only saying that, whatever else is involved (and a great deal more *is* involved), forgiveness must be part of what it means to be a Christian. (Boice, vol. 2, pp. 396-397)

Notice the phrase at the end of this verse, *from your heart*. What does this mean to you? What would you say to someone who had been wronged and said, *I can forgive, but I can't forget*?

HOW MANY TIMES?

Be honest with yourself. How do you do in this area of the Christian life? Discuss as a group ways in which we can cultivate a forgiving spirit.

Sometimes severe events or circumstances cause forgiveness to be extremely difficult and seemingly impossible (abuse, fatal accidents, alcoholic family of origins, severe trauma inflicted on a person, etc.). What does forgiveness look like in these more severe situations?

How can we encourage a friend who is working through *forgiving* in such a situation?

In the end, this parable which answers Peter's question calls us to see forgiveness as an essential expression of what it means to be a Christian. Christians are people who forgive. They are not to nurse grudges, seek revenge or cultivate resentment. On the contrary, they are to have short memories, keep short accounts and let the past be the past. Reflect on the following quotation as a homegroup. Pray together that God would grant us as individuals and as a church the grace of forgiveness.

Forgiveness reflects the highest human virtue, because it so clearly reflects the character of God. A person who forgives is a person who emulates godly character. Nothing so much demonstrates God's love as His forgiveness. A person who does not forgive is therefore a person lacking in godly character and without Christlike love, no matter how orthodox his theology or how outwardly impeccable his morals appear to be. A Christian who will not relinquish a hateful, resentful attitude toward someone who has wronged him is a person who knows neither the true glory of his redeemed humanity nor the true glory of God's gracious divinity. An unforgiving Christian is a living contradiction of His new nature in Christ. It is central to the heart of God to forgive, and only the Christian who radiates forgiveness radiates true godliness. (MacArthur, vol. 2, p. 143)

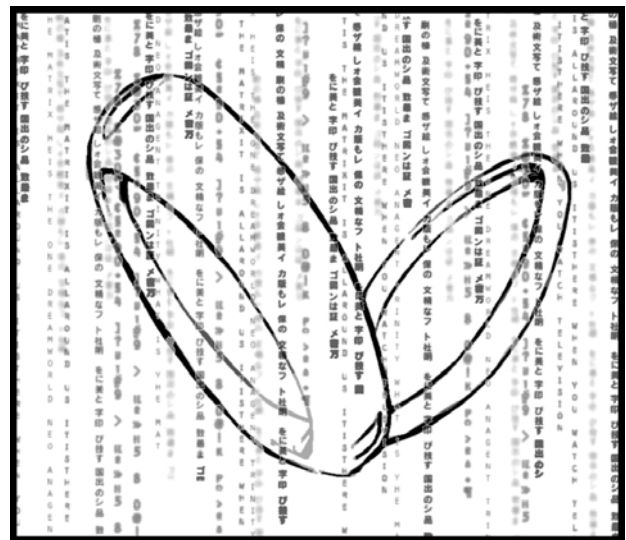
Study Thirty

The Matrix of Marriage

Matthew 19:1-12

Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has few pleasures.
 Samuel Johnson

To many, Johnson's words ring true. We can't live without marriage and we can't live within it. We yearn to be *coupled* with another human being. And when we get married some of us find the friction unbearable. Divorce has become the pandemic of family life in recent times. In American life we have had several years where there was one divorce registered for every two marriages. Such a statistic speaks of an alarming trend that testifies of the pain and failure of millions of people and of the bewilderment of many more millions of children. As one commentator put it, *We're living in a time when not getting a divorce is like not going to Europe.* The quip makes us laugh, but every one of us reading this study guide has been touched, and hurt, by divorce.



So, Jesus, what about divorce? When can a man divorce the woman he married? Such was the loaded question of the Pharisees.

When we look at all of Matthew 19 we find a portion of Jesus' teaching that penetrates two of the deeper areas of our lives. Jesus interacts with the Pharisees on marriage (with its related concerns) and money.

In verses 1-12 Matthew presents what we might call the matrix of marriage. Here we learn of Jesus' views on marriage, divorce, remarriage, singleness and children. All in a mere 12 verses! Would that it were so simple. These verses have prompted scores of debates, books and seminars through the centuries.

Before going on in this study, read Matthew 19:1-12 for yourself. Avoid the explanatory notes if you are reading from a study Bible. Simply read the text. Compare at least two translations. What are the key words in this passage? Make a list to share with your group? What questions of interpretation does your preliminary reading of this passage bring to mind?

Key Words

Preliminary Questions

19:1 *When Jesus had finished saying these things. . .* Note the chart at the beginning of this study. Matthew signaling a new section in his telling of the gospel.

Jesus finally concludes his ministry in Galilee and begins his final journey through Judea toward Jerusalem.

In each of the topics Jesus discusses with the Pharisees, with the rich man and with his disciples, he turns the dominant values of his day upside down.

19:3 The Pharisees come to *test* Jesus, or to *tempt* him. They ask him about the permissibility of divorce.

What was their motive? There were several schools of thought regarding divorce among the Jews of the first century.

- The Qumran sect in the desert forbade divorce altogether.
- Rabbi Shammai permitted divorce for what he called, but didn't specifically define, *gross indecency*.
- Rabbi Hillel offered a more liberal view that permitted divorce for a variety of reasons as trivial as burning dinner.
- Rabbi Akiba went so far as to say a man could divorce his wife if he found a more attractive prospect.

Perhaps the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to align himself with one of these schools of thought and thus lose the support of many of his listeners.

It is possible that the Pharisees were trying to set an altogether different kind of trap, hoping that Jesus would say something that would attract the attention of Herod. John the Baptist lost his head over comments regarding the ethics of divorce. Maybe Jesus would find himself in trouble too.¹

19:4 How does Jesus answer the Pharisee's first question? He doesn't! The Pharisees ask about the permissibility of divorce and Jesus extols the virtues of marriage. Compare the following. What is God's view of marriage?

- Malachi 2:13-16
- Ephesians 5:25-33

19:4-6 Read Jesus' answer carefully. Outline his answer. Consider the Old Testament passages Jesus cites.

- Genesis 1:27
- Genesis 2:18, 21-24

19:7 It would seem the *test* comes here. The Pharisees' are ready for Jesus' reply and have a second question. They pit Moses against Moses. Moses wrote the book of Genesis, why then did he *command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce*. . .

The Pharisees are referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Read these verses in whatever translation you have available. What is the one command in these verses?

Compare these verses with the Pharisees interpretation of this passage. Did Moses *command* divorce? Far from it. Deuteronomy 24 is a passage that prohibits a woman from remarrying her first husband after an interim marriage to another man.²

¹ See Matthew 14:1ff.

² Why would Moses give such a command? We can't be sure, but it seems he is trying to prevent a legal form of committing adultery. Peter Craigie points out that the Deuteronomy passage only has one command. It comes in verse 4, *then her first husband, who divorced her*,

Notice in the Deuteronomy passage the reason given for the first divorce.

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her. . .

Deuteronomy 24:1

What is the *indecent* Moses has in mind? The text itself doesn't say and the word translated *indecent* is only found in one other place in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 23:14).

Boice says the word *was associated with being unclothed for the purpose of sexual relations and thus was often associated with sexual sin or impurity. . .* (Boice, vol. 2, p. 403) But the word can't mean *adultery* (extra-marital sex for a married person) because the Old Testament law stipulates the death penalty for violating the seventh commandment (Leviticus 20:10). Adulterers wouldn't have been around long enough to get a divorce.

If the word does not refer to adultery, which is sexual sin after marriage, the only thing it can refer to is sexual sin before marriage. . . (Boice, vol. 2, p. 403)

If this is the case, the Deuteronomy passage speaks of the permission given to a man to divorce his wife when he discovers, presumably on his wedding night, that his wife is not a virgin.

The Pharisees jumped from Moses' concession, due to the hardness of the heart, to a rather casual view of divorce and remarriage.

19:9 is an exceptionally controversial text. What does Jesus mean? Let us unpack Jesus' answer to the second question the Pharisees ask.

*is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. Craigie writes, under all these circumstances, the first man may not remarry his former wife. After she has been defiled—the language (defiled) suggests adultery (see Lev. 18:20). The sense is that the woman's remarriage after the first divorce is similar to adultery in that the woman cohabits with another man. However, if the woman were then to remarry her first husband, after divorcing the second, the analogy with adultery would become even more complete; the woman lives first with one man, then another, and finally returns to the first. Thus the intent of the legislation seems to be to apply certain restrictions on the already existing practice of divorce. If divorce became too easy, then it could be abused and it would become a "legal" form of committing adultery. The legislation thus restricts what may have been a loophole in the older custom. The purpose of the restriction is to keep free from sin the land which God would soon be giving to his people as an inheritance. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 1976, pp. 305-306.*

Notice the parallel between Jesus' teaching and Moses' teaching.

Deuteronomy 24:1	Matthew 19: 9
If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her , and he writes her a certificate of divorce . . .	I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness , and marries another woman commits adultery."

There appears to be a parallel between *indecent* and *marital unfaithfulness*. In both passages these words refer to a legitimate cause for divorce. In Matthew *marital unfaithfulness* refers to the only legitimate cause for divorce.

The key question then becomes, what does Jesus have in mind? What is the *unfaithfulness* to which he refers?

Marital unfaithfulness translates the Greek word *porneia*. This is not the Greek word for adultery (*moicheia*). *Porneia* is a far broader in its scope. It refers to a variety of sexual sins. Accordingly it is translated *immorality* (NASB) and *fornication* (KJV).

If there is a parallel between Deuteronomy 24 and Matthew 19 as there seems to be, Jesus is permitting divorce for grooms who discover their brides to be non-virgins.

Jesus would then be saying (in full accord with the accepted views of the day) that although a man may divorce a woman immediately after marriage if he finds her not to be a virgin (in which case he was allowed by the law to remarry and was not to be called an adulterer), he is not permitted to divorce her for any other reason. If he does, he places her into a position in which she may be forced to remarry, thereby becoming an adulteress, and he would become an adulterer if he remarried. (Boice, vol. 2, pp. 402-403)

Jesus, therefore, is taking an exceedingly strong stand against divorce. He is anything but accommodating to those who would break their marriage vows.

How do we apply the strong teaching of Jesus in our own lives, in our own time and in our own church? Consider the following summary statements on divorce and remarriage. Discuss these as a homegroup.

1. The Bible affirms the permanence of marriage (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-6; Mark 10:2-9; I Corinthians 7:10-11)

2. The Bible consistently speaks against divorce; *What God has joined together let man not separate* (Mt. 19:6); *"I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel* (Malachi 2:16)

3. The Lordship of Christ over every area of our lives will be an encouragement to his followers to seek the restoration of a difficult marriage. The fact that God is pleased by faithfulness to our mates should encourage perseverance in a challenging marriage.

4. Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of the Israelites hearts. Our hearts are still hard. Because of our sin and the sinfulness of our spouse, sometimes divorce is the lesser of two evils (marriage to an abusive husband, a promiscuous wife, a drug-addicted criminal). Therefore, in some instances, marriages are breakable and remarriage is, in some instances, permissible. (Matthew 19:8-9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

5. The grace of God, as proclaimed in the Bible, assures us that divorce, even for the wrong reason, is not unforgivable. The church calls for repentance and reconciliation from those in a hostile marriage while extending the forgiveness and grace of God to those who have experienced past failure (Ephesians 4:32).

Spend some time praying for the marriages in your homegroup and for the marriages in Santa Barbara Community Church. Pray that God will protect and preserve these unions.

Study Thirty-One

The Eye of the Needle

Matthew 19:13-30

The second half of Matthew 19 presents a startling contrast between Jesus' reaction to the very young and the not-so-young. We find a contrast between the children who are brought to Jesus for a blessing and the rich young ruler who



comes to receive a blessing. The disciples shun the parents who bring their children but Jesus lays his hands on their children's heads. This same Jesus allows the wealthy *seeker* to walk away empty handed after a dialogue about entering the kingdom of heaven.

Read Matthew 19:13-30. Recall the geography of this section of Matthew. Jesus is *in Judea on the other side of the Jordan* (19:1). He is on his way to Jerusalem.

- What impressions do you glean about Jesus from your initial reading?
- If this were the only passage of the Gospels you had, how would you describe Jesus?
- What emotions do you think are represented in these two stories?

¹ Note on the art: Jesus blesses a small child on the left. His kingdom is not about rank, it welcomes the littlest children and the weak. Note the compassionate heart and crown. The right panel tells about the rich young man. His mansion and wealth separate him from the cross. Also note the Ten Commandments, and the camel.

19:13-15 Jesus and the Children

The Greek word used for children (*paidia*) refers to very young children, toddlers to infants. Luke says, in a parallel passage, that people were *bringing babies to Jesus* (Luke 18:15).

Both Mark and Luke, when telling this story use what is called the imperfect tense. *People were continually bringing* their young children to Jesus. The people were doing what Jewish parents did. They were bringing their children to an increasingly prominent rabbi for blessing.

19:13b *The disciples rebuked those who brought their children. . .* Evidently the disciples thought Jesus too busy, or children too unimportant, for the rabbi to send valuable ministry time on young children. We often limit the ministry of Jesus (compare 14:15; 15:23, 33; 16:22).

Think about your own *limiting* of the sphere of Jesus' ministry. What people or areas of ministry do you think are too small (or too tough) for Jesus to care about?

19:14 What does Jesus mean when he says *the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these*? Are young children saved by virtue of being children? Compare 18:1-4.

What lessons should parents learn from this passage? What lessons should our church learn from these verses?

19:16-24 Jesus and the Rich Young Man

Matthew, Mark and Luke include Jesus’ interaction with the rich man. Matthew tells us the man was *young* (19:20), and Luke informs us that he was a *ruler* (Luke 18:18).¹ The story is unique in that the man is not transformed by his encounter with Jesus. He is neither healed nor saved by Jesus.

Read this dialogue once again. How does Jesus’ approach to the young man differ from what most evangelical Christians would say in a similar situation?

19:16 How does the man’s question show that he is not like the children Jesus welcomed in verses 14-15?

Notice how this question appears in Mark’s Gospel compared to Matthew’s Gospel.²

Matthew 19:16-17	Mark 10:17-18
<p>Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”</p> <p>“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”</p>	<p>As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”</p> <p>“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good —except God alone.”</p>

What is the different emphasis the way the two Gospel writers record this conversation? Notice how, in the end, Jesus makes the same point in both accounts. What is that point?

¹ He was probably a leader in a local synagogue.

² The difference in wording in Matthew on the one hand and Mark and Luke on the other is a problem for biblical interpreters. Did Matthew editorialize the conversation as recorded by the other two Gospel writers? But Matthew was the only eyewitness of the three. Neither Luke nor Mark was there.

19:17 . . . *obey the commandments*. . . Upon hearing this what might the Jewish man who was rich have thought?

- Leviticus 18:5
- Ezekiel 20:11

Jesus then cites the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and fifth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and concludes with the call to love ones neighbor in Leviticus 19:18.

Then Jesus paraphrases the tenth commandment, the law of coveting.

Because the man was addicted to his wealth he *went away sad*.

How is it with you and your wealth? Could you let it go? What can you do to achieve freedom from your wealth?

New Testament scholar John Broadus sees a broad application of this interchange between Jesus and the rich man. Respond to the following quotation.

The test of this is different for different people. Some find it harder to renounce hopes of worldly honor and fame for Christ's sake, than to renounce wealth; and for others the hard trial is to abandon certain gratifications of the various appetites or of taste. Abraham left his native country at God's command, but became rich and famous. Moses gave up the distinction and refined pleasures of court life, and tried patiently to rule a debased and intractable people. Elisha left his property at the call of God through Elijah. Paul abandoned his ambitious hope of being a great rabbi. All should be willing to die for Christ (16:24ff.), though not many are actually required to do so¹.

Fill in verse 21 as if Jesus were speaking to you.

If you want to be perfect, go. . .

¹ John Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew*, 1990, p. 407, cited in Boice, vol. 2, pp. 409-410.

19:23-30 Jesus and the Disciples

What do you think Jesus' emotions were as the man walked away?

19:24 Many commentators try to wiggle out of this verse by claiming that Jesus has in mind a narrow gate in the wall of Jerusalem that a camel might possibly fit through. But the opposite is the case. Jesus is making a shocking statement to the disciples (see 19:25). Jews expected the rich to get into the kingdom of God because riches were a sign of God's blessings. Jesus reverses this!

Respond to the commentary by Michael Green on this verse.

And it is *impossible* (26) for a rich man to enter heaven. It can't be done. And why not? Because money tends to make us selfish, materialistic, independent of God and of our fellows, and distracted with methods of retaining our wealth. Wealth leads to an overconfidence which is the very antithesis of the childlike spirit of trusting dependence on the goodness and mercy of God. It is perfectly evident. It had just happened in front of their eyes, in the person of the rich young man. Wealth was something Jesus set his own face against. Christians who have great possessions are in great peril. (Green, p. 209)

19:25-26 Explain these verses in light of the Michael Green quotation above. What is Jesus saying in verse 26?

19:28-30 are very difficult verses. There are several occasions where we learn that the Apostles and believers will have a role in judging and governing the world to come.

- Luke 22:30
- 1 Corinthians 6:2

But what does Jesus have in mind here? Jesus seems to be speaking of the messianic age prophesied by Isaiah and the other prophets. When all things are

renewed (literally, *rebirthed*) then *you who have followed me* will judge *the twelve tribes of Israel*.

At the consummation the Twelve will judge the nation of Israel, presumably for its general rejection of Jesus Messiah. (Carson, p. 426)

19:29 What are we to make of this? Do those who make great sacrifices for the kingdom of God receive a hundred-fold return for their sacrifice? Again, Carson is helpful when he writes,

[We should] take the proverb as a way of setting forth God's grace over against *all* notions that the rich, powerful, great and prominent will continue so in the kingdom. Those who approach God in childlike trust (vv. 13-15) will be received and advanced in the kingdom beyond those who, from the world's perspective, enjoy prominence now. (Carson, p. 426)

Study Thirty-Two

Grace and Greatness

Matthew 20:1-34



What happens inside you when you hear the word *grace*? Does your heart beat a bit faster? Do your eyes well up with tears? Or has the word *grace* become a bit boring over the years. Has *grace* become sterile concept rather than a gut-wrenching reality?

The New Testament writers were overwhelmed with the word. Paul, for example, saw God's *grace* as the fundamental principle of all that he was as a man (1 Corinthians 15:10). It was *grace* that brought Paul salvation (Ephesians 2:5) and it was *grace* by which Paul lived (Galatians

2:21). But we have spoken the word so many times and sung the word in so many songs that, perhaps, *grace* has lost its sizzle. J. I. Packer mourns the state of many in the church when it comes to their relation to grace.

They may pay lip-service to the idea of grace, but there they stop. Their conception of grace is not so much debased as non-existent. The thought means nothing to them; it does not touch their experience at all. Talk to them about the church's heating, or last year's accounts, and they are with you at once; but speak to them about the realities to which the word 'grace' points, and their attitude is one of deferential blankness. They do not accuse you of talking nonsense; they do not doubt that your words have meaning; but they feel that, whatever it is that you are talking about, it is beyond them and the longer they have lived without it the surer they are that at their stage of life they do not really need it¹.

Matthew 20 is a chapter of surprises. At the beginning of chapter 19 Jesus concluded his long Galilean ministry and headed for Jerusalem. By the end of chapter 20 he is leaving Jericho, making his final push to the City of David. The end is near. But before we get to Jerusalem, Matthew wants the reader to, once again, comprehend the sheer gracious nature of Jesus. At the heart of the chapter (20:17-19) Jesus gives his third prediction of the cross. Surrounding this prediction are stories, positive and negative, testifying to the grace of God.

Before going on in this study, read Matthew chapter 20. Pretend that you are not at all familiar with this chapter. As you read, make a list of the surprises you find

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 1973, p. 143.

in this chapter. What questions does your reading of this chapter bring to your mind?

Consider the following outline of this chapter.

- The grace of the Landowner (20:1-16)
- The grace of the cross (20:17-19)
- The blind disciples (20:20-28)
- The seeing blind (20:29-34)

The grace of the Landowner (20:1-16)

At the outset, notice how this parable is offset by 19:30 and 20:16. The first will be last, and the last first. Why does this phrase come up before and after this parable? How does this parable fit with what has come before in Matthew 19?

This parable of the landowner and his vineyard is very *Old Testament*, very Jewish. Frequently Israel is compared to a vineyard. Grapes and wine are familiar metaphors for the people of God and for God's blessing.¹ In this story it is harvest time. The vintner needs workers, and he is willing to pay a generous salary for a day's labor. And he keeps hiring workers throughout the day.

What happens at the end of the day? Every worker gets the same pay!

¹ See, for example, Isaiah 5; 25:6; 62:8; Jeremiah 31:12.

What is the parable teaching? We must be careful not to press too much juice out of a single grape. If we push the details of this story too far we can end up with an idea that is not biblical.

Some have taken this parable to deny the biblical doctrine of rewards. Just as everyone will get the same pay at the end of the day in the parable, these interpreters claim, everyone will get the same blessing in heaven. But Jesus and the writers of the New Testament clearly teach that we will be rewarded for how we have served God.¹

This parable is teaching God's grace.

Lasts become firsts in this story not because they have done enough good works but because they have a good Lord—a Lord who invites them into his field at all, even at the latest possible hour, and who then rewards them as though they had done a full days work. (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 723)

Peter has just pointed out his and the disciples' great sacrifice for the kingdom of heaven.

We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?
(19:27)

Jesus has, essentially, two responses to Peter's question.

First Jesus promises that the disciples' sacrifice will be rewarded a hundred times over (19:29). Second, Jesus says through this parable, *Be careful to understand anything and everything you have before God as something that has come from the grace of God! There is no room for spiritual pride of accomplishment in the kingdom of God.* As the Heidelberg Catechism has it in question 60,

Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. . . . God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. He grants these to me as if I had never had nor

¹ The Puritan John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* said, *Whatever good thing you do for Him, if done according to the Word, is laid up for you as treasure in chests and coffers, to be brought out to be rewarded before both men and angels, to your eternal comfort.* Consider Jesus' explicit promise of rewards in Matthew's Gospel: 5:12, 46; 6:2, 5, 6, 16, 18; 10:42, 16:27. James speaks of *the crown of life* for the one who perseveres.

committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me, if only I accept this gift with a believing heart. (Emphasis added.)

How should this parable be a warning to those who have a *boring testimony* (that is, a testimony without a whole lot of pre-Christian battle wounds)?

Explain how this parable challenges your spiritual pride.

As a group, interact with and respond to the following quotation. How can those who *work hard* for the King and those who are growing in Christian purity continue to be awestruck by grace?

Many Christians who have worked hard for God over a long period will have a lowly place in the kingdom because their motives were not purged by the ideas of merits and reward. Many poor Christians who came to faith only at the end of their life will be high in the kingdom because they knew they had done nothing to boast of, and never gave rewards a thought. They just responded to the unexpected love that sought them and accepted them. That is the attitude that brings joy to the heart of God, the great lover. (Green, p. 213)

How has this parable affected your view of grace?

The grace of the cross (20:17-19)

The irony of Matthew's placement of these verses should not be missed. Peter has just said, *We've left everything to follow you*. The eternal Son of God left the fellowship of the Trinity, became a man, and now he makes his way to the cross (see Philippians 2:5-11). This is the first mention of how Jesus will die. The

Romans reserved the use of the cross for executions to themselves, therefore we learn of *the Gentiles* role in the coming passion of Jesus.

Why do you think Jesus had to repeat his predictions of his coming death¹?

What might the disciples have been thinking as Jesus uttered these words? See John 11:16.

The blind disciples (20:20-28)

The disciples don't seem to understand the parable of the landowner. James and John come (with their mother!²) to secure positions of prominence in the coming kingdom of heaven.

Read these verses again and look for the following:

- Jesus' prediction of his own destiny
- The destiny of James and John
- The reaction of the other disciples
- The path to greatness for true disciples

20:28 James Boice calls this verse *one of the most remarkable verses in Matthew, perhaps even in the entire Word of God.* (Boice, vol. 2, p. 426)

The word means *to redeem, to buy back*. A *ransom* payment was paid to purchase the freedom of someone in captivity.

Consider the following verses.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you

¹ See also 16:21 and 17:22-23. Notice how each of these predictions becomes more specific and detailed.

² There is a possibility (probability?) that *the mother of Zebedee's sons*, Salome (Mark 15:40) is Jesus' aunt on his mother's side.

from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Peter 1:18-19

. . . Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:13b-14

In what ways does your life (actions, activities, thoughts, expenditures, etc.) reflect your *redemption*? What spiritual or behavioral disciplines can you practice to remember Jesus' ransom payment?

Worship the Christ who gave his life as a *ransom* for your sins.

The seeing blind (20:29-34)

The upside-down values of the kingdom and the King are given one more notice as this chapter concludes.

The disciples are blind to the priorities of the kingdom. They want to know what they will get for their service. *Can we have a good seat as you rule in the coming kingdom?* The blind, however, see. They cry, *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!*¹

Describe how your life priorities do or do not reflect the priorities of the kingdom of heaven.

The chapter concludes with the healing of two blind men who see Jesus for who he really is, the *Son of David*.

If we see Jesus to be our Messiah, the Son of David, it is only because he has opened our eyes too. Yes!

¹ Ironically, the Messianic title *Son of David* first occurs in 9:27 on the lips of two blind men.

Study Thirty-Three The Final Week Begins Matthew 21:1-27

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Matthew 21 records the beginning of the most important week in history. When all is said and done, the life and ministry of Jesus only have significance because of what happened during this week. Without what we call *Holy Week* Jesus would have been a long-forgotten figure in ancient history.

In the final eight days of Jesus' life he will be lauded by the crowds, he will *cleanse* the temple, teach both Jews and Greeks, institute the *Lord's Supper*, he will be betrayed by Judas, abandoned by his disciples, be tried under both the Jews and the Romans, he will be condemned, scourged, crucified, he will die and be raised from the dead!



Accordingly, the Gospel writers devote a disproportionate amount of space to this, the most important of all weeks.

- **Matthew** reserves about one-fourth of his writing for this week (chapters 21-28).
- **Mark** devotes a third of his short gospel to this week (chapters 11-16).
- **Luke** is the most economical in his presentation of *holy week*, but, nevertheless, commits one fifth of his material to the final 8 days of Jesus' life (chapters 19:28-24).
- **John**, astonishingly, devotes fully half of his Gospel to Holy Week (chapters 12-21).

¹Note on the art: Jesus' triumphant entry atop a colt, revealing the gentle Messiah on the left. Compare this with Jesus' anger at the moneychangers on the right. His compassion is expressed by gentleness and righteous anger. Temple taxes, sacrifice sellers, and many other stringent restrictions kept the needy outside of God's temple. Following this, Jesus does many healings inside the temple.

Read Matthew 21 with the following outline in mind.¹

1. The Servant-Messiah enters Jerusalem (21:1-11).
2. Jesus purifies a corrupt temple (21:12-17)
3. An acted parable of judgment on fruitless Israel (21:18-22)
4. Jesus teaches in the temple courts (21:23-46)
 - a. Jesus' authority questioned (21:23-27)
 - b. Two parables of judgment (21:28-46)

As you read, make note of anything which is confusing. Make note of those questions which come to mind as you read. What verse in this chapter would Matthew call *the most important*?

1. The Servant-Messiah enters Jerusalem (21:1-11)

Matthew 21 is a judgment passage. Jesus enters Jerusalem as the Servant-King. The crowds express their adulation. By the end of the chapter, Jesus will make his final break with the Jews (vs. 46).

We have to supply many of the details of Jesus' triumphal entry. He has made the 17-mile walk from Jericho to Jerusalem, ascending 3,000 feet in the process. Bethpage, which means, *house of figs*, is on the outskirts of the city. This is Passover week, one of the three annual pilgrimage feasts in Jerusalem.²

Evidently the excitement over Jesus' miracles and teaching had reached its zenith. The crowd loves Jesus, at least on what we call *Palm Sunday*. The Pharisees and the priests are deeply jealous.³

¹ We will examine the final section of chapter 21 in our next lesson.

² The other two were the *Feast of Weeks*, or *Pentecost* and the *Feast of Tabernacles*.

³ 21:4-5 is not found in either Mark or Luke. Matthew is the *Jewish Gospel* (see introduction). The King has entered the City of David!

Jerusalem is packed with pilgrims. Josephus estimates that during the Feast, the population of Jerusalem swelled to about two and a half million people. Approximately 250,000 lambs will be sacrificed at Passover.¹

The action of the crowd looks back to the Maccabean revolution in 164 BC. During that era of Jewish history the Greeks, under Antiochus Epiphanes, occupied Jerusalem. Antiochus sullied the temple by offering pigs to Zeus on the altar and bringing prostitutes into the temple courts. Judas Maccabaeus liberated Jerusalem from such sacrilegious abomination. When he rode into the city as a conqueror, palm branches were waved by the people and spread on the road. The branches were symbols of the Jewish state and were used to welcome a king.

Jesus is, to some extent, reenacting this event. He has come to cleanse the temple, much as Judas had done a century and a half earlier.

Judas Maccabaeus rode into Jerusalem on a horse, the symbol of war and, in his case, proud victory. Why would Jesus ride on a donkey? Consider the following to help you answer.

- Notice the Old Testament quotation that follows (21:5-6). What word in this quotation gives a clue to Jesus' mission in Jerusalem?
- Zechariah 9:9-10
- Revelation 19:11-15 Notice, here we have a forward look at Jesus' second coming. This time on a horse. How does Matthew 21:1-11 look forward to Revelation 19:11-15?

2. Jesus purifies a corrupt temple (21:12-17)

3. An acted parable of judgment on fruitless Israel (21:18-22)

The theme of judgment ties these two stories together. Jesus purifies a corrupt temple which has been compromised by commercialism. Boice explains.

The money changers charged 6 percent for changing money, and if the coin was of greater value than the required half shekel, they charged an additional 6 percent for giving change. The total charge was about half a day's wage for a laboring man. Abuses associated with the sale of the sacrificial animals were worse. A person could bring his own sacrifice, but almost certainly the inspectors would reject any animals not purchased from their concessions, and they were not cheap. For example, a pair of

¹ Passover celebrated the deliverance of Israel from the angel of the Lord shortly before the Jews were delivered from Egypt (see Exodus 12).

doves could cost fifty times more inside the temple area than outside.
(Boice, vol. 2, p. 443)

When Jesus *cleansed* the temple, the people must have been elated. Jesus was acting as Messiah!

- Malachi 3:1-4

21:12-17 Look at this section as a whole. What is the primary difference between the response of the *chief priests and the teachers of the law*, and the response of the *children*?

What does this passage teach us about worship? How would Jesus react to the *business* of church life today?

What has been helpful to you to maintain a child-like response to the work of Jesus?

Notice how the cleansing of the temple fulfills Jesus' words in 12:6. The temple is, after almost 1000 years, out of date. The one to whom the temple pointed stands in its courts.

The obsolete temple in Jerusalem was replaced by the temple of Christ dwelling within believers (individually and corporately). Read the following verses.

- 1 Corinthians 3:16
- 1 Corinthians 6:19

What does Jesus intend to cleanse from our lives and our church?

21:18-22 Figs and fig trees were symbols of Israel's faithfulness to God¹. In these verses we have an acted parable. Explain how this parable is parallel to and explains the cleansing of the temple in verses 12-16.

In its immediate context Jesus is prophesying the judgment of God on Israel. Seven centuries before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Ezekiel did the same thing when he pointed out the fruitless way in which the Jews were living. Notice what the Lord said to Ezekiel,

. . . your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.
Ezekiel 33:30-32

The next day Ezekiel learned from God that Jerusalem would fall to the Babylonians.

Jesus' parable of the fig tree is a similar prophecy of doom on the temple, on Jerusalem and on Israel. And God's judgment came in 70 AD when the Romans sacked and utterly destroyed Jerusalem.

What is the lesson or warning for us in this parable? What can our church learn from this judgment parable? What is the lesson for our lives as individuals?

¹See Jeremiah 8:13; 24:1-8; Micah 7:1.

4. Jesus teaches in the temple courts (21:23-46)

21:23-27 Jesus' *authority* is a crucial issue in Matthew's Gospel. Notice the use of this word in the following passages. What authority does Jesus have? Where did he get his authority?

- 7:28-29
- 8:8-9
- 9:6-8
- *Authority* occurs four times in 21:23-27
- 28:18-20

What does this emphasis on Jesus' authority say to us in our time and place and culture? Respond to the following quotation.

The average person today is about as naive as was the average person in the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages people believed in the authority of their religion, no matter what. Today, we believe in the authority of our science, no matter what.

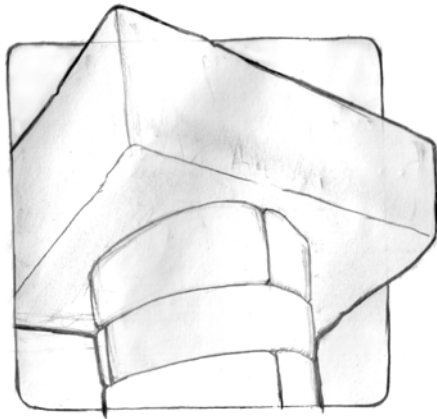
George Orwell

How do you wrestle with Jesus' authority over your life? With whom or with what does Jesus compete for ultimate authority?

Study Thirty-Four

Three Parables of Judgment

Matthew 21:28—22:14



As the final week of Jesus' life and ministry begins, the tension in Matthew's Gospel mounts. The hostility Jesus experienced from the Jews in Galilee intensifies as Jesus comes face-to-face with hostile Pharisees and Sadducees in the temple courts. Matthew 21:28—22:46 records a series of confrontations and parables that chronicle the coming storm of Holy Week. We might outline this section as follows:

3 Parables of Judgment (21:28—22:14)

The Two Sons (21:28-32)

The Tenants (21:33-44)

The Wedding Banquet (22:1-14)

3 Stories of Controversy (22:15-46)

God or Caesar? (22:15-22)

Marriage in heaven? (22:23-33)

The Greatest Commandment? (22:34-40)

Jesus Turns the Tables (22:41-46)

Read the three parables of judgment (21:28—22:14). Before going on in this study, answer the following questions.

- How are the three parables similar? What are the common themes in these parables?
- What is the difference in the points they make?
- Which parable would have been the most difficult to hear for the listeners?
- What do you think is the *most shocking* verse in this section?

The Two Sons

The Tenants

The Wedding Banquet

21:28-32 The Parable of the Two Sons

Re-read this brief parable considering the following questions:

- In the Jewish mind *tax collectors and prostitutes* were the political and moral scum of the earth. In our day and age, what would the equivalent to *tax collectors and prostitutes*? How does this affect the way in which you understand these verses?
- Obviously the point of this parable is that obedience is more important than lip service. How would you harmonize this passage with Romans 10:9-10? What is relation between *creed* (what one says he believes) and *deed* (the practice of ones life)?
- Share with your homegroup an example of a time when you said to God, *I will not*, but then changed your mind and obeyed the Lord's will.

21:33-46 The Parable of the Tenants

The Old Testament backdrop of this parable is loaded with significance. Israel was often understood by the prophets and poets of the Old Testament as *God's vineyard*. But the imagery was frequently less than favorable. Consider the following passages. Notice how God is the vintner, and Israel is the vineyard.

- Psalm 80:8-13
- Jeremiah 2:21
- Isaiah 5:1-7ff.

The very mention of a vineyard would bring such passages to the minds of Jesus' listeners. Notice, then, how this rather shocking parable builds to a very unlikely climax in verses 42-44. The response of the chief priests, and Pharisees in verse 45 should come as no surprise.

While it is dangerous (and easy) to over-interpret a parable and make it say more than Jesus intended, the various details in this parable seem quite obvious. The parable of the tenants tells the story of Israel. Identify each of the biblical equivalents of the following details of the story.

Parable of Tenants

Meaning

The Landowner

The Vineyard

The Tenants

The Servants

The Son

21:42 Jesus says, *Have you never read in the Scriptures. . . ?* Commentators point out that Jesus is the only one in the New Testament who asks this question.¹ He is pointing out that the Old Testament is a book that looked forward to himself (see Luke 24:27).

21:42 quotes Psalm 118:22-23. The verse is also quoted by Mark and Luke, along with Peter before the high priests of the temple (Acts 4:11), and again in his first letter (1 Peter 2:7). Paul alludes to this verse in Ephesians 2:20-21.

What is the *capstone* to which the Psalm refers? Leon Morris offers the following.

We do not have enough knowledge of the way people built in that day to be quite sure which stone it was. It may have been a large stone laid in the foundation at the corner of two walls. In such a place it provided a foundation that could be built on and it also set the position for two walls and therefore for the whole building. The other suggestion is that it was at the top of the walls, binding two walls together and thus marking the consummation of the builders' task. (Morris, p. 543)

¹ 12:3; 19:4; 21:16; Mark 12:10.

Notice the important point in the Psalm. There is a surprise. The stone the builders thought was useless became the most important stone in the building.¹

21:44 looks back to Isaiah 8:13-15.

*The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a **sanctuary**; but for both houses of Israel he will be a **stone** that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.*

We stumble over a sanctuary or a stone. Our response to Jesus is the difference.

21:45 reads,

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

He was talking about us too. What do these first two parables mean to you today? How does the parable of the two sons speak into your life? Which son are you? What role does the stone play in your life? Is the stone a solid foundation or does it cause you to stumble? Explain.

They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (21:46).

Holy Week has just begun.

22:1-14 The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

This third parable of judgment describes a royal wedding feast. This wedding would have been unlike any you have attended. A wedding feast lasted a week and included elaborate meals, entertainment, and celebration. It was the sort of

¹ Note, in the original context of Psalm 118, it was Israel which was the *capstone*. The surrounding nations rejected Israel, or what God was doing through Israel.

event one would not want to miss if invited. But in this case the invited guests don't come to the feast.

Who does the *king* invite? Compare Luke's rendering of this parable (Luke 14:15-24). What does this tell us about the heart of God?

22:11-13 Someone has slipped in to the banquet without the proper clothes. Notice in these verses how the parable ends and Jesus begins to speak of the judgment unbelievers will face in hell.

What are the proper garments we are to wear to God's *wedding banquet*?

- Isaiah 61:10
- 1 Corinthians 1:30
- Philippians 3:8-9

What would it mean in our time and in our culture to be without the proper clothes for the wedding banquet of the king?

22:14 is a fitting conclusion to these three parables of judgment.

Many are invited; but some refuse to come, and others who do come refuse to submit to the norms of the kingdom and are therefore rejected. Those who remain are called "chosen" (*ekletoi*), a word implicitly denying that the reversals in the parable in any way catch God unawares or remove sovereign grace from his control. At the same time it is clear from all three parables (21:28—22:14) that not the beginning but the end is crucial. (Carson, p. 457)

As a homegroup encourage one another toward the end of giving God honor and obedience. Pray for one another in these areas.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Thirty-Five Three Stories of Controversy Matthew 22:15-46



Think about our present section of Matthew in the context of Jesus' life and ministry. After an extended time in northern Israel (Galilee), Jesus is rejected by the Pharisees who plot to take his life (12:14). Jesus then moves south and arrives in Jerusalem to the praise of the people (21:1ff.). But immediately controversy is in the air. The tension builds; Holy Week moves to its climax.

The religious authorities play their role in this cosmic drama. They oppose everything Jesus does and everything he claims to be. Jesus plays his role

as well. Everything he says and does heightens the conflict. First, he curses the fig tree as a symbol of fruitless Israel (21:18-22). He then gives two parables of judgment on faithless Jews. Following the second parable, Jesus makes one of his most offensive claims:

Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

21:43

At this point the *chief priests and the Pharisees* look for a way to arrest this exceedingly sassy rabbi who has the attention of seemingly everyone in Jerusalem.

They can't just kill him. . . that would be murder. They have to catch him in a teaching they can construe as blasphemy, which was a capital offense. Or at the very least, they have to discredit him before the people. (Boice, vol. 2, p. 473)

With these things in mind, read the three stories of controversy in 22:15-40. Without going on in this study, answer the following.

¹ The Pharisees try to trap Jesus by asking him about the tax. Note the waiting serpent. Jesus compares the denarius, made in the image of Caesar, with man, made in God's image, and what to give to whom. Note the coin, heart, and Holy Spirit in the arches and spandrels. The stump which Jesus sits is the cut off line of Davidic kings. Jesus is both the son and Lord of David.

- Who initiates each question?
- Why is each question a trap for Jesus?
- In what way does Jesus turn the table on his questioners in his response?

Paying Taxes to Rome

The Resurrection

The Greatest Commandment

22:15-22 God or Caesar?

Every Jew had to pay a poll tax to Rome. And every Jew hated the tax, not because it was exorbitant, but because it was both a reminder of Rome's political authority and a sign of compromise with paganism¹. The question put to Jesus, therefore, is loaded. It is intended to put him in an impossible dilemma. If he says *Pay the tax*, he will lose the affection of the people. If he says *Don't pay the tax*, he will be subject to arrest as an insurrectionist.

Jesus' answer is both profound and revolutionary. First, he figures a way out of the dilemma posed to him. Second, he drops the first hint we have of what we might call the *separation of the church and state*.

In ancient civilizations the power of the king or governor was closely aligned with the power of the gods. The king would pay homage to the gods while the gods would protect the king and his kingdom. So the Jews grimaced when they were forced to, in a sense, give money to the pagan gods of Rome in the form of a poll tax.

Jesus' response to the Pharisee's trap disentangles the *state* from *religion*. There is a place for paying taxes (and participating in civic life), and a larger place for giving to God.

He said 'Yes' to paying Caesar taxes, but 'No' to giving Caesar worship. That disjunction had the most profound consequences, and was one of the reasons the Roman Empire was so jittery about the Christians. . .

One delightful touch comes through in the Greek word translated *give* (*apodote*), which means 'give back'. The coin bears Caesar's image: give it back to him. You bear God's image: so give yourself back to him! (Green, p. 234)

¹ The inscription on the coin read, *Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the deified Augustus, chief priest*.

How would you apply Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees in this section to our own times? We live in a nation where the *church* is often entangled with the state. Our situation is far different from that of Palestinian Jews of the first century. Our coins bear the inscription, *In God We Trust*. Does this change anything? Because our nation has *Christian* underpinnings do we owe more to Caesar than first century Christians?

What is the Christian's duty to the state (Caesar) and to God? Use the following verses to help formulate your answer.

- Acts 4:13-20
- Acts 5:29
- Romans 13:1-7
- 1 Peter 2:13-17

22:15 Notice the uncommon alliance that is formed by those who see Jesus as an enemy. The *Pharisees* come with the *Herodians*. The word Pharisee means *separate*. This group prided themselves in their separateness Rome (and from the religious establishment of temple priests). The Herodians, on the other hand, were a group of Jews who were much more tolerant of Roman authority. Another group, unmentioned in this text, were the Zealots who advocated violent revolution against Rome.

What does it mean to be both a *Christian* and a *citizen* of the United States? As you think of your relation to the state, which group do you tend to align yourself with? Are you a *Pharisee* or a *Herodian*? Why?

22:23-33 Will I be Married in Heaven?

The Sadducees controlled the priesthood in Jerusalem. They were politically powerful and theologically liberal. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the

dead¹, the immortality of the soul² and the existence of angels and demons. They accepted only the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) as fully authoritative. The Sadducees were well-to-do financially and were certainly threatened by Jesus' *cleansing* of the temple (21:12ff).

What are the Sadducees trying to do with the question they pose to Jesus?

22:29 What two things does Jesus say in response to their question? How can you apply Jesus' answer to your own life?

22:30-32 Compare the wording in Luke 20:38. Jesus quotes a part of the Old Testament that the Sadducees accept to prove his point that they are wrong in their beliefs, *for to him all are alive*.

Over and over again in Matthew the crowds are *astonished*, or *amazed* at the teachings of Jesus (see 7:28-29; 13:54; 22:22). Why do you think this was the case?

Think back over the teaching sections of Matthew (see chart in Introduction). What amazes you about the teachings of Jesus? What surprises have you found in Jesus' teaching in Matthew? What changes has this teaching made in your thinking or actions?

¹ The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed in the resurrection of the dead and based this belief on Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2.

² Josephus writes, *The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: souls die with bodies*. *Antiquities* 18:16.

22:34-40 The Greatest Commandment?

The Jewish rabbis determined, over the centuries, that the Torah (the law) contained 613 commandments¹. The rabbis further divided these commands into positive and negative categories. They found 248 positive commands (*You shall. . .*), and 365 negative commands (*You shall not. . .*). Furthermore, they *weighed* the commands, dividing them into *heavy* and *light* categories. The *heavy* commands were absolutely binding while the *light* commands were less binding².

Therefore the question posed to Jesus was a natural one, *Hey rabbi, which is the most important law of them all?*

22:35 What hint does Matthew give showing the question is another trap?

But what was the trap? We can't be sure. Probably the Pharisees hope to isolate Jesus by his answer, or catch him disagreeing with one of their favorite rabbis.

Notice the portion of the *law* Jesus chooses. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 as a summary of the Old Testament law.

The summary is exceedingly powerful and disturbing, for it takes the questioner from the area of achievement, which he might conceivably fulfill, to that of attitude, where nobody can boast fulfillment. (Green, p. 236)

The expert in the law got more than he asked for. Instead of a nice debate about the law, God' answer penetrates to the heart.

. . . nobody has ever loved God with all his being. Nobody has ever loved her neighbour as herself. So nobody can possibly merit eternal life. Once again, it brings us back to grace. If we are to have any place in the kingdom of God, it will be due to the unmerited grace of God for sinners who could never make it by themselves. (Green, pp. 236-237)

¹ In the Hebrew Bible the Ten Commandments in the book of Numbers contain 613 letters.

² One must remember in the first century there was no television, telephone or internet. The rabbis had to talk about something. Such discussions filled many winter evenings around the fire.

THREE STORIES OF CONTROVERSY

Write down three statements describing what it means for you to love God with all your heart.

Loving God

Loving Neighbor

1.

1.

2.

2.

3.

3.

What habits do you cultivate or disciplines do you adopt to keep your heart devoted to God? Do the same with regard to your love for your neighbor. Share these with your homegroup. Pray for one another in these areas.

22:41-46 Jesus Turns the Table

After the three confrontations initiated by the Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees, Jesus asks a question of his own. *Whose son is the Messiah?*

The Pharisees' answer, *Messiah is the son of David*, testifies to their expectation of an earthly-political messiah who would deliver Israel from the Romans.

In response to this Jesus says, *Okay, but what about Psalm 110?*

Jesus cites a portion of Psalm 110 and silences the Pharisees (22:46). What is Jesus' logic? What is he saying when quoting this Psalm?

Sadly the Pharisees are silenced, but remain unconvinced. Jesus will address the hardness of their hearts in the next chapter.

Read Psalm 110. Worship this Lord!

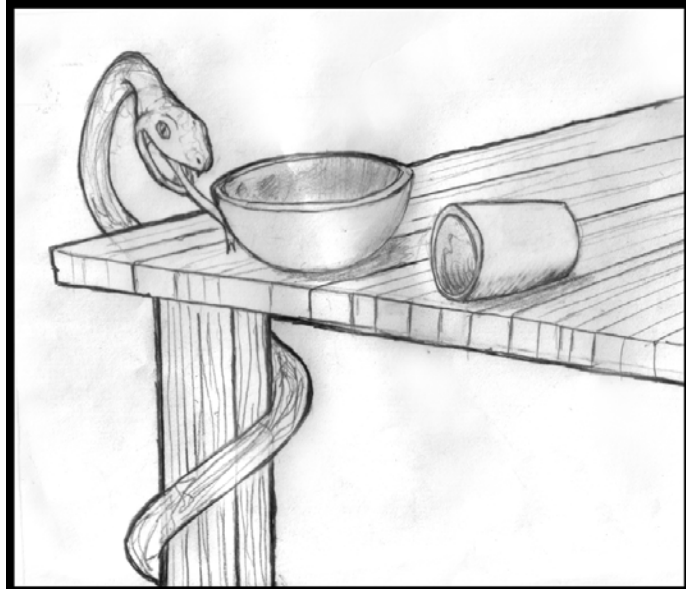
Study Thirty-Six Woe To You Matthew 23:1-39

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth — you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Romans 2:17-23

Such was the apostle Paul’s condemnation of the outward righteousness of Pharisaic Judaism. The apostle had lived as a self-righteous law-keeper until he met the risen Christ. When he met the one to whom the law pointed Paul became aware of the hypocrisy of his legalistic way of life.

Matthew 23 records Jesus’ last address to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem. From this point on he only addresses his disciples. This chapter is Jesus’ response to the traps the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians set in chapter 22. In his teaching Jesus utters seven woes to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The word *woe* does not convey hostility or anger as we might suppose. It is a word of lamentation, of sorrow. The word would have been familiar to Jewish listeners. Isaiah, for example, has six *woes* for his listeners (Isaiah 5:8-23) and Habakkuk has five (Habakkuk 2:6-20). The word conveys the notion that the game is over. God’s judgment is sure to come because of the unbelief of those who have had revelation from God.



Before going on in this study read Matthew 23 with the following outline in mind. As you read identify and summarize each woe. What questions of interpretation does your initial reading of this chapter bring to mind?

1. Pharisaism Described and Denounced (23:1-12)

2. Seven Woes for the Pharisees (23:13-36)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

3. A Final Loving Lamentation (23:37-39)

23:1-12 Pharisaism Described and Denounced

The Pharisees were devoutly *religious*, but they consistently missed the call of God in their lives. Their *righteousness* was outward and pretentious but lacked authenticity. Make a list of the specific criticisms Jesus gives the Pharisees in these verses. You should be able to find five or six.

How could we fall prey to the same shortcomings in our Christian life? Share with your homegroup how you might see yourself in this list.

What can we do to avoid an outward righteousness and nourish an inner godliness?

What is the most surprising verse in this section? What does Jesus say that you would least expect?

23:13-36 Seven Woes for the Pharisees

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees are false religious leaders. Their *ministry* is harmful to others. They are deserving of God's judgment.

. . . [N]othing is sadder or more deleterious in its results than the perversion of religion. Jesus grieves for the harm that these 'hypocritical' scribes and Pharisees are doing to others, and for the inevitable doom that they are bringing upon themselves. (Tasker, p. 217)

James Boice summarizes the seven woes of this section with the following list.¹ How does Boice's list below match up with your list above?

¹ Boice, vol. 2, pp. 492-494.

Woe to those who

1. make salvation hard for other people (vss. 13)
2. corrupt converts (vs. 15)
3. trivialize religion (vss. 16-22)
4. neglect what is truly important (vss. 23-24)
5. are self-indulgent (vss. 25-26)
6. have wickedness within (vss. 27-28)
7. who murder God's prophets (vss. 29-36)

Again, to which of these shortcomings are you prone? Where do you identify with the Pharisees? As you formulate your answer consider Michael Green's commentary on the seven woes.

How deep those seven indictments bite, and how dangerously up to date they are! Are we rejecting the kingdom ourselves and obstructing the entrance of others? Do we have a legalistic approach to church growth, interested only in our own neck of the woods? Do we break solemn promises if convenient or if the heat is on? Do we misconstrue God's revelation by neglecting the central and going for the peripheral? Do we go for external things and ceremonial precision, but remain indifferent to the attitude within? Are we walking around as a living lie, a spiritual tomb, highly decorated, maybe, on the outside, but inwardly full of corruption and dead men's bones? And keepers of ancient monuments? What a list! How important for Christian Pharisees to take it to heart, and for us all to note the tendencies to Pharisaism that lie embedded in each one of us! (Green, p. 245)

Compare these seven woes with the eight beatitudes of 5:3-12. How is the character of the Pharisee and the character of the disciple to be different?

The Disciple's Character (5:3-12)

The Pharisee's Character (23:1-39)

What can you identify in your life that God has used, or is using, to draw you away from Pharisaic hypocrisy into authentic Christian character?

23:37-39 A Final Loving Lamentation

These verses are the last words Jesus utters to the public in Matthew's Gospel. What do they teach you about the heart of Jesus?

Notice these verses in light of what has come before. In verse 35 Jesus says in effect, *You have a history of killing God's prophets from A to Z from Able to Zechariah son of Berakiah. In 23:37 Jesus says, I was there the whole time. And I've longed through history to gather you to myself, but you were not willing.*

23:38-39 form a fitting conclusion to the public teaching ministry of Jesus.

Look, your house is left to you desolate. Surely there is an allusion to Isaiah 6 which Jesus has quoted already in his ministry (Matthew 13:13-15). Isaiah the prophet was called to preach to a stubborn people. God told the young prophet that his preaching would only further harden the hearts of an already hardened

people. In Isaiah 6:11 Isaiah asks, *How long shall I preach my message?* God responds,

Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted [desolate] and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

Isaiah 6:11-12

Now Jerusalem will be left spiritually desolate. Before the week is over the Messiah will be crucified by the people he came to redeem.

For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord¹.'

Of course the crowds have already uttered this cry as Holy Week began (21:9). But Jesus looks to his second coming when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is, indeed, the Lord of the universe (Philippians 2:9-11). The next two chapters of teaching to his disciples (Matthew 24-25) make it clear that our response to Jesus determines whether or not he comes for us as a welcomed King or a condemning judge.

¹ Matthew 23:39.