

Jesus Christ: The Son of Man
Studies in the Gospel of Matthew
Sermons preached at the Bendavis
Church of Christ
2010



By Edward Williamson

The Gospel according to Matthew

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew is an attempt by a Jewish follower of Jesus to convince other Jews that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. His theme throughout the book is that Jesus Christ is the King of the Jews. To accomplish his purpose, Matthew quotes extensively from Old Testament passages. For those of us who are not physical descendants of Abraham this Gospel represents a wonderful opportunity to study how Old Testament prophecies, which we are not familiar with in the same way that Jewish readers would be, are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. The Gospel also provides us with information concerning the life and ministry of Jesus.

The name Matthew means "gift of the Lord". The writer of this Gospel was also known by his other name, Levi, which means "attached", particularly "attached" to the Lord (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). Matthew was one of the Twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus and he is named in all of the lists of the Apostles. The last mention of Matthew in the New Testament is found in Acts 1:13 where he is listed as being present on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was sent by God. He is supposed by some commentators to have preached primarily to the Jews in Judea, but some believe he also preached in Ethiopia, Macedonia, Syria, or Persia (modern day Iran). There is confusion about the date, place, and manner of his death, but most commentators believe he was martyred for his faith in Jesus.

Matthew was a tax collector prior to his call to be an Apostle of Jesus. He was the only tax collector who was one of the original disciples. This would have been a considerable handicap to overcome since tax collectors were despised by the Jewish people. His Gospel is one of the synoptic Gospels (along with Mark and Luke) since much of the same material is

found in each. The Gospel was almost certainly written before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Matthew chapter 1

The genealogy of Jesus Christ (1:1-17)

Matthew emphasizes Jesus' descent from Abraham and David. He wastes no time in pointing his Jewish readers to the fact that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham (the patriarch of Israel) and David (the greatest king of Israel). All of the Jewish readers of this Gospel would have been fleshly descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (also known as Israel), with the exception of gentiles who became proselytes of the Jewish faith. Jacob was the father of 12 sons who were the foundation of the 12 tribes of Israel. Matthew is proving that Jesus is a physical descendant of Abraham. But, Matthew also proves that Jesus descended from the royal family of David, a claim that few Jews could make. So, in verse 1, Matthew presents Jesus' credentials as a Jew and as a descendant of the kings of Israel.

Verse 2 shows the lineage through those that received the promises of God, beginning with Abraham. God repeated the Abrahamic promises to Isaac and to Jacob as well (Galatians 3:29). Verse 5 mentions Rahab, the harlot from Jericho (Joshua 6:25) and Ruth, a woman of Moab (see the book of Ruth). What is amazing about the ancestors of Jesus is that they included those who were not of the physical line of Abraham as well. Verse 6 mentions Bathsheba (although not by name). We are familiar with David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel chapter 11) and once again are amazed that Matthew includes even details that might be considered by some as scandalous. This reinforces his credibility as a reporter of what Jesus said and did. We know from verse 6 that David and Bathsheba had another son, named Solomon, who was known as the wisest man in the world, and who ruled over the nation of Israel during the time of its greatest extent.

Verses 7-11 list the ancestors of Jesus who were kings after Solomon in the Kingdom of Judah following the division of the Kingdom of Israel after Solomon's death (you can read about these kings in the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles). Finally, the Kingdom of Judah was destroyed and its people taken captive by the Babylonians. Verses 12-16 show the lineage of Jesus from the captivity to the time of His birth.

Verse 16 departs from Matthew's usual manner of recording the genealogies (this father begot this son, etc.). In verse 16 he does not say that Jesus was Joseph's son, only that Joseph was the husband of Mary, "of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ". Matthew gives us the legal line of descent for Jesus.

The birth of Jesus (1:18-25)

Matthew tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. This was in accordance with the Old Testament law. A betrothal was considered as legally binding as a marriage under the Law of Moses. Those who were betrothed were considered married in all matters except the physical consummation of the marriage. This period was mandated to insure that pregnancy was not the reason the couple wanted to marry.

In this case, while still in the betrothal period (before their marriage had been consummated) Mary became pregnant. To Joseph it would appear that Mary had been unfaithful, but Matthew explains that this pregnancy was the result of the power of God. This was the virgin birth! Mary had not been unfaithful to Joseph, she was still a virgin, but she was pregnant and Joseph had to make a decision. One option was to publicly accuse Mary of unfaithfulness and have her stoned to death like the Law of Moses required (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Because Joseph was a just man he decided to divorce Mary quietly, however God intervened in his plans. Joseph was instructed by an angel in a dream to take Mary as his wife.

In this dream the virgin birth of Jesus is emphasized by the angel (verse 20). The angel also gives specific information and commands for Joseph to carry out. In verse 21, the angel tells Joseph that Mary will have a Son and that Joseph will call His name Jesus. The significance of this name cannot be overlooked because this Son "will save His people from their sins". The name of Jesus means "savior". The angel also refers Joseph to an Old Testament passage that he and every other Jewish reader would recognize: Isaiah 7:14. In this passage the virgin birth is again emphasized, the birth of a Son is repeated, and His name is to be Emmanuel, which literally means, "God with us". What a blessing this is to us!

Matthew tells us that Joseph carried out the angel's instructions and married Mary. From that point on she was his wife. After Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary lived together as husband and wife. There is no indication from scripture to suggest that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. While she was a virgin until the birth of Jesus, the scriptures plainly show that she and Joseph had other children as well (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Jesus is identified as her "firstborn Son" indicating that she had other children after His birth.

Matthew chapter 2

Visit of the wise men (2:1-12)

Matthew now records events after Jesus had been born in the city of Bethlehem. Wise men (from the Greek word, *magos*), also known as Magi, came from the east, probably from Persia (modern-day Iran). These wise men traveled many dangerous miles to the land of Israel in search of the King of the Jews.

After the wise men arrived in Jerusalem they began to ask, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus is referred to in this way. The actions of God are seen in how the wise men arrived where they did. While still in their homeland far to the east of Israel these men had seen an unusual sight, a star. Because of their

desire for knowledge these men were familiar with many prophecies and ancient texts. When they saw the star they knew that it represented something, in this case, the birth of a King (Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 60:1-3).

Once they realized what the star meant these men began their journey to Israel to worship the new King. When they arrived in Jerusalem and began asking where the new King was this caught the attention of Herod, who was the King of the Jews because of the favor of the Roman Empire. The questions of the wise men caused Herod great trouble. Herod was a very cruel and violent ruler, one who was paranoid about threats to his reign. Matthew records that all Jerusalem was troubled with him. The citizens of Jerusalem knew Herod's reputation for crushing any threats to his reign.

Herod then gathered the chief priests and scribes and asked them to identify prophecies that would enable him to find the Christ (literally the Messiah, anointed). The chief priests and scribes quoted from Micah 5:2 which indicated that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah (John 7:42). Once Herod knew where the Christ was to be born he called the wise men into his presence and asked them when they first saw the star and then sent them to Bethlehem on a mission to find the Christ and then return to tell him so he could come and worship as well. We see here the deceitful nature of Herod. He had no intentions of worshipping the Christ. He only wanted the wise men to find him so he could destroy Him.

When the wise men left Jerusalem for Bethlehem (about six miles away) Matthew records that the star traveled before them and led them to Jesus, finally standing over where He lay. Matthew records that the wise men were full of joy while they followed the star. It seems evident that the visit of the wise men occurred some time after the birth of Jesus. We know that Jesus was born in a manger (Luke 2:16). But, when the wise men arrived, Matthew tells us that they came to the house where Mary and Jesus were.

The wise men presented gifts to Jesus: gold, symbolic of the Kingship of Jesus; frankincense (literally, the incense itself), symbolic of worship because Jesus is our High Priest; and myrrh, perfumed oil that was used to preserve bodies after death (John 19:39). The wise men worshipped Jesus, the culmination of their long journey from the east.

Once again we see the providence of God in verse 12. The wise men are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and depart for their homeland by a different route. Guided by a star to begin their journey they now return home guided by a dream. One wonders what message these wise men shared upon their return.

The family of Jesus flees to Egypt (2:13-15)

Joseph was warned by God in a dream to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. This warning allowed Jesus to escape the terrible fate that eventually fell upon the young children of Bethlehem. Again, we see the providence of God in sending Jesus away. The family traveled to Egypt (a straight line distance of about 200 miles from Bethlehem) and stayed there until the death of Herod the Great sometime later. This flight into Egypt also allowed Jesus to fulfill the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called My Son".

Herod's wrath (2:16-18)

While Jesus was safely in Egypt, Herod waited impatiently in Jerusalem for the return of the wise men. Once he realized that the wise men were not going to return, Herod issued an order to murder all the male children in the region of Bethlehem who were under the age of two. Since Herod had asked the wise men when the star first appeared (2:7) he figured that if he killed all the males under the age of two he would eliminate any possible threat to his reign. This terrible slaughter was carried out and illustrates the cruelty of Herod, but also was a fulfillment, according to Matthew of Jeremiah 31:15.

Jesus and His family settle in Nazareth (2:19-23)

We know very little about the childhood of Jesus from the Bible. This chapter contains a large amount of what we do know about Jesus prior to the beginning of His ministry. While the family was in Egypt, Joseph received another dream containing directions from God.

An angel of the Lord instructed Joseph to take his family and return to Israel. Joseph would probably not have known about the death of Herod prior to the dream. As soon as he received the message he packed up and returned toward his home. As they drew closer to Israel Joseph heard that Herod's son, Archelaus had risen to the throne and this caused Joseph to fear. At this point Joseph receives yet another dream (the fourth one recorded in Matthew's Gospel) warning him to turn aside to the region of Galilee (about 60 miles north of Jerusalem).

The town of Nazareth in Galilee was Mary's hometown (Luke 1:26). This is where the family settled and where Jesus grew up (Luke 2:51-52). Once again we see the guiding hand of God in Joseph's decision to settle in Nazareth. Matthew records that this decision was a fulfillment of the prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazarene". Unlike most of the other prophecies Matthew quotes, this one has no one particular source from the Old Testament. One possibility is found in Judges 13:5 where the Nazarite vow is described. Most commentators believe that Matthew is referring to a common belief, almost a cliché, referring to the idea that the Messiah would be someone of humble origins. In John 1:46 this is illustrated by Nathanael's question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Jesus was not born or raised in an important city, but rather in humble surroundings.

Matthew chapter 3

The ministry of John the Baptist (3:1-12)

Matthew devotes most of this chapter to the ministry of John the Baptist, highlighting his preparatory ministry and culminating with John's baptism of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel is not the only place where information can be found about John the Baptist. In fact, there is considerable information about this unique preacher throughout the New Testament.

His miraculous conception is described in Luke 1:5-25. John's mother, Elizabeth is described as a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus in Luke 1:36. Luke also records that Mary traveled to be with Elizabeth during her pregnancy with John (Luke 1:39-45). The birth of John, his circumcision, and his father's prophecy are found in Luke 1:57-80.

The preaching ministry of John is recorded also in Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22; and John 1:6-8, 19-36. The baptism of Jesus by John is described in John 3:22-36. Jesus commented on the ministry of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:1-19 and Luke 7:18-35. The death of John the Baptist is described in Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:14-29. Even many years later, after the establishment of the church, Paul came across a group of John's disciples who had not yet heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). Truly this was an amazing man!

Matthew begins this chapter by stating "In those days" referring back to chapter 2, where Jesus is residing at Nazareth, that John began to preach in the wilderness of Judea. His message was simple, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Verse 3 is Matthew's commentary on John the Baptist, that he is the one spoken of by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 40:3). John's father, Zacharias, had also prophesied about his son in Luke 1:76.

Matthew provides a description of the appearance of John the Baptist in verse 4 and proceeds in the following verses to tell us about the results of his ministry. People went out into

the wilderness to hear him preach. When they heard his message he baptized them upon a confession of their sins.

Beginning in verse 7, Matthew provides some of the preaching points that John used. John was not a politically correct preacher! He called some of those who came to hear him a "brood of vipers", a phrase that Jesus would later use in His preaching (Matthew 12:34). He asked the people who "warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" something that Paul later wrote about (1 Thessalonians 1:10). He demanded that the people bring forth fruits "worthy of repentance", not just to feel sorry for doing something wrong, or getting caught. He warned his Jewish listeners not to trust in Abraham for salvation. In fact, he stated that God could create physical descendants of Abraham from the very stones on the ground.

Another point John made was that "the ax is laid at the root of the trees" a phrase that Jesus also used in His preaching (Matthew 7:19). John warned that unless the people bore good fruit they would be cut down and cast into the fire. It is not difficult to imagine Jesus standing and listening to John's sermons.

John's message was also clear about baptism. He was a firm believer in the necessity of baptism and practiced it. But, as Matthew records in verses 11-12, John made a distinction between his baptism and the one that the Messiah would bring. John's baptism was with water "unto repentance" and, as Luke records, "for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). Paul also explains a purpose of John's baptism in Acts 19:4, "that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus". So, John's message was clear, repentance and faith in Christ were coupled with baptism.

In verse 11, Matthew records John teaching about "He who is coming after me". This One is mightier than John. In fact, John declares that he is not worthy even to carry His sandals. The One who follows John will not preach a baptism of repentance but will baptize with the Holy

Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; John 14:26; John 20:19-22) and fire (which is a reference to Malachi 3:3).

John tells us that we only have two possible destinies: either the barn or the fire.

The baptism of Jesus (3:13-17)

Jesus came from Galilee, where Nazareth was located to be baptized by John. This put John in a precarious spot. He knew that Jesus did not need to be baptized "unto repentance", in fact, John knew that Jesus should be baptizing him instead. Jesus responded, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness". It seems that John's entire ministry culminates in this one act: the baptism of Jesus.

Jesus was not baptized to receive the remission of sins. He had no sins to confess and repent of. Jesus was not baptized to be added to the church, for the church was not yet in existence. He was not baptized to receive eternal life, for He was, and is the eternal Son of God. He was baptized to fulfill righteousness. Once He was baptized He received the outward sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. As Matthew records, the Spirit of God descended from heaven in the form of a dove and lighted upon Him. God's voice was heard exclaiming, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The ministry of John the Baptist essentially ended when Jesus was baptized, and the ministry of Jesus began when He fulfilled all righteousness, received the fullness of the Spirit, and the approval of God at His baptism.

It was at the baptism of Jesus that Matthew stated, "the heavens were opened". This was one of the blessings resulting from Jesus' baptism. There are some who would claim that baptism is unimportant, but from this passage we can see that it was so important that even the Son of God was baptized. Baptism was a feature of the ministry of John the Baptist. It would become a feature of the ministry of Jesus and would become the defining mark of those who believe in Christ after the establishment of the church.

Matthew chapter 4

The temptation of Jesus (4:1-11)

This section highlights the three attempts of Satan to tempt Jesus. After John baptized Jesus the Holy Spirit led Him out into the wilderness where the Savior fasted for 40 days and nights. It was at the conclusion of this lengthy fast, while Jesus was physically weakened that Satan sought an opportunity to lead Him away.

Satan's first attempt begins with a taunt, "If you are the Son of God" which was designed to provoke Jesus into a response not in keeping with His mission. Since Jesus had fasted for 40 days and nights He was obviously hungry. Satan challenges Jesus to command that the surrounding stones become bread. In response, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3, prefacing it with, "It is written". This verse teaches that we should be hungry for God's word. What Jesus is saying is that our spiritual health is more important than our physical health. It is better to be full of God's word than bread.

Satan's second attempt also begins with the taunt, "If you are the Son of God". But, first Satan took Jesus to Jerusalem and placed Him on the very pinnacle of the temple. This demonstrates that Satan has tremendous power. After placing Jesus on the top of the temple, Satan dares Him to jump off, which would undoubtedly kill anyone who attempted it. During this second temptation Satan also quotes scripture to try and persuade Jesus to do as he asked. Satan quotes from Psalm 91:11-12 which promised God's protection. Notice how Satan uses the Bible when it suits his purposes.

In response Jesus says, "It is written again" and quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 which forbids testing the Lord. If Jesus would have jumped from the top of temple one of two things would have happened: either He would have been killed by the fall thus thwarting God's plan, or, God would have sent angels to protect Him which would have constituted testing the Lord. In either

case, Jesus would not have been obedient to God's will. Another point to consider from this temptation is that proper interpretation is the key to understanding God's word. Satan took a passage of scripture out of context in an attempt to cause Jesus to sin. He does the same thing today. We must be careful in our study of God's word.

The final attempt of Satan to tempt Jesus in the wilderness differs from the previous ones. In this attempt Satan does not taunt Jesus with "If you are the Son of God"; he knows that Jesus is the Son of God. He takes Jesus to a high mountain where the kingdoms of the earth are visible and shows Him all the glory of mankind. Satan promises Jesus all that the earth has to offer if He will bow down and worship him. This once again shows the tremendous power Satan possesses.

Jesus answers this final attempt with a strong warning, "Away with you Satan!" Jesus models the approach we should take when dealing with Satan in our lives. This is in accordance with the teachings of Peter (1 Peter 5:8-9) and James (James 4:7). Jesus also quotes a final scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13) showing that God is to be worshipped, not Satan.

After his unsuccessful attempts to sway Jesus from His mission Satan departed. Matthew records that angels came and ministered to Jesus after this incident.

The beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (4:12-17)

At some point after the temptation Jesus learned that John the Baptist had been imprisoned. Matthew provides more information about the arrest and execution of John the Baptist in Matthew 14:1-12. Jesus departed from the wilderness and traveled back north to Nazareth in Galilee. While back home in Nazareth, Luke records that Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from Isaiah 49:8-9 and Isaiah 61:1-2 proclaiming to the people that He was the fulfillment of these prophecies (Luke 4:16-21). The people of Nazareth

rejected His message and sought to kill Him (Luke 4:28-30) and Matthew records that Jesus then traveled northeast to Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

This change in location was the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2. In that passage Isaiah spoke of blessings and promises God would grant to the Gentiles. Notice that Jesus did not travel to Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish nation, but rather went in the opposite direction to a region that was predominantly Gentile. His public ministry began in a remote part of Israel, far removed from Jerusalem and the temple. It began in a region surrounded by Gentile nations, as the Sea of Galilee was.

The message that Jesus preached was identical to the message of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Mark records that Jesus also preached, "The time is fulfilled" and that people should repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14-15).

Calling of the first disciples (4:18-22)

While Jesus was walking on the shores of the Sea of Galilee He came upon two brothers who had been disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35-42). John had described Jesus to these brothers as "the Lamb of God" and they had followed Jesus. Obviously they had returned home and gone back to their vocation which was fishing. Jesus sought them out and commanded them to follow Him so they could become "fishers of men". This incident is described in more detail by Luke in Luke 5:1-11. The brothers were Peter and Andrew, and they became the first disciples of Jesus. Matthew records that they immediately left their nets and followed Him.

Shortly after this Jesus finds two more brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. These brothers were actually in the boat with their father mending the fishing nets when Jesus called them. Like Peter and Andrew, James and John immediately left their nets, but also their

father, to follow Jesus. These four disciples are known as the inner circle of the disciples, and Peter, James, and John were especially close to Jesus throughout His ministry.

First miracles of the public ministry of Jesus (4:23-25)

The first miracle that Jesus performed was that of turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-12). But, the first miracles of His public ministry are recorded here by Matthew.

Jesus went into the synagogues of Galilee and taught the people. He also preached the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews. To prove the truth of His message Jesus performed many miracles in Galilee. Matthew records that He healed all kinds of sickness and disease.

His fame spread far to the north, to Syria (which roughly corresponds to modern-day Syria). When people began to hear about all of the miracles Jesus was performing they brought sick and diseased people to Him so they could be healed. Matthew provides a partial list of the types of problems that Jesus healed (diseases and torments, demon possession, epilepsy, and paralysis). It should be noted that demon possession and epilepsy are both mentioned. There are some who think there was no such thing as demon possession, that it was only a disease such as epilepsy. However, Jesus healed both types of problems, showing that demon possession was not the same as epilepsy.

Imagine the excitement that Jesus produced through His preaching and healing ministry! Matthew records that great crowds followed Him, not only those from Galilee, but also from Decapolis, to the southeast, Jerusalem and Judea to the south, and those from beyond the Jordan, where John had baptized. People traveled for miles to be near Jesus.

Matthew chapter 5

This chapter contains the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (continued in chapters 6 and 7). The highlight of this chapter is verses 2-12, commonly known as the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes (5:1-12)

Matthew records that Jesus saw the multitude which followed Him (4:25) and went up on a mountain where His disciples joined Him. After Jesus was seated He began the Sermon on the Mount. It is important to keep in mind the audience that Jesus spoke to that day. The multitude consisted of people who were poor, sick, hungry, and marginalized by society.

At this point only four disciples were known by name: Peter and Andrew and James and John. These two sets of brothers had been called by Jesus in Matthew 4: 18-22. It is possible that only these four disciples were present with Jesus on the mountain. We know that Matthew was not called to be a disciple until Matthew 9:9. The first mention of the entire group of 12 disciples is in Matthew 10:1-4.

In the Beatitudes Jesus provides eight pairs of characteristics with their rewards. A similar list is found in Luke 6:20-23. Each pair begins with the words "Blessed are". This phrase could also be translated fortunate, well-off, or happy. The first Beatitude is directed to "the poor in spirit" referring to the human spirit. Remember that those whom Jesus was addressing would have instantly identified with this description. They were the downtrodden of Israel, far away from the center of Jewish life in Jerusalem. The reward for those who were poor in spirit is that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

The Beatitudes continue with "those who mourn...shall be comforted", "the meek...they shall inherit the earth". The concept of meekness is many times misunderstood. The word

translated meek in Matthew 5:5 is the same word translated "lowly" in Matthew 21:5 with reference to Jesus as He entered the city of Jerusalem. David had also used this same phrase in Psalm 37:11, a passage the multitude would have been familiar with.

Other Beatitudes were "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...they shall be filled", "the merciful...they shall obtain mercy" (James 2:13), "the pure in heart...they shall see God" (Hebrews 12:14), "the peacemakers...they shall be called sons of God", and, finally, "those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This last Beatitude is repeated by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 4:4-16. One can imagine Peter many years after the Sermon on the Mount as he takes pen in hand to write his first epistle, looking back over the years and bringing to his mind the words of Jesus!

Verses 11 and 12 amplify the eighth Beatitude. They are not constructed in the same manner as the Beatitudes. In these verses Jesus describes the types of persecution His followers would encounter: reviling, persecutions, and false charges. Jesus says those who endure these things are "Blessed" and reminds them that their reward in heaven would be great. Jesus also states that these kinds of persecutions were suffered by the prophets of old.

Christian metaphors (5:13-16)

A metaphor is a literary device in which one thing is said to be another thing. Metaphors are used quite often in scripture. In these verses Jesus says that His followers are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city set upon a hill.

Salt was and is a common item. Everyone knows the impact that salt has upon food. In Jesus' day salt was used to preserve as well as season food. It was even used by the Roman Empire as currency, hence the term, salary. But, if salt has no flavor, if it loses its salty taste and impact then what good is it? Salt that does not season or preserve is good for nothing except to

be thrown away. Christians must be salty when they are poured out onto the world. We must make an impact.

Christians are also known as the light of the world, giving light to all who are in the house. No one lights a candle in a dark room and covers it up. In the darkness light needs to be seen. A city set on top of a hill cannot be hidden but is visible for long distances around it. Christians are to be conspicuous as well as providing light to those in darkness.

Jesus wants us to shine forth in the world, not to draw attention to ourselves, but that those in darkness may see our good works and glorify God as well. Are we letting our light shine?

Christ and the Old Covenant (5:17-48)

Jesus did not come to destroy the Old Covenant, but to fulfill it. Jesus uses the term, "Law or the Prophets" as an indication that He is referring to the entire Old Covenant system, not just the Law of Moses.

Jesus makes plain that even if heaven and earth were to pass away the Old Covenant would not pass away until He fulfilled it. He states that not one jot (the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet) or one tittle (the smallest stroke used in writing a letter of the Hebrew alphabet) would pass away until He fulfilled the Old Covenant.

When Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and raised again He fulfilled the Old Covenant. From that time until Jesus comes again we can only be saved through the New Covenant. No one can be saved today under the Old Covenant. However, when Jesus spoke these words the time of His death was still three years in the future and the Old Covenant was to continue in effect until all was fulfilled. Any person who broke the commands of the law and

taught people to disobey would be called "least" in the kingdom. This is to be compared with the attitude of obedience that should continue as long as the Old Covenant was in force.

As Jesus said, "but whoever does and teaches them he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven". The earliest Christians were Jews who continued keeping the commands of the Old Covenant even after their conversion. After Gentile converts began to come into the church the Old Covenant practices became less prominent, even non-existent in Gentile churches.

Jesus then teaches that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that their hearts were not right before God. They placed tremendous emphasis on external things and ignored what was truly important, their thoughts and motives. Jesus said that they "say and do not" (Matthew 23:1-4). Compare this with what Jesus just got through teaching in Matthew 5:19. In fact, Jesus repeatedly called the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites" because of their misguided emphasis on the external.

The serious nature of what Jesus says is found in verse 20 when He warns, "unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven". Our righteousness must be better than that which is focused on the externals only. Our hearts must be right before God in order to have a better righteousness. Beginning in verse 21, Jesus provides six test cases to illustrate how our righteousness is to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Murder versus anger (verses 21-26)

In each of the six test cases Jesus quotes a commandment or precept from the Old Testament and then contrasts it with His teaching on the attitude of the heart. Murder was contrary to the Law of Moses (Exodus 21:12-14), in fact one of the Ten Commandments stated,

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). According to the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees you were all right with God as long as you did not actually commit the sin of murder. As long as you did not take someone's life you could harbor hatred for them in your heart.

In contrast to this strict interpretation of the Law, Jesus states, "But I say to you..." Yes, Jesus taught that murder was a sin, but He also went beyond the actual act of murder to the underlying anger that would cause it in the first place. Jesus taught that anyone who was angry with his brother without a reason would be in danger of the judgment. He argued against calling anyone "*Raca*" which meant an empty-headed person, or even calling someone a fool.

Jesus urged those listening to search their hearts to see if they had done anything which someone might hold against them. Even if they were in the temple area preparing to offer a gift when they realized they had wronged someone, Jesus commanded that they leave their gift at the altar, seek out the one they had wronged and make things right. He urged that we agree with our adversaries quickly so that disagreements would not escalate into hatred and anger. This was a far cry from what the scribes and Pharisees taught and practiced.

Adultery versus lust (verses 27-30)

Adultery was another sin condemned by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14). Even the scribes and Pharisees acknowledged the sinfulness of adultery (being unfaithful to a marriage partner). However, the scribes and Pharisees said nothing about lust. Jesus states that our righteousness must extend even to our thoughts.

If a man looks at a woman in order to lust after her, he has violated the standard that Jesus established. While God made male and female with obvious differences and placed within man a natural desire for beauty, Jesus forbids a Christian to lust in their heart (whether male or female). James also discusses this in James 4:2, even using the same Greek word

translated lust that is found in Matthew's Gospel. Solomon spoke about the evils of lusting and carrying out actions based on that lust in Proverbs 6:20-29.

Jesus states that if our right eye causes us to sin by looking with lust upon another, then we should take the step of blinding ourselves to keep that from happening. Here Jesus uses hyperbole to make a point. He is not literally telling us to blind ourselves, but rather to remove the opportunity for lusting in our heart. How could we lust only with our right eye? When a person looks at something they use both eyes simultaneously. Is Jesus suggesting that it is alright to lust for someone using our left eye? Certainly not! He is showing us that our hearts must be pure before God.

He uses a similar case of hyperbole in verse 30 when suggesting that if our right hand causes us to sin we should cut it off and be maimed. Just the right hand? Is Jesus suggesting that it is alright to sin with the left hand? Certainly not! But, it is better for us to deprive ourselves of sin than to be condemned to hell.

Marriage versus divorce (verses 31-32)

Under the Law of Moses a man who wished to divorce his wife could do so simply by giving her a certificate (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Under the law women had no rights to initiate divorce against their husbands. The man, however, could divorce his wife for any reason he saw fit (Matthew 19:3-12). This was based upon an incorrect interpretation of the Law of Moses and occurred because of the hardness of their hearts.

Jesus contrasted this erroneous interpretation with a correct view of God's original intention for marriage. Marriage was intended by God to be for life. Divorce was not a part of God's original plan. Certainly God did not approve of men divorcing their wives for any superficial reason. So, Jesus tells us that marriage is to be held sacred by men and women, with one exception. If a spouse is unfaithful to their partner then adultery has taken place. In this

case a physical act of adultery has resulted in a symbolic act of adultery. The literal meaning of adultery is unfaithfulness, a breaking of vows, not primarily a sexual sin as we so often think.

As Jesus explains, if a man divorces his wife for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness, he causes her to commit adultery (or the breaking of the vows). His act of divorce could not force her to commit a sexual sin, but it would cause her to commit a symbolic sin, that of breaking the vow. In fact, Jesus said that anyone who married a divorced woman also commits adultery (the breaking of her first vow).

In order for our righteousness to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees we must maintain faithful marriages. Within the church there should be no breaking of marriage vows for trivial reasons. Our hearts must be pure before God.

Taking oaths versus telling the truth (verses 33-37)

The next test case involves swearing an oath to substantiate what you say is true. Jesus is not forbidding an oath required by a court, but rather the frivolous oath taking that existed in Jewish society. The Law of Moses demanded that oaths be carried out faithfully (Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 23:23), but some Jews had tried to find a way around this (Matthew 23:16-22). As a result, Jesus stated that we should not swear at all. We should not swear by heaven, earth, or Jerusalem, not even upon our own heads. As mortal creatures we are unable through our own efforts to cause even one hair on our head to change color, so why would we swear upon ourselves.

In contrast Jesus says that His followers should always speak the truth. Our "yes" should be "yes" and our "no" should be "no". When we speak our words should always be words of truth. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that our words are true. Anything beyond that, including swearing, is from the evil one.

Revenge versus service (verses 38-42)

As hard as the previous test cases are for Christians to implement, the last two test cases are even more difficult. It was commanded in the Law of Moses that punishments for crimes should fit the crimes, or as Jesus quotes, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24-25). The scribes and Pharisees were very keen on applying this commandment. However, our righteousness must exceed theirs. How hard it is for us to apply what Jesus commands in verses 39-42!

Jesus commands that we should not resist an evil person, but that is exactly the first thing we usually do. We have a sense of right and wrong. We are outraged when people do bad and evil things and many times we think about how we would like to take revenge. But Jesus tells us that if someone strikes us on the right cheek we should let them strike us on the left also. He says that if someone sues us for our tunic we should give them our coat as well. If someone commands us to go one mile (according to Roman law a subject of the empire was required to carry the equipment of a Roman soldier for one mile when asked) then we are to go two miles. These commandments go against everything we believe about fair play and right and wrong. However, our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Our hearts must be right before God.

One way we can begin to transform our lives into what Jesus wants is to put into practice what He commanded in verse 42, "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

Love of neighbor versus love of enemy (verses 43-48)

The final test case features Jesus quoting a command from the Law of Moses, "You shall love your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:18) and also a commonly accepted teaching which does not appear in the Law of Moses at all, "hate your enemy". Over time the Jewish nation had

accepted this teaching. It is easy to see why. It is easy to love your neighbor and to do good to those we love, however it is very difficult for us to love our enemy and do good to those we hate.

So, Jesus teaches that our hearts must be right before God. Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. How can we do this? It is very simple according to Jesus: love our enemies; bless those who curse us; do good to those who hate us; and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us.

Yes, this is very simple, but it runs counter to our common sense. Even Christians have a hard time living up to this standard. However, if our hearts are right before God we will do just as Jesus asked. If we do He promises us that we "may be sons of your Father in heaven".

Jesus uses common examples of how God blesses everyone, not just those who follow Him. God sends the rain on everyone, not just the ones who obey Him. God makes the sun rise on everyone, not just those who listen to Him. If God is willing to do these things for everyone then we should as well. If we only love and greet those we love, how are we any different from the tax collectors? Jesus urges us to be "perfect" (complete) just as God is.

Matthew chapter 6

This chapter contains a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount (concluded in chapter 7). The highlight of this chapter is the Lord's Prayer found in verses 5-15. Jesus provides instructions about good works, prayer, fasting, and assorted other subjects. In these examples He uses a teaching technique showing the wrong way to approach these subjects followed by the correct way.

Instructions for good works (6:1-4)

We are not supposed to do good works in order to be seen by others. If our motivation is to gain the praise of others then we have received the only reward we will get. We are not to

make a spectacle out of good works (Mark 12:41-44). One example Jesus provides is that of people sounding a trumpet to call attention to their good works.

In contrast Jesus tells us not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing, which is a physical impossibility. What Jesus is really saying is that our good works should be known only to God who will reward us openly (Luke 14: 12-14).

Instructions about prayer (6:5-15)

We are not to pray like hypocrites, standing on the street corners or in the synagogue in order to be seen. Jesus also spoke about this in Luke 18:9-14, when He described the difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector who went into the temple to pray. Once again, if our only purpose in praying is for others to see us then we have received the only reward we will get.

In contrast Jesus directs us to go into our room, shut our door, and pray to our Father in secret so that He will reward us openly. We are also warned against using vain repetitions like the heathen. They believe that using a lot of words when they pray will impress God, but such is not the case. The length of a prayer does not determine its effectiveness.

Jesus tells us that God knows what we need before we even ask Him. Therefore we should pray as He instructed His disciples. The Lord's Prayer is found in verses 9-13, along with explanatory verses 14-15. The Lord's Prayer is also found in Luke 11:1-4.

The object of our prayer is God, our Father in heaven. His name is "hallowed" which means it is made holy, purified, consecrated and venerated. Following the object of our prayer Jesus describes the subjects. First, we are to pray that God's kingdom would come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. While some have objected to praying the Lord's Prayer by pointing out that God's kingdom has already come (in the form of the church), it is clearly

evident that many people and societies in our world remain untouched by the Gospel. We should earnestly pray that both the kingdom and the will of God spread throughout the earth. This is the same sentiment Jesus exhibited in Matthew 26:42 just before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The next thing Jesus instructs us to pray for is our daily bread. He will devote much more teaching to this portion of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:25-34. Then He directs us to pray that God will forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. This is expounded on in verses 14-15. Our forgiveness is dependent upon how we treat other people. If we will not forgive, we cannot expect God to forgive us.

Jesus instructs us to pray that we will not be led into temptation, but rather that God would deliver us from evil. The Lord's Prayer concludes with a phrase of praise toward God, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen". This short, simple prayer is one that Christians should become accustomed to praying on a frequent basis.

Instructions about fasting (6:16-18)

In this section Jesus teaches about an often overlooked aspect of the Christian life, fasting. Once again He uses the teaching technique of describing the wrong way to approach it and then gives instructions on properly carrying out the command.

We are not to fast as the hypocrites do. They made sure that everyone around them knew they were fasting. In fact, Jesus states that they went around with a sad countenance, disfiguring their faces so that people would notice. If we fast in order to gain the praise of men, then that is the only reward we will receive.

In contrast to fasting for the wrong reason, Jesus instructs us to anoint our head, wash our face, and not advertise to the world that we are fasting. Fasting is a way for a Christian to

become closer to God. It is meant to be a private time of prayer and dedication. If we fast for these purposes, God will reward us openly.

Assorted instructions (6:19-34)

In this passage Jesus commands us to lay up treasures in heaven rather than worrying about earthly ones. All earthly treasures are destined to decay, rot, and be stolen and destroyed. We cannot keep any material possessions we accumulate here upon the earth. We should be more interested in eternal treasures which are stored in heaven and are not subject to decay and theft. Jesus is interested in our hearts, because the state of our hearts will determine whether we are laying up earthly treasures or heavenly ones.

Verses 22 and 23 describe the eyes as the lamp of the body. Just as a lamp provides light to its surroundings, so we will either provide light or darkness depending upon our focus. What we see is literally what we get. If we focus on good things then our whole body is good. If we focus on evil things then our whole body is evil.

This is further explained in verse 24 when Jesus declares that we cannot serve two masters. In this case He specifically contrasts serving God with serving mammon (wealth, in particular, avarice or greed for wealth). If our eye is concerned with money, our body will then be dedicated to serving mammon rather than God. If our eye is concerned with the things of God we will serve Him.

The passage from verse 25 to the end of the chapter serves to explain what Jesus meant in the Lord's Prayer (verse 11) when He instructed us to pray for our daily bread. He begins by telling us not to worry. We should not worry about our life (by being obsessed with food and drink), nor should we worry about our body (by being obsessed with our clothing). The problem is that most Christians still worry about these earthly things to their spiritual detriment.

Jesus focuses His teaching by posing a question, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing (verse 25)? If Christians could only realize the truth of this question! We, like many others, continually worry about things beyond our control. We continually worry about mundane things like food and clothing, as well as weightier things. Jesus' point is that we should not worry about these things at all, and He provides several examples to prove it.

He first asks us to consider the birds which do not sow or reap, and yet they are cared for by God. Jesus asks, "Are you not of more value than they"? Then He illustrates the uselessness of worrying by asking, "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature"? The next example concerns worrying about clothing where Jesus asks us to consider the lilies of the field which are more beautifully arrayed than even Solomon, the greatest king who ever ruled.

If God will clothe even the grass of the earth, will He not clothe us as well? Jesus states that worry is really a symptom of weak faith (verse 30). Finally, He commands us not to worry about these earthly things and repeats His promise that God knows we need these things before we are able to even ask.

The solution to worrying is found in verse 33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness". The blessing for doing this is that all these earthly needs will be taken care of by God. We are also commanded not to worry about what will happen tomorrow, since each day contains enough problems already.

Matthew chapter 7

Instructions about judging (7:1-6)

This chapter contains the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. In the first section Jesus utters the one phrase usually known by all people, especially non-Christians, "Judge not

that you be not judged". If non-Christians know any verse of scripture this is the one. This verse, taken completely out of context is a favorite of those who wish to justify their own lives while at the same time condemning Christians for saying something is a sin.

What did Jesus really mean in verse 1? Certainly He did not mean that Christians should never make judgments about the merits of a particular idea or practice, especially since He commanded us to judge in John 7:24 and Luke 12:57 where the exact same Greek word is used as is found in Matthew 7:1.

From these two passages we find that followers of Christ are to "judge with righteous judgment" and "judge what is right". Taken together with the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 7, we can see that what He is warning us against is judging others with a higher standard than we are willing to subject ourselves to. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus stated, "For with what judgment you judge you will be judged; and with what measure you use it will be measured back to you" (verse 2). This regulates any judging that Christians engage in.

When Christians look into the word of God and find that a particular practice or belief is sinful they have the obligation to let those who practice or believe such things know that it is sinful. What Christians do not have a right to do is to judge sin in someone else's life while pretending that they themselves have no sin. The folly of such a course is described in verses 3-5. As Jesus so aptly demonstrates, it is easy for us to see sin in other people's lives, while at the same time being blind to our own failures.

If Christians engage in such sinful judging Jesus rightly calls them "hypocrites". A perfect example of this is found in John 8:3-11 when the Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus "caught in adultery, in the very act". There could be no question as to the woman's guilt, however Jesus simply tells them that "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first". From this example we should see that Christians ought to stay out of the judging

business. But this passage in no way implies that Christians are to remain silent when sin needs to be exposed.

Jesus further says that we should not "give what is holy to dogs" or "cast our pearls before swine". It seems that this verse is teaching us the folly of trying to expose the sin in other people without a regard for our own sinfulness.

Instructions about persistence (7:7-12)

In these verses Jesus speaks of three actions on our part coupled with three responses from God. If we ask, we will receive from God; if we seek, we will find what God provides; if we knock, God will open the door for us. The reason for this is found in our own relationships with our children.

In verses 9-10 Jesus shows that if our children ask for something they need we provide it. In verse 11 He takes the illustration further by pointing out that even though we are "evil" we still "give good gifts" to our children. If we can understand that then Jesus points out "how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

Therefore, since we know that God wants to bless us we should live our lives by blessing others. Jesus provides the "Golden Rule" in verse 12, "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them". Jesus states that this simple rule fulfills all that the Law and Prophets spoke about.

The narrow and broad ways (7:13-14)

Jesus compels us to enter by the narrow gate (Luke 13:24). He warns against entering through the wide gate which the world provides. The wide gate opens to the broad way which leads to destruction and many people travel that road. By contrast, the narrow gate opens to a difficult way, but that way leads to life, even though there are few that find it. Jesus seems to

say that we must be diligent and search for that correct pathway, not just any pathway like the world says.

Bearing fruit (7:15-20)

Jesus warns us to "Beware of false prophets". How can we know they are false prophets if we are prohibited from judging as many people think? This is an excellent example of the fact that Matthew 7:1 is usually taken out of context. We have to be able to judge the difference between a false prophet and one that is true.

The way to do this according to Jesus is to look at (judge) the fruit in a person's life. The Beast in Revelation 13:11 was described as having horns "like a lamb" although it spoke "like a dragon". John was warning Christians not to be deceived by the lamb-like appearance. In the same way Jesus commands us to become fruit inspectors (judges). We know that grapes do not grow on thorn bushes; we know that figs do not come from thistles. We can certainly tell the difference. We know that good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit. We know that a good tree will not produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Jesus is stating the obvious here, but He reminds the reader that the bad tree will be cut down and cast into the fire. By their fruits we will know (judge) whether a person is good or bad, whether a person is a false prophet or true.

Who enters heaven? (7:21-23)

Immediately after instructions on judging fruit Jesus states, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven". This passage tells us that there are some who claim to be following Jesus who really are not. They deceive themselves and perhaps others, but they cannot deceive Jesus. The only ones who truly follow Jesus are those who do the will of God.

On the Day of Judgment, there will be those who are rudely surprised when Jesus tells them to depart, rather than welcoming them to heaven. These will claim that they have done wonderful things in the name of Jesus, including wonders, prophecies, and casting out demons. There is only one thing wrong with them: they are said to be practicing "lawlessness". Many think they are saved, but they do not truly follow Jesus. They pay lip service to Jesus while practicing lawlessness (something Paul warned about in 2 Timothy 2:19). Jesus will explain this teaching in the next section.

Use the right foundation (7:24-27)

It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus, we must also do them. Jesus says that if we do what He commands, we are building our house upon the rock. When the rain descends and the floods come and beat upon our house it will stand, because it has the proper foundation. It is founded upon obedience to the commands of Christ. These people are described as wise.

On the other hand, just like those described in verse 23, the person who hears the words of Jesus and does not obey builds their house upon the sand. The same rain descends; the same floods rise and beat on that house. The result is drastically different; it falls because it has the wrong foundation. As Jesus stated, "And great was its fall". These people are described as foolish.

Results of the Sermon on the Mount (7:28-29)

When Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount the people "were astonished at His teaching". People are still astonished at the Sermon on the Mount. It stands as the greatest sermon ever preached. The reason the people were astonished was that Jesus taught "as one having authority" as contrasted with the teachings of the scribes who could only copy what was already written. They had no authority to go beyond what they had received. Jesus, on the other

hand, boldly preached the word of God in new and vibrant ways that the people had never heard before.

Matthew chapter 8

Various healings (Matthew 8:1-17)

This is a chapter of miracles and a demonstration of Jesus' authority over sickness, disease and nature. The first section contains information on four miracles beginning with the healing of a leper.

Jesus was still in the region of the Sea of Galilee and great multitudes (Matthew 5:1) followed Him after the Sermon on the Mount. A man with leprosy came and worshiped Jesus saying, "Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean". The Law of Moses was quite clear that persons with leprosy were to be considered unclean (Leviticus 13:1-59). In particular, Leviticus 13:44-46 demonstrate the uncleanness of those suffering from this fatal, disfiguring disease.

Contrary to the Law of Moses, Jesus touched the leper and said, "I am willing be cleansed". Immediately the leprosy was gone. Jesus instructed the man to tell no one and to go show himself to the priest, offering the gift that Moses commanded when someone was cleansed of leprosy (Leviticus 14:1-32).

After Jesus entered Capernaum (on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee) a Roman Centurion came to Him and pleaded that Jesus would heal his paralyzed servant. Jesus stated that He would go and heal the servant, but the Centurion made several amazing statements. First, he said that he was not worthy that Jesus should even come to his house. Then, he said that if Jesus would only speak a word, his servant would be healed.

The Centurion described himself as a "man under authority" who was able to command others. The Centurion admitted that Jesus was also a man of authority whose commands would

be carried out. Matthew tells us that Jesus was "amazed" at the faith of the Centurion. He stated that He had not found such faith in Israel and made a promise that many would come from "east and west" and sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. This promise was made to the Gentile nations, including the Centurion. Jesus also warned that many of "the sons of the kingdom" (in this case, Jews) would be cast into outer darkness where there would be "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

After this teaching Jesus sent the Centurion home and his servant was healed. From there Jesus went into the house of Peter's mother-in-law (a clear reference that Peter was married). This woman was suffering from a fever and Jesus touched her hand and healed her. The completeness of the miracle is demonstrated in the fact that she immediately arose and served Jesus and His disciples.

Matthew concludes this section in verses 16 and 17 by writing that many who were demon-possessed were brought to Jesus and the demons were cast out with a word. Matthew also writes Jesus healed all who were sick and states that this was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4.

The cost of following Jesus (Matthew 8:18-22)

Jesus saw great multitudes coming toward Him and gave a command (demonstrating His authority) that the disciples should cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Before they could leave a scribe arrived and called Jesus "teacher" (rather than Lord as the Centurion had done) and stated that he would follow Jesus anywhere. In response, Jesus told Him that even though foxes have holes and birds have nests, the Son of Man did not have a place to lay His head.

Another disciple said he would follow Jesus but asked to be allowed to go bury his father first. This does not mean his father had recently died, but rather was an expression of the accepted Jewish tradition that sons were to take responsibility for their parents, including

making their final arrangements. This disciple wanted to follow Jesus, just not yet. Jesus replied, "Let the dead bury their own dead" indicating that those who were spiritually dead should discharge the responsibility of burying the physically dead. Jesus wanted him to follow now, not later.

Jesus calms the storm (Matthew 8:23-27)

Once the disciples and Jesus got into a boat and started crossing the Sea of Galilee, a violent storm arose upon the water. The Sea of Galilee is known for violent weather. In this case the boat was covered with waves while Jesus slept. This particular event is also found in Luke 8:22-25 and Mark 4:35-41. Because of the storm the disciples, including the former fishermen who were familiar with the weather on the Sea of Galilee were terrified.

They woke Jesus up and said, "Lord, save us! We are perishing". In reply Jesus asked, "why are you fearful?" and described them as being of "little faith". Then He spoke to the winds and the sea, rebuking them. Immediately there was a great calm. The men marveled at the authority of Jesus, asking "who can this be?"

Two demon-possessed men healed (Matthew 8:28-34)

When Jesus and the disciples landed on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee they were in the country of the Gergesenes (or Gadarenes). Two men who lived in the tombs met them after they landed. They were described as fierce, so that no one could pass their way. These men were demon-possessed and when they saw Jesus the demons inside them cried out, "What have we to do with you, Jesus, You Son of God?" In this chapter Jesus has already referred to Himself as the "Son of Man", which was His typical title. Here we find that demons recognized Jesus as the "Son of God".

The demons wanted to know if Jesus was there to torment them before the time, perhaps a reference to Revelation 20:10. The demons mentioned to Jesus that there was a herd of pigs nearby (which was contrary to the Law of Moses) and asked that Jesus send them into the swine.

Jesus spoke a single word, "Go", and the demons entered the swine which subsequently ran into the Sea of Galilee and drowned. The keepers of the herd of swine ran into town telling everyone what had happened to their pigs and also the two demon-possessed men. At this, the people of the town came to Jesus and begged Him to leave their country. Their reaction was completely different from those who saw other miracles that Jesus performed. Instead of drawing closer to Him they asked Him to leave.

Matthew chapter 9

This chapter describes the continuing healing ministry of Jesus, including the first time He raised someone from the dead.

Healing a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:1-8)

Jesus returned from the land of the Gergesenes across the Sea of Galilee to His own city of Capernaum (Matthew 4:12-13). After Jesus and His disciples arrived people brought a paralyzed man to Him. While there is no indication in the Gospel that the paralyzed man asked to be healed, Matthew clearly points out the faith of those who carried the man to Jesus.

Jesus used one of His favorite phrases in verse 2, "be of good cheer", and then instead of healing the paralyzed man He simply said, "your sins are forgiven". When the scribes heard this they immediately thought that Jesus was blaspheming, knowing that only God could forgive sins (Luke 5:21). Jesus knew what was in their hearts and asked them which was easier to say, "your sins are forgiven" or "arise and walk"? Then Jesus pointedly proves to them that He is

indeed God, when He commanded the paralyzed man to get up and walk. Obviously it would be easier to say "your sins are forgiven", but if someone says to a paralyzed man, "get up and walk" and he does, then that would prove the great power that person possessed.

In this case, there was no question as to the authenticity of the miracle. The paralyzed man was immediately healed and walked. The crowd marveled and glorified God and the power Jesus possessed. This miracle is one more proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

Matthew's calling as a disciple (9:9-13)

While in Capernaum Jesus happened to see a man named Matthew who was busy at his job. In this case, Matthew's job was that of a tax collector. In New Testament times this was one of the most reviled jobs that any Jewish person could hold. They were considered to be traitors to their own people. Tax collectors made their salary by extorting additional taxes from the people. They were considered dishonest and were commonly classed together with sinners, as in the phrase, "tax collectors and sinners" (verses 10 and 11).

When Jesus told Matthew "follow me", he immediately left his tax collecting job and became a disciple. One of the first things Matthew did after this was to invite Jesus to dinner. While Jesus was eating in Matthew's house many tax collectors and sinners also ate with them. The Pharisees were concerned that Jesus was associating with tax collectors and sinners and asked Jesus' disciples why He did this.

In answer Jesus stated that only sick people go to the doctor, not those who are well. Jesus also challenged the Pharisees to understand what the prophet Hosea said in Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice". Too often we hold the same position as the Pharisees when it comes to our interaction with people. Instead of seeing people as Jesus did, as spiritually sick people who need spiritual healing, we often turn up our noses at those we consider "sinners". Jesus ate with and associated with sinners. Our calling today is to do the same. We must point

people to the One who can heal what ails them. As Jesus said in verse 13, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance".

Questions about fasting (9:14-17)

John's disciples came to Jesus and asked why He and His disciples did not fast like the Pharisees and they did. In reply Jesus said that the friends of a bridegroom do not fast while he is at the party. But, when the bridegroom was absent then his friends would fast.

Then Jesus spoke the familiar words in verses 16 and 17 about putting new cloth on an old garment, which results in a worse tear. He also stated that you do not put new wine in old wineskins since the new wine will continue to ferment destroying the old wineskin. Rather, you put new wine in new wineskins. What Jesus is saying is that His ministry is completely different from any that had come before. While fasting is an honored part of a spiritual life, Jesus was not bound by the traditions of previous religious leaders. This is our example today as we follow Jesus. We are to see ourselves as new wine placed in new wineskins, not trying to conform to what earlier traditions might expect or teach.

Raising a girl from the dead (9:18-26)

While still in Capernaum a ruler of the Jews came and worshipped Jesus telling Him that his daughter had just died. Then the ruler said something completely out of the ordinary, "come and lay your hand on her and she will live". While Jesus was beginning to be known in that region as a worker of miracles, up until this point He had not done anything as amazing as raising someone from the dead. The great faith of this Jewish ruler caused Jesus and His disciples to get up immediately and go toward the man's house.

While they were on the way to the ruler's house a woman in the crowd came up behind Jesus in order to touch the hem of His garment. She was someone who had suffered for twelve

years with a bleeding disorder. As such, she would have been considered unclean by Jewish standards. It was also not permitted for women to touch a man such as she did. But, this woman was willing to violate several traditions because she had said, "if I only touch the hem of His garment I will be clean". Here we find another example of great faith. Jesus turned around and said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well".

Finally Jesus and His disciples made it to the ruler's house where the funeral was already underway for the girl that had died. It was customary for the dead to be buried within 24 hours of their passing in Jesus' time. There were already wailers and musicians present when Jesus arrived. He told them to make room because the girl was not dead, only asleep. Imagine what your reaction would be if someone came to the home of someone who had died and informed the family that the deceased was not really dead. We would be offended and appalled. This was the same reaction that greeted Jesus when He spoke. However, Jesus went inside the house, took the girl's hand and raised her from the dead. Immediately she was brought back to life. Imagine how this miracle would have electrified the crowd! As Matthew records, "the report of this went into all that land" (verse 26).

Healing the blind and mute (9:27-34)

When Jesus left the ruler's house two blind men followed and cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on us"! Notice that these blind men believed that Jesus was a descendant of David, thus of royal descent. Jesus asked if they believed He was able to heal their blindness. He is asking the same question of us today! The blind men replied, "Yes, Lord" indicating their understanding of the authority of Jesus. They were immediately healed and able to see. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone, and they promptly went out and told everyone, disobeying Jesus due to their excitement over being healed.

A demon-possessed man who was unable to speak was brought to Jesus. When Jesus cast out the demon the man was able to speak and this caused the multitude to marvel saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel". Instead of rejoicing that the demon had been cast out of this mute man, the Pharisees accused Jesus of using the power of Satan in order to cast out the demon (Luke 11:14-23), a charge that they would later repeat (Matthew 12:22-30).

The compassion of Jesus (9:35-38)

Leaving Capernaum, Jesus went about the region of the Sea of Galilee into the cities and villages. This part of His ministry included teaching, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease.

Of course His healing caused many people to want to be near Him, and the crowds began to grow larger. When Jesus saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion. This should be our example for today. We should also be moved with compassion when we survey the multitudes of people who are lost in sin.

Jesus described the multitudes as sheep that were wearied and scattered, without a shepherd. This is the situation of our world today! If only we could see the world the way Jesus did. He stated that the harvest was truly plentiful, but the laborers are few (just like today). Then Jesus instructed His disciples to pray to God that He would send more laborers into the fields. Even if we are unable to enter the fields ourselves we must still pray that God would send others in our place.

Matthew chapter 10

This chapter describes the calling of the Twelve Apostles. Most of the chapter consists of Jesus' instructions to the Apostles when He sent them out on their first mission.

The Twelve Apostles (10:1-4)

The calling of the Twelve Apostles is also described in Mark 6:7-13 and Luke 6:12-16. While Jesus had numerous disciples He chose twelve men to become Apostles. He gave them power over unclean spirits and to heal all kinds of sickness and disease.

The Twelve Apostles named by Matthew are almost identical to those listed by Luke. The only difference is Lebbaeus Thaddaeus who is called Judas, the son of James in Luke. It is interesting that Matthew only records the profession of one of the Apostles, himself. He is called Matthew the tax collector. Judas Iscariot is named as the one who betrayed Jesus.

The Apostles' instructions (10:5-42)

When Jesus sent the Apostles on their first mission it was under a limited commission, as opposed to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. The Apostles were forbidden to go into the way of the Gentiles; they were not to enter any city of the Samaritans. Rather, they were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

As they went to the lost sheep of the house of Israel they were to preach, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand". They were commanded to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. These were all miracles that Jesus had previously performed. They were to trust in God's provision. They were not allowed to take a bag, extra tunic, sandals, or staff. Wherever they went they were to inquire where they could stay and were supposed to stay in that house as long as they were in the city. If the household was worthy, their peace would rest on it. If the household was not worthy, their peace would return to them. In the extreme case where a city would not welcome the Apostles, they were commanded to shake the dust off of their sandals as a testimony against that place. Jesus stated that it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that inhospitable city. Since we know about the judgment that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah and how wicked

those two cities were, this is a terrible indictment of those cities that would not welcome the Apostles.

Jesus then tells the Apostles that they would be persecuted, not that they might, but it was a certainty. They were being sent out as sheep among wolves. They were to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. Jesus warns that "men" would deliver them to councils and that the Apostles would be scourged. They would be brought before governors and kings for His sake.

"When" (not if) they were delivered to the authorities, the Apostles were not to worry about what they would say. The Spirit of God would enable them to answer anytime it was required. Jesus describes a period of conflict where a brother would deliver up his own brother, or a father would deliver up his own children and cause them to be put to death. Such things did occur and continue to occur when people choose to follow Jesus. As Jesus said, "you will be hated by all for My name's sake". This still happens to believers today. But Jesus also promises, "he who endures to the end will be saved".

Again, Jesus warns, "When", not if, the Apostles were persecuted in one city, they were to flee to another. He also stated that the Apostles would not be able to go into all of the cities of Israel before "the Son of Man comes". Perhaps Jesus was referring to the end of His earthly ministry, or was referring to a specific time during His ministry. He was not referring to His second coming.

The reason that the Apostles would be persecuted was because they were disciples of the Teacher and servants of the Master. Since the Jews (and others) persecuted Jesus, including calling Him Beelzebub (Matthew 9:34), they would likewise do the same to His followers. But, Jesus instructs the Apostles not to fear because everything will eventually be

revealed. So, they were to preach from the housetops what they heard in the ear and to speak in the light what they heard in the dark.

The Apostles were not to fear men because men can only kill the body. Rather, they were to fear the One who is able to destroy both body and soul, that is, God. God's power is described by Jesus in verses 29-31. Jesus said that God knows even when a sparrow falls to the ground. God also knows the number of hairs on our head. Since God knows these things, the Apostles are not to fear men.

Jesus then teaches about the necessity of confessing Him. If a person confesses Christ before men, Jesus will confess him before His Father in heaven (Revelation 3:5). On the other hand, if we choose not to confess Christ, or deny Him, then Jesus will also deny us before God. Because of the necessity of confessing Christ there will be division among people. Some will confess Christ, others will deny Him. In this sense, Jesus "did not come to bring peace but a sword". He quotes from Micah 7:6 to show that even families will be divided because of Him.

Jesus also shows the cost of following Him. If you love your father, mother, son, or daughter more than you love Christ you cannot be His disciple. In verses 37 and 38, Jesus says twice some are "not worthy of Me". If we allow family relationships to come between us and Christ, or if we refuse to take up our cross and follow Him, then this description would apply to us. Jesus then makes a statement in verse 39 that is exactly opposite what the world teaches. He says that if we lose our life for Him then we will actually have found it, but if we find our life (and not Jesus) we will actually lose what we thought we had. This directly contradicts what the world teaches.

In His final instructions to the Apostles Jesus tells them that whoever receives them actually receives the Father. Then He discusses receiving prophets, righteous men, and finally

something as simple as giving a cup of water to a little one. In each case the person receiving the other will likewise receive a reward from God (Hebrews 13:2).

Matthew chapter 11

The messengers of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:1-19)

When Jesus concluded His instructions to the Apostles in chapter 10 He departed from there and went alone to teach and preach in the cities surrounding the Sea of Galilee. His Apostles went out on their first mission. Matthew does not record their return and the results of their mission, but Mark does in Mark 6:12-13, 30.

While Jesus was on His own mission John the Baptist sent two disciples to ask a couple of questions. John the Baptist had been put into prison by this time, something Matthew elaborates on in Matthew 14:3-4. While he was imprisoned he heard about the works of Jesus. The two disciples were to ask Jesus, "Are you the coming one, or do we look for another?"

These questions seem strange considering that John the Baptist knew who Jesus was. He was related to Jesus, he had baptized Jesus, he had been present when the Holy Spirit descended and the voice of God proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God. John had even identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)". So why now does he send disciples to find out who Jesus was?

There are a couple of possibilities. One is that John wanted these disciples to ask Jesus for their own sake, so that they would have confirmation of Jesus' identity. The other possibility is that John the Baptist was experiencing doubts because of his incarceration. This would be perfectly understandable given the situation. Whatever the reason for the questions, Jesus provides a response and proof for these disciples to take back to John.

Jesus commanded them to go back and tell John what they saw and heard. He specifically mentioned how the blind see, how the lame walk, how lepers were cleansed, how the deaf hear, how the dead were raised, and that the poor had the gospel preached to them. All of these are manifestations of the ministry of Jesus; all of them have been documented by Matthew in his Gospel.

When John's disciples left, Jesus spoke to the multitudes about the ministry of John the Baptist. He asked them what they went out to see. Did they expect a reed shaken by the wind, or someone in soft garments? The answer to these questions is, no. Did they go out to see a prophet? Yes, Jesus said, and more than a prophet.

Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the one prophesied by Malachi (Malachi 3:1), the messenger who would go before the Messiah and prepare the way. Yet Jesus also states that while no greater one had been born up to that time than John the Baptist, even the person considered least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he.

What does Jesus mean? He explains in verse 13. Jesus states that the law and prophets continued until John the Baptist. However, John was the end of the law and prophets and now that Jesus' ministry has commenced something new and better is at hand. The new and better thing is identified as the kingdom of heaven. Jesus explained in Luke 16:16, that since the time of John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven had been preached, or as Matthew says, "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence" (Matthew 11:12). Jesus makes clear that there is a definite ending of the old (law and prophets, culminating in John the Baptist's ministry) and beginning of the new (kingdom of heaven, originating in Jesus' ministry). Therefore, the least person in the kingdom of heaven is said to be greater than John.

But Jesus makes certain to honor the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus states that John was in fact Elijah who was to come (Luke 1:17; Mark 9:11-13) even though John the

Baptist denied being Elijah (John 1:19-23). And Jesus then commands those who have ears to hear what He is about to say. The problem is that all of us have ears and all of us can hear what God would say to us, but too many times we do not want to listen. We know what God wants from us but we act as if we do not hear.

Our society is very much like the society in the time of Jesus. He likened His generation to children in the marketplace who at various times play a tune but no one dances, or mourn and no one laments. Children are very fickle. They do not have long attention spans; unfortunately neither do adults who choose not to use their ears to hear what Jesus says.

There was no pleasing Jesus' generation. When John the Baptist came he did not eat or drink and the people said "he has a demon". Then Jesus comes upon the scene eating and drinking and those same people now say, "a glutton and a winebibber", in other words exactly the opposite of John. They also said that Jesus was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners". Surely Matthew must have smiled when he wrote this! Praise God that Jesus was a friend of sinners. He is calling the church to the same thing today!

Those who do not repent (Matthew 11:20-24)

After Jesus honored John the Baptist He began rebuking those cities in which many of His miracles were performed. The reason they were rebuked is quite simple: they did not repent (Matthew 11:20). Chorazin, a city north of Capernaum is mentioned first. This city is only mentioned one other time in scripture, a parallel account found in Luke 10:13. The next city is Bethsaida, on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida was the home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44). Bethsaida is also commonly thought to be the location for the feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21).

While Jesus does not specify the sins of these cities, He makes it clear that they are being rebuked because they would not repent. In fact, Jesus states that if the miracles

performed in these cities had been done in Tyre (a coastal city of Phoenicia, and one of the most northern cities in Israel) or Sidon (a coastal city north of Tyre) they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. It is interesting to note that when Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21-28) He encountered a Canaanite woman who manifested more faith than many Jews did. Because of the lack of repentance on the part of Chorazin and Bethsaida, Jesus said that it would be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Gentile cities like Tyre and Sidon!

Jesus then turns His attention to the town that He called home, Capernaum. He describes Capernaum as wanting to be lifted up to heaven, but in reality, brought down low. If the miracles that had been performed in Capernaum had been done in Sodom it would still exist! In fact, it will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Sodom, even with all of the sins associated with that place, than it will be for Capernaum. The reason is because Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum refused to repent even though Jesus was there in person.

Promises of Jesus (Matthew 11:25-30)

The last part of this chapter contains many wonderful words. Jesus thanks the Father for revealing His truth to babes. He states that all things have been delivered to Jesus by His Father. He says that no one knows the Son except the Father (which is a claim that Jesus is the Son of God) and that no one knows the Father except the Son (another claim that Jesus is the Son of God). This fact would make it very difficult for us to be obedient to God if Jesus had not also said that we can know God because "the Son wills to reveal Him". Since only Jesus can know the Father, He must reveal things about God to people. He did this first with His Apostles and they revealed these truths about God to us through the Bible.

Verses 28-30 contain beautiful promises from Jesus. He commands, "Come unto Me". Those "who labor and are heavy laden" are to come to Him. Our society is filled with people

who labor and are heavy laden. They know that they need something, but perhaps not exactly what that is, or *Who* it is they need. It is the duty of the church to share these precious words of Jesus with those people. Jesus promises that He will give them rest. This is what the world is looking for. We have the answer to the world's problems if we will only share it with them! When people come to Jesus He expects them to take His yoke upon themselves and learn from Him. Jesus expects action on the part of those who would come to Him for rest. He expects us to see and learn that He is gentle and lowly in heart (meek).

When we come to Jesus, take His yoke and learn from Him we "will find rest for our souls". This gives us the confidence we need to make it through any trouble. While Jesus does expect action on our part He also promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Matthew chapter 12

Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8)

As Jesus and His disciples passed through a grain field on the Sabbath Day the disciples picked some of the grain and ate it. The Pharisees condemned this act as a violation of the Sabbath Day. According to the Law of Moses (Exodus 20:8-11), no work was to be done on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees interpreted what the disciples had done as work.

Jesus asked two questions of the Pharisees in response. First, He asked them if they had read what King David had done in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, when David and his men ate the showbread in the house of God, which was a direct violation of God's law. Yet, Jesus knew that the Pharisees did not consider David to have broken the law. He also asked if the Pharisees had read in the Law about how the priests in the temple performed work on the Sabbath Day (Numbers 28:9-10). Of course, the Pharisees did not consider what the priests did in the temple on the Sabbath to be work, so Jesus used these examples to answer their condemnation of the disciples.

Jesus then went on to announce that someone greater than the temple was present in the temple. By this Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees had become so interested in protecting the temple and the Sabbath that they had forgotten God Himself who was the originator of both. Jesus could also be referring to Himself in verse 6, but He certainly was referring to the Father.

Jesus then quoted from Hosea 6:6 and stated that if the Pharisees had understood what it meant they would not have condemned the guiltless. Here He might be referring to the disciples as being guiltless, that is, they had not broken the Sabbath by eating grain, but He probably also had reference to the eventual rejection that He would experience at the hands of the Pharisees. Jesus then concluded His answer by stating that He was Lord, even of the Sabbath.

Healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14)

From there Jesus went into a synagogue where there was a man present who had a withered hand. Those present asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. The Pharisees would consider healing to be a violation of the Sabbath. In reply, Jesus asked them if anyone would pull a sheep out of a hole on the Sabbath. The obvious answer is yes. Since mankind is much more valuable than a sheep, Jesus said that it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath.

Jesus healed the man there on the Sabbath. Verse 14 tells us that the Pharisees began from this moment to plot how they might destroy Jesus. From this point on there would be constant conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of the Jewish nation culminating in His betrayal and crucifixion.

Jesus, the fulfillment of prophecy (Matthew 12:15-21)

After Jesus left the synagogue, great multitudes followed Him. Matthew records that Jesus healed them all. He also warned them not to spread the news about Him. Matthew records that this was a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-4, and Isaiah 49:3.

In Isaiah's passage the Servant whom God chose was also the Beloved in whom God's soul was well-pleased. Jesus is the one Isaiah was prophesying about. It is very interesting that Isaiah also promises that the Messiah would declare justice to the Gentiles and that the Gentiles would trust in His name. Isaiah was prophesying about us.

A divided house cannot stand (Matthew 12:22-30)

Out of the great multitude following Jesus was a man who was demon-possessed, unable to see or speak. Jesus healed this man and this healing so amazed the multitude that many of them asked, "Could this be the Son of David?" which was a term referring to the Messiah.

The Pharisees claimed, once again, that Jesus cast out demons through the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (Matthew 9:34). Jesus knew their thoughts and replied in words that have been used by many through the ages: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand".

Jesus exposes the fallacy of the Pharisees argument. Satan cannot cast out Satan because that would mean his kingdom would fall. Jesus asked the Pharisees how their sons were able to cast out demons, was it by the power of Satan? Jesus then states that His casting out demons by the Spirit of God proves that the kingdom of God has come.

Jesus bound the power of Satan when He cast out demons during His earthly ministry. Satan continues to be bound by the power of Christ to this day. Once Jesus bound Satan He was able to cast demons out of those whom Satan had control over.

Verse 30 seems to be in direct opposition to what Mark records in Mark 9:38-41. In Matthew, Jesus says that if you are not with Him you are against Him, while in Mark; Jesus says that if you are not against Him you are for Him. The key to understanding these two verses is to see that they were spoken in different contexts. In Matthew, Jesus was replying to the Pharisees who had attributed His healing to the power of Satan, while in Mark, Jesus was referring to those who were casting out demons in His name, but who were not following Him as the disciples were. Verse 30 leads directly into Jesus' teaching concerning the unpardonable sin.

The unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:31-32)

Every sin can be forgiven except for one. Jesus defines the unpardonable sin as "blasphemy against the Spirit". What does it mean to blaspheme the Spirit? Remember that this teaching takes place in the direct context of what the Pharisees said, that Jesus cast out demons, not through the Spirit of God, but through the power of Beelzebub. This was blasphemy against the Spirit. As Jesus explains, if you speak a word against Jesus it can be forgiven. For proof all you have to do is see that some of those who cried out for the death of Jesus were the ones who were saved on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. However, if you speak against the Spirit of God, such as the Pharisees did that can never be forgiven.

Another way of looking at it is that the Holy Spirit provided us with the Word of God, which reveals the teachings of Jesus. The Holy Spirit also pleads with us to accept the message He has given through the Word. If we refuse to accept the message of Jesus revealed by the Spirit there is no forgiveness.

Known by your fruit (Matthew 12:33-37)

Each tree is known by its fruit. We don't plant apple trees and expect to get peaches. Also, a tree is expected to produce good fruit, otherwise it is worthless to us. Jesus continues His argument against the Pharisees which began when He cast the demon out earlier in the chapter by calling them a "brood of vipers". Their fruit was not good, it was evil, and culminated in their rejection of Jesus.

Jesus warns that it is our heart that determines what kind of fruit we produce. If our heart is good, we will produce good fruit. If our heart is bad, we will produce bad fruit. The Pharisees produced bad fruit because their hearts were bad.

Jesus also warns that we will answer for every idle word we speak (Revelation 20:12), just like the Pharisees will someday answer for attributing Jesus' miracles to the power of Satan. Our words justify or condemn us and come from our heart.

Asking for a sign (Matthew 12:38-42)

After this the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove who He was. Jesus called them "evil and adulterous" because they asked for this in light of all the miracles He had performed. He also said that the only sign He would provide to them would be the sign of Jonah.

We are all familiar with the story of Jonah (Jonah 1:17), how he was instructed by God to preach to the city of Nineveh and ran the other way. In his attempt to get away from God he was swallowed by a great fish and spent three days and three nights in the belly of that fish. Jesus said that He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and that would be the sign proving that He was the Son of God.

This was fulfilled in His death, burial, and resurrection which Matthew will record in later chapters and forms the foundation of our belief to this day. Jesus also said that the men of

Nineveh would rise and condemn His generation because they repented when Jonah preached to them, and yet a greater than Jonah was provided to the Jews.

The queen of the South (Sheba) would also rise up and condemn Jesus' generation since she traveled many miles to listen to the words of Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13) and a greater than Solomon was provided to the Jews. These words were spoken specifically to the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of the Jewish nation. Jesus continues His argument in the next section.

Return of an unclean spirit (Matthew 12:43-45)

The Jewish nation had become like a man who once was rid of an unclean spirit, but did nothing to fill the void. He swept his house and left it empty. When the unclean spirit returns and sees the emptiness he finds seven more spirits, even more wicked than himself, and they take over. Perhaps Jesus is referring to the destruction of the Jewish nation that took place in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. In any event, He is warning the Jews that they need to take care of their house.

Arrival of Mary, and Jesus' brothers (Matthew 12:46-50)

While Jesus was speaking, His mother and brothers arrived. They sent word that they were waiting to see Him. When Jesus was told this He asked "Who are My mother and my brothers?" Then He pointed to His disciples and identified them as His family. He also promised that all those who do the will of God are to be referred to as His brother, sister, and mother. This shows that spiritual ties are more important than physical ones.

Matthew chapter 13

This chapter contains some of the most well-known parables Jesus told. The parables were told publicly to the multitude which followed Him and also privately to the Apostles. Part of the chapter also contains explanations which Jesus provided to the Apostles.

The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-9)

After the arrival of Jesus' family (Matthew 12:46-50) He went to the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd gathered and Jesus got into a boat going a short distance offshore while the crowd remained standing on the shore. This enabled Jesus' voice to carry so the crowd could hear.

This parable is explained later in the chapter. In it Jesus tells of a sower who went out to sow. In ancient days, before mechanized vehicles, farmers grew crops in small plots casting their seed broadside (by hand). As the sower cast his seed some fell by the wayside and was eaten by birds, some fell on stony places, sprouting up quickly, but dying because of the shallowness of the dirt. Other seed fell among thorns which overwhelmed the seed, and some fell on good ground where it brought forth a crop of varying size. Jesus ended this parable with a common warning, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear".

The purpose of parables (Matthew 13:10-17)

The disciples came to Jesus asking Him why He spoke in parables instead of speaking plainly. Jesus replied by reminding the Apostles that they had been granted the ability to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but that the multitude did not have this benefit.

Still speaking where the multitude could hear, Jesus said that those who have (the disciples) would receive more, but those who have not (the multitude) would have even less than they did right now. He stated that the reason He spoke in parables was because the multitude refused to see, hear, or understand. Many of them only followed Jesus to see

miracles. Jesus applied the words of Isaiah 6:9-10 to the multitude. He said that their hearts were dull, their ears hard of hearing, and their eyes were closed.

If only the multitude would open their hearts, ears, and eyes! Then Jesus would be able to heal them. While they looked for the miraculous they failed to see that their greatest need was faith. Jesus closes this explanation for parables by saying to the disciples that they were blessed. They were experiencing what many prophets and righteous men had longed for in the past.

The explanation of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18-23)

Again, in the hearing of the multitude and the Apostles, Jesus explains the meaning of the parable of the sower. The seed eaten by birds represents those who hear the gospel without understanding. Because of their lack of understanding the wicked one (Satan) is able to snatch the seed away before it can sprout in faith.

The seed that fell on rocky places without much dirt represents those who hear the gospel and immediately receive it, but because of the lack of good soil these will fail to grow. When tribulation comes the ones planted in rocky soil will stumble. Those growing among the thorns represent people who accept the gospel but allow the cares and riches of the world to influence them and never bear fruit.

Then there are those who are planted in good soil. Jesus really only talks about two types of soil, the good soil which brings forth a bountiful harvest and bad soil (wayside, rocky, and thorns) which all result in no fruit. Those who are planted in good soil represent those who hear and understand the gospel. The difference between the good soil and the wayside is understanding or not understanding. If you hear and understand you will bear fruit (some 30 fold, some 60 fold, and some 100 fold) indicating degrees of fruitfulness.

The parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30)

This parable (told to the multitude and the disciples) is prefaced by, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." In this case, it is like a man who sows good wheat seed in his field, but while men were sleeping an enemy comes and sows tares (weeds) in the same field.

When the wheat begins to grow so do the weeds. The workers ask if the weeds should be pulled up and the owner of the field says, "no". If the workers tried to remove the weeds they would probably damage the wheat crop. The owner has a solution, wait until the harvest then cut everything down. Once this happens it will be easy to separate the wheat from the weeds. This parable is explained to the Apostles later in the chapter.

The parables of the mustard seed and leaven (Matthew 13:31-33)

These short parables appear together and contain similar teachings. Each is prefaced by "The kingdom of heaven is like..." and each is told to both the multitude and the disciples.

In the case of the mustard seed, the kingdom of heaven is described as beginning very small but eventually growing into a plant that is large enough for birds to build nests in. This is exactly what happened when the church was established on the Day of Pentecost. Starting with only a small number of believers, 3000 people were saved on that day and the church has spread into all regions of the world in the ensuing centuries.

In the case of the leaven, the kingdom of heaven is described as a woman making bread. She adds a small amount of leaven to the ingredients and this impacts all she bakes. This is also a picture of the church. From a very small beginning it has risen like a loaf of bread impacted by yeast. Once yeast is introduced into the ingredients for bread it cannot be hidden for long.

Explanation of the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:34-43)

Following the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven Jesus sent the multitude away. Then Jesus went back to the house which He had left earlier that day. His disciples came and asked Him for an explanation of the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Jesus provides the explanation for each item in the parable privately to His disciples. The sower is the Son of Man (Jesus), the field is the world, the good seed represents the sons of the kingdom (Christians) while the tares represent the sons of the wicked one (unbelievers). The enemy who sows the tares is the Devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.

While presently the tares exist alongside the wheat Jesus states that when the end of the age comes He will send His angels to gather out of the kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness. This is a warning to all of us. We who consider ourselves to be part of the wheat must be diligent to make sure we are not actually a weed! We must keep ourselves from things that offend and lawlessness.

One of two things will happen to each of us at the end of the age. Either we will be among those whom the angels gather out of the kingdom or we will be considered righteous. The weeds will be cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth while the wheat will shine forth as the sun. These are the only possibilities. Once again Jesus ends this explanation with a customary warning, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The parables of the hidden treasure, pearl of great price, and dragnet (Matthew 13:44-52)

These three parables were told to the disciples privately. Each of them is prefaced with, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." In the first, the kingdom is said to be like a treasure hidden in

a field. When it is found you should be willing to sell everything you have in order to buy that field.

In the second, the kingdom is said to be like a merchant looking for pearls. He finds the one pearl he has always been looking for and sells everything he has in order to buy it. In the third, the kingdom is said to be like a net thrown into the water and gathering fish of all kinds (similar to the different kinds of soil in the parable of the sower). When the dragnet is brought to land the fishermen go through everything and separate the good fish from the bad. Jesus expands this parable to include teaching about the end of the age. He states that the angels will separate the wicked from the just. Again, just like His explanation of the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus warns that the wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He was talking about in these parables and they replied, "Yes, Lord" (see Matthew 13:10-17). He then commends the disciples as being those who are instructed in the kingdom of heaven. They are like a householder who brings out of his treasure things both old and new.

Jesus rejected in Nazareth (Matthew 13:52-58)

After teaching in parables to the multitudes and to the disciples, Jesus left Capernaum and returned to His own country (Nazareth). He taught in the synagogues and astonished everyone. These people in His hometown figured that they knew who Jesus was. They correctly identified Him as the carpenter's son. They knew His mother was Mary and that He had James, Joses, Simon, and Judas as brothers, along with several unnamed sisters.

The problem was that they really didn't know who Jesus was. They could not see past the fact that He had grown up in Nazareth. Now He was back teaching in their synagogues. Undoubtedly, news of His miracles and previous teachings had been spread even in Nazareth.

Now, the people were offended at Him. Unfortunately, many people today are also offended at Jesus. Because they continued in their unbelief, Matthew records that Jesus did not perform many miracles there. Jesus explained the lack of faith by saying, "a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house".

Matthew chapter 14

The murder of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12)

More details concerning the murder of John the Baptist can be found in Mark 6:14-29 and Luke 9:7-9, but the essential details are provided by Matthew in this passage. Herod, one of the rulers of Judea, heard about the ministry of Jesus and concluded that the marvelous works were being done by a resurrected John the Baptist.

Matthew then describes what had happened to John the Baptist previously. Herod had put John in prison because John had preached against Herod and his relationship with his brother Philip's wife, a woman named Herodias. Herod had convinced Herodias to leave her husband and marry him. John correctly identified this situation as adultery and preached against it. What Herod and Herodias had committed was contrary to the Law of Moses.

Herod was so angry that he wanted to kill John but feared what might happen if he did. The multitudes considered John the Baptist to be a prophet and if Herod killed him the multitudes would turn against him, so John was kept in prison (Matthew 11:1-19).

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias came and danced before him and his guests. This dance pleased Herod and he made a rash promise to the girl that he would give her anything she wanted. Mark records that he offered up to half of his kingdom (Mark 6:23). The girl consulted with her mother (who also hated John the Baptist) and Herodias told her to

ask for John's head on a platter. The girl returned to Herod and made the request which Herod reluctantly granted.

Herod sent guards into the prison to behead John the Baptist and bring his head on a platter. After he was murdered his disciples came and buried the body and then went to tell Jesus. The ministry of John the Baptist had ended.

Jesus feeds 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21)

When the disciples of John came and told Jesus about what had happened Jesus left by boat to go to a deserted place. The murder of John the Baptist affected Jesus. Not only was John a relative, but he was the one who had baptized Jesus and prepared the people for His ministry. Many times we do not think about the humanity of Jesus, but this is one occasion when His humanity is clearly seen. He wanted to be alone to grieve for John.

But, although Jesus wanted to be alone, the multitudes followed Him. When Jesus saw the great crowds of people He had compassion on them and healed all the sick among them. While Jesus was engaged in this healing ministry His disciples arrived around evening. They saw the great multitudes, and seeing how late in the day it was, told Jesus to send the people away so they could find something to eat.

Jesus told the disciples that the multitude did not need to leave and then commanded them to feed the great crowd. This was not what the disciples had in mind. In fact, they told Jesus it was impossible. All they had were five loaves of bread and two fish, which would not be enough for them, let alone the rest of the crowd (John 6:1-14).

Then Jesus commanded the disciples to bring the food they had. He commanded the disciples to have the multitude sit down then blessed and broke the loaves and fish. He gave the food to the disciples who in turn gave it to the multitudes. Everyone ate as much as they

wanted. Following the meal the disciples gathered what remained and discovered there were twelve baskets full of leftovers. The leftovers far surpassed what they started with even after 5,000 men, not to mention women and children ate all they could. This is one of the most remarkable miracles Jesus performed.

Jesus and Peter walk on water (Matthew 14:22-33)

After the feeding of the multitude Jesus commanded His disciples to get into a boat and cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus stayed behind to dismiss the crowd. After the multitude left Jesus went up on a mountain alone to pray (which was His original intention after receiving news about the death of John). At the end of the day Jesus was there alone while the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee battling a storm.

During the fourth watch (corresponding to the time between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m.) Jesus came to them by walking on the water. The disciples, who had been trying to cross the Sea of Galilee for hours, looked out and saw someone walking on the water. This scared them even more than the storm did and they thought it must be a ghost.

However, Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, It is I". Peter wanted to be sure and he asked that he be allowed to also walk on the water if it really was Jesus. When Jesus said, "Come", Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water as well. A lot of times Peter is criticized because he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink, but we should highlight the fact that he did get out of the boat!

When Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and began to look at the waves and wind he sank. He cried out to Jesus for help and Jesus reached out His hand and rescued Peter. He chastised Peter for having "little faith" and doubting. Then Jesus got into the boat and the storm ceased. Once this miracle occurred the disciples worshipped Jesus saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God".

Other miracles (Matthew 14:34-36)

After Jesus and Peter got back into the boat they safely crossed over the Sea of Galilee to Gennesaret (on the western side of the Sea). The people of that region recognized Jesus and brought all those who were sick to Him. Notice how different their reception of Jesus was compared to what happened at Nazareth (Matthew 13:58). In Gennesaret they believed in Jesus and begged to even touch His garment. All those who even touched His garment were made perfectly well.

Matthew chapter 15

The cause of sin (Matthew 15:1-20)

While Jesus was in the region of Gennesaret healing all who came to Him (Matthew 14:34-36) a group of scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem arrived. This is the first recorded contact that Jesus has had with those who represented the very center of Jewish life.

Rather than being impressed with the miracles that Jesus was performing these scribes and Pharisees lodged a complaint. They asked Jesus why He did not require His disciples to undergo the ritual washing required by the tradition of the elders. It seems that the disciples were not washing their hands before they ate. This was a violation of the tradition, not a violation of the Law of Moses. The scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem were much stricter in their religious practices than those of the outlying regions, such as Gennesaret.

In response, Jesus asked the scribes and Pharisees a question. He demanded to know why they allowed their traditions to become more important than the commandments of God. While they were concerned with traditions, Jesus was concerned about the commandments.

Jesus reminded the scribes and Pharisees that God had commanded people to honor their father and mother (Exodus 20:12). In addition, God had demanded the death penalty for

those who cursed their parents (Exodus 21:17). Yet, in spite of these clear commandments, the scribes and Pharisees had devised a way for the people to ignore God and do what they wanted.

In the time of Jesus there were no nursing homes. When someone's parents were no longer able to take care of themselves their children were expected to take them into their homes and care for them. This was a proper thing for children to do and honored God's laws. However, over time some Israelites began to feel that caring for their parents was a burden. The scribes and Pharisees determined that if someone gave the resources that they would have used to care for their parents to the temple treasury then they would not be obligated to take care of their parents. Evidently some hard-hearted Israelites had actually refused to take care of their parents claiming that they no longer had the money. This tradition violated the law of God.

Jesus correctly pointed out that the law of God had become of no effect because of this tradition. In our time we need to be mindful of the possibility that our traditions might nullify the law of God. Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites" because they were more interested in money than honoring parents. Jesus also referred to Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 29:13) which describes what causes sin: people drawing near to God with their mouths and honoring Him with their lips while their hearts are far from Him. This results in vain worship where the commandments of men are taught as doctrines.

After condemning the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus called the multitude together and urged them to "hear and understand". While the scribes and Pharisees were concerned about the possibility of eating food with dirty hands Jesus focused on what really defiles a person: the thoughts and intents inside.

The disciples came and reported to Jesus that the Pharisees were offended by His remarks. In response Jesus warned that every plant not planted by God will be uprooted and

again condemned the Pharisees as "blind leaders of the blind". The only result of the blind leading the blind is that both will fall. Peter then asked Jesus to explain the parable found in verse 11. Jesus was amazed that His disciples were still not able to understand this clear teaching.

The explanation provided to the disciples is that whatever a person eats, whether they wash their hands or not, travels through the body and eventually is eliminated from the body. This does not make a person unclean. However, when a person's heart is unclean it causes all types of sin. Jesus lists evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and blasphemy as sins that result from an evil heart. Every sin begins with a thought, and that is what Jesus said causes defilement.

The faith of a Gentile woman (Matthew 15:21-28)

Jesus and His disciples left Gennesaret and traveled about fifty miles northwest to the region of Tyre and Sidon. These cities were located near the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea and were far from the spiritual center of Judaism at Jerusalem. Sidon was actually outside the land allotted to the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

A Gentile woman, referred to as a Canaanite came to Jesus and cried out for Him to heal her daughter who was demon-possessed. This woman asked for mercy and referred to Jesus as "Lord" and "Son of David". It is remarkable that a non-Jewish woman would exhibit more faith than many of the Jews of Jesus' time. Jesus ignored the woman's request and the disciples came to Him and asked that He send her away. In response Jesus stated that He was not sent to anyone except the lost sheep of the House of Israel. At this, the woman came and worshipped Jesus, crying out, "Lord, help me!"

It was only then that Jesus spoke to the woman, saying that it was not proper to take food meant for children and give it to dogs. Jesus was explaining to her why He had not healed

her daughter. Jesus was sent to bring the Jewish nation to repentance, not to preach to the Gentile nations. The woman, instead of taking this as an insult, turned Jesus' statement around and said that even though the dogs should not receive the food meant for children, that they do eat the crumbs that fall from the table. All this woman wanted was a crumb!

When Jesus heard this He exclaimed, "great is your faith" and told her that her daughter was healed. We need to compare this woman's faith with the lack of faith exhibited by Peter on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:31) and the lack of faith on the part of many in the nation of Israel. Here was a person who did not have the spiritual advantages of the Jews, yet she manifested a great faith in Jesus and received the healing her daughter needed.

Jesus heals many (Matthew 15:29-31)

Jesus and His disciples left Tyre and Sidon and journeyed back toward the southeast passing by the Sea of Galilee. Mark records that they passed through Decapolis on the way (Mark 7:31). Decapolis was a region named for ten cities on the southeastern side of the Sea of Galilee. When they arrived, Jesus went up on a mountain and sat down.

Great multitudes came to Him and brought those who were lame, blind, mute, and maimed, along with many others. Jesus healed all who came. This great time of miracles resulted in the multitudes marveling and glorifying the God of Israel.

Feeding 4,000 (Matthew 15:32-39)

Jesus called His disciples and expressed compassion for the multitudes. He said that they had been with Him for three days and now had no food left. He explained to the disciples that He did not want to send them away since they might faint from hunger. Perhaps Jesus was trying to provide a hint to the disciples. Surely they remembered the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21).

It appears that the disciples did not take the hint because they wondered how anyone could get enough bread in the wilderness to feed such a large crowd. It amazes us to consider how many times the disciples needed a reminder of the power of Jesus!

Jesus then asked them how many loaves they had. Surely now they would remember the feeding of the 5,000! They replied that they had seven loaves of bread and a few little fish. How could they forget the twelve basketfuls of leftovers from the previous miracle?

Jesus commanded the multitude to sit, and then He took the loaves and fish and gave thanks, passing them to the disciples who passed them on to the multitude. Everyone ate as much as they wanted and there were still seven baskets full of leftovers! Matthew records that this second miraculous feeding was enjoyed by 4,000 men, not counting women and children. Jesus then sent the multitude away and got into a boat crossing back over the Sea of Galilee landing in the region of Magdala, on the western shore.

Matthew chapter 16

Seeking a sign (Matthew 16:1-4)

While Jesus and His disciples were in the region of Magdala, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Him. While the Pharisees have been mentioned several times already in Matthew's Gospel, the Sadducees appear in this passage for only the second time. They had previously been mentioned when they came to the place where John was baptizing (Matthew 3:7). This is the first recorded encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees were very strict traditionalists when it came to religion. The Sadducees were not. In fact, the Sadducees did not even believe in the resurrection of the dead (Mark 12:18). They were much more involved in politics and society than the Pharisees. But, on this

occasion, both groups set aside their differences in order to concentrate on their common enemy, Jesus.

They were not sincere in their request to see a sign. The Pharisees had already asked for a sign once before and been refused by Jesus (Matthew 12:38-42). Jesus replied to this request in much the same manner as the first time. He first chided them for being able to predict the weather based upon the signs they saw, and then called them hypocrites because they were unable to discern the signs of the times, especially concerning His mission. He then stated that only a wicked and adulterous generation would demand a sign and promised that the only sign they would receive would be that of the prophet Jonah. As shown in Matthew 12:39-42, the sign of the prophet Jonah was spending three days and nights in the belly of the fish. In like manner Jesus would spend three days and three nights in the earth. Like Jonah, Jesus would come forth on the third day. Once Jesus finished these sayings He left the Pharisees and Sadducees and the region of Magdala.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:5-12)

Jesus and His disciples crossed over to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 8:14). While they were on the lake the disciples realized they had forgotten to bring along anything to eat. As they discussed this among themselves Jesus stated that they should beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples mistakenly thought He was referring to physical leaven (yeast) that a person would use to bake bread.

This was not what Jesus was referring to. He then described the disciples as possessing "little faith". Surely by now they would not worry about forgetting to bring food. Jesus reminded them about the five loaves that He used to feed the 5,000 with twelve baskets left over (Matthew 14:13-21) and the seven loaves He used to feed the 4,000 with seven baskets left over (Matthew 15:32-39). He asked them why they did not remember or understand these events.

Then Jesus explained to the disciples that He was not talking about physical leaven, but rather that they should beware of the doctrines which the Pharisees and Sadducees taught.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:13-20)

Once Jesus and His disciples crossed over to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, they followed the Jordan River north about 30 miles to Caesarea Philippi, a city built by Philip, son of King Herod and named after Tiberius, the Caesar of Rome (Luke 3:1).

It is significant that Jesus took His disciples to a city named for the most powerful man in the world. While in this important place Jesus asked His disciples a question, the answer to which is the most important truth ever revealed to mankind.

He asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am"? Once again Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, the term He most often used to describe Himself. In response, the disciples mentioned what they had heard people say about Jesus.

Some people had said that He was John the Baptist, resurrected from the dead. This is what King Herod believed (Matthew 14:2); others thought He was Elijah (Mark 6:15); Jeremiah; or, one of the other Old Testament prophets. By this time people were beginning to take notice of Jesus and were trying to figure out who He was.

Then Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am"? He was not terribly concerned with what everyone else thought, He wanted to know what His disciples thought. Peter, as usual, was the one who spoke what was on his mind. He proclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". This confession represents the greatest statement ever made. It is the foundation upon which our faith is built.

Once Peter had made this confession, Jesus pronounced a blessing upon him. He called him Simon Bar-Jonah which simply means, "Simon, son of Jonah". Jesus also stated that

Peter had not arrived at this conclusion on his own, but rather that God in heaven had revealed this truth to him. Then Jesus made a statement that has confused some and led others to a false understanding of Peter's role. Jesus stated, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church". Some have taken Jesus' words to mean that Peter is the rock on which the church is built and have elevated him to a status not found in the Bible.

When Jesus said, "You are Peter" He used a word that is translated into Greek as *Petros*, which means a piece of rock. However, when He said, "and on this rock I will build My church" He used a word that is translated into Greek as *Petra*, which means a large mass of rock. Peter is not the "rock" upon which the church is built, rather the confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God is the "rock".

Peter was a "rock" in the early church. He was the one who preached the sermon on the Day of Pentecost resulting in 3,000 baptisms (Acts 2). He was also the one who first preached the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). However, he was also the Apostle who denied the Lord three times and was described by Jesus as "Satan" in this same chapter. While Peter was an Apostle of importance he was not of more importance than the remaining ones.

The church which Jesus said He would build comes from the Greek word, *ekklesia*, which means "a calling out". Those of us in the church are called out of the world. Jesus also stated that the gates of Hades would not prevent the building of His church. Even though Jesus would enter into the realm of the dead (Hades) following His crucifixion, He would rise from the dead and build His church. It is vital for us to remember that Jesus built only one church.

Jesus promised to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the disciples, all of them, not just Peter. Whatever was bound or loosed by the disciples would be bound or loosed in heaven. There is an alternate reading for the last part of verse 19 which perhaps makes more sense. The alternate translation states, "whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in

heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven". This reading reinforces that it is God who determines what is bound and loosed, rather than the disciples, and is probably a more accurate translation.

Following these words, Jesus commanded His disciples not to tell anyone that He was Jesus the Christ. The reason for this command seems to be that even the disciples were not prepared yet for a complete understanding of His mission.

Jesus predicts His death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-23)

Even though Jesus commanded His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ, He did begin preparing them for the events which would shortly take place. Jesus began to instruct the disciples that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders, be killed and rise on the third day. This was the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Once Jesus began revealing these things to them, Peter took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus. He told Jesus that none of these things would happen. Remember that it was Peter who confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. This was due to a revelation from God. Now Peter relies upon his own understanding to tell Jesus that He is wrong.

While Jesus called Peter a rock in verse 18, now He calls Peter "Satan". Peter is also called an "offense" to Jesus. The reason Peter is in the wrong here is that he was more concerned about the things of men than the things of God. This incident should illustrate that Peter was not the rock that Jesus said He would build His church upon.

Take up the cross (Matthew 16:24-28)

This chapter ends with some of the most well-known teachings of Jesus. He tells us that if we want to come to Him we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. There are

many who believe that people do not need to do anything to be saved but Jesus clearly teaches that we must act.

Then Jesus stands human logic on its head when He says that if we want to save our life we must lose it. This is completely contrary to the way the world operates. The world wants us to believe that we must look out for ourselves. Jesus teaches that the true way is to lose our life for His sake. If we do this He promises that we will find our lives.

Here is a question that deserves an answer: "What profit is there to gain the whole world and lose our soul"? Here is another question that we must answer: "What will a man give in exchange for his soul"? There are many in our world who are striving for wealth, fame, and possessions but who give no thought to the eternal destiny of their souls. There are many in our world who are exchanging their soul for far less than the thirty pieces of silver that Judas received for betraying Jesus.

The reason these questions are important is that Jesus one day will come in the glory of His Father, with the angels, and will reward each of us according to our works. We should reflect upon our answers to the questions that Jesus posed while we still have the opportunity.

Jesus promised that there were some standing there with Him who would not see death until they had seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. It seems that Jesus is referring to the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost. He is certainly not referring here to His second coming otherwise some of the Apostles would still be alive today. On the Day of Pentecost all of the disciples were present except Judas who had committed suicide. With the establishment of the church it would seem that Jesus came in His kingdom on the Day of Pentecost.

Matthew chapter 17

The Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-13)

Six days after the events recorded in chapter 16 in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took Peter, James and John by themselves to a mountain. Occasionally in the gospels, Jesus took this particular group of disciples aside from the rest of the twelve. Another example is found in Matthew 26:37, when Jesus took these three into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

While on the mountain Jesus' appearance was altered (transfigured) in a supernatural way. His face shone like the sun while His clothes became as white as light. Many years later, John was privileged to see another manifestation of Jesus' glory (Revelation 1:13-17). Not only was Jesus' appearance changed, Moses and Elijah also appeared on the mountain talking with Him. This appearance is also recorded in Mark 9:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36. In Luke's account we learn that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus concerning the events which would shortly take place in Jerusalem. They spoke of Jesus' crucifixion.

When the disciples saw what was taking place Peter spoke up suggesting that they erect three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. The tabernacle was a portable structure originally designed by God and built by Moses. In Exodus 40:34-38 it states that when the original tabernacle was completed the Spirit of God entered it and resided there. It seems that Peter was aware of the tremendous event that was taking place and wanted to do something to sanctify it.

While Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed the scene and a voice came from the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him!" In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus usually refers to Himself as the Son of Man. It is only others, in this case God Himself that call Jesus the Son of God. The voice of God declaring Jesus to be

His Son is found in several other passages: at His baptism (Matthew 3:17) and at His entry into Jerusalem (John 12:28-32). After seeing the cloud and hearing the voice Peter, James and John fell on their faces.

Jesus came and touched them telling them to arise. When they stood up they saw no one but Jesus. He again commanded them not tell anyone that He was the Christ. While they were descending the mountain the three disciples asked Jesus about the teaching of the scribes that Elijah must come before the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6).

Jesus answered that Elijah was coming first and would restore all things in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. Then He declared that Elijah had already come and the people had done to him what they wanted. In the same way Jesus declared that He was about to suffer at the hands of the people. Once again we see how Jesus begins emphasizing His imminent sacrifice. The disciples then understood that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist being the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.

Jesus heals a boy (Matthew 17:14-21)

After coming down from the mountain a multitude was waiting for them. A man in the crowd came to Jesus asking that He would have mercy on his son who was evidently suffering from epilepsy. The effects of the disease caused the boy to fall into the fire and into the water endangering his life. The man went on to explain that he had asked the disciples to heal his son but they were unable to. We know that the disciples had the ability to heal since Jesus had granted them that power in Matthew 10:8.

When Jesus heard this He called them a "faithless and perverse generation". He also manifested His humanity when He asked how long He would have to bear with them. Many times we do not think of the humanity of Jesus, but this event shows that He got tired and frustrated by things He encountered. He then commanded the demon to come out of the boy

(who was not suffering from epilepsy, but rather demon possession). The boy was instantly healed.

His disciples asked why they were unable to cast out the demon and Jesus told them it was a lack of faith. Then He told them that if they had faith even as small as a mustard seed they would be able to do anything. He did clarify that the demon in the boy would come out only with prayer and fasting. These are two Christian disciplines that are sadly undervalued today. We should emphasize prayer and fasting the same way Jesus did.

Another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection (Matthew 17:22-23)

While they remained in Galilee Jesus told the disciples that He was going to be betrayed, killed and raised the third day. As shown in Matthew 16:21, Jesus had already begun emphasizing the events that would take place culminating in His sacrifice in Jerusalem. When the disciples heard this they were saddened.

Paying the temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27)

Jesus and the disciples came to Capernaum (on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee). While they were there Peter was approached by those who collected the temple tax and they asked him whether or not Jesus had paid the tax. Peter answered that Jesus did pay the tax and left to find Jesus to tell Him what had happened.

As Peter entered the house where Jesus was Jesus asked him a question, "From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or strangers?" Peter immediately answered, "From strangers." Jesus then declared that the sons were free from the tax. Yet, He wanted to alleviate any concerns that the Jews had, and told Peter to go down to the lake, cast in a line, take the first fish he caught and look inside the fish's mouth. Inside the mouth he would find the money to pay the temple tax.

Matthew chapter 18

The problem with ambition (Matthew 18:1-5)

While they were still in Capernaum the disciples asked Jesus who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had already spoken about the concept of greatest and least in the kingdom of heaven in describing the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). In that case, Jesus had said that whoever was least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, the mother of James and John is recorded as asking that her two sons sit on the right and left hand of Jesus (Matthew 20:20-27). This request caused much friction with the other disciples.

To answer the disciples' question, Jesus called a small child to Him and had the child sit in the midst of the disciples. He used the child as an object lesson and explained that unless the disciples were converted and became like little children they would not even enter the kingdom of heaven. In contrast to their ambition Jesus commanded them to humble themselves like the little child. Then Jesus stated that whoever received a little child in His name would actually be receiving Jesus. Several of the sections in this chapter are concerned with explaining what it means to receive little children.

Dealing with sin (Matthew 18:6-9)

In this section Jesus illustrates the opposite of receiving little children. He states that whoever causes one of the little ones to sin would be better off being drowned in the sea. This shows the importance of a person's soul.

Jesus then pronounces "woe to the world" because of offenses, stating that offenses must come, but "woe" to that man by whom they come. Perhaps Jesus is referring to Judas and his betrayal (Matthew 26:24). Perhaps Jesus is referring to the fact that all of the disciples

eventually deserted Him (Matthew 26:31, where the alternate translation of the verse says, "All of you will be caused to take offense at Me"). Or, perhaps Jesus is referring to sin in general.

Jesus states that if our hand or foot causes us to sin we should cut it off and cast it away. This is similar to what He has previously taught in Matthew 5:29-30. It would be better to enter into life maimed and crippled than to be cast whole into hell. In similar fashion Jesus said that if our eye causes us to sin we should pluck it out and throw it away. It is better to be blind than to go to hell. Jesus had a lot to say about hell and why we should avoid it, contrary to what many people believe today.

Parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:10-14)

This parable is a continuing explanation of what it means to offend little ones. Luke records a parallel to this parable and includes two others, the lost coin and the lost son (Luke 15). Jesus begins the parable with the warning to take heed not to despise one of the little ones. He states that their angels always see the face of God in heaven (Hebrews 1:13-14). In this passage Jesus refers to God as "My Father", an indication that He considered Himself to be the Son of God. Jesus then explains His mission: "to seek and to save that which was lost". In other words, Jesus came to seek and to save us!

Then Jesus provides the parable about a man who had one hundred sheep and one goes astray. The man would leave the ninety-nine sheep which were not lost and would go and search for the one that is lost. If he should find it (notice that Jesus does not say, "when he finds it", which is an indication that sometimes the lost sheep is not found) he rejoices more over that sheep than the ones which were not lost. Jesus concludes the parable with the fact that it is not God's will that any one of these little ones should perish (John 3:16-19).

Dealing with sin among believers (Matthew 18:15-20)

The principles taught by Jesus in this section, if followed by believers today, would result in far fewer problems in the church. Too many times when there are conflicts among believers they are allowed to fester and become much more difficult to resolve.

If a brother has sinned against us we are commanded to go alone and talk with him. If he listens to us and repents we have gained our brother. However, if he will not hear us we are then commanded to take one or two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). If the problem is resolved at that point we have gained our brother. But if he refuses to listen to the witnesses then the church needs to be informed. If at that point the problem is resolved we have gained our brother, however if he refuses to listen to the members of the church then the church is to consider him to be "a heathen or a tax collector" (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

Jesus then repeats His earlier teaching to the disciples that whatever they bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. In this passage He expands this teaching to include that if two of them agree on earth concerning anything it will be done for them by God. Once again Jesus refers to God as "My Father". The best example of this teaching in practice would be the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15:22-29. Jesus then teaches that where two or three are gathered in His name He is in the midst of them. This was something John described in the Revelation 1:13 where Jesus is said to be among the churches. He is also with us today.

Parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35)

After hearing what Jesus had to say about dealing with sin Peter came to Jesus and asked how many times a person who sins against us should be forgiven. Peter offered to forgive seven times, which seems pretty generous, especially in light of the fact that many times people won't even forgive once!

In reply Jesus stated, not seven times, but seventy times seven. Jesus was not saying that we must keep track of how many times a person sins against us and when they reach 490 times then we are no longer under obligation to forgive them. In order to illustrate this teaching Jesus presented the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts. A man was brought to him who owed the sum of 10,000 talents and was unable to pay. This was a huge sum and the king ordered the man to be sold, along with his family and all his possessions. Even if this had been done the debt would have remained. The man asked the king for time, promising that he would pay all of the debt (this was an impossibility). The king was so moved by the man's request that he forgave the huge debt.

This same man after receiving forgiveness of his own debt found another man who owed him 100 day's wages, a considerable sum, but nothing compared to what his debt had been to the king. This man took hold of the other man's throat and demanded that the debt be paid. In response the other man asked for time to pay the debt (the same thing the first man had asked for). Instead of being moved with compassion like the king, the man refused to grant the request and had the other man thrown into prison.

Once the king heard about what had happened he summoned the man back and reinstated the original debt. This parable is a warning to us to be forgiving people. Our debt to God is impossible to pay, yet God freely forgives us through Christ. How can we who have been forgiven of so much refuse to forgive our brothers and sisters when they ask us?

Matthew chapter 19

Marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:1-10)

This passage has generated considerable controversy among Christians. As seen in this chapter the controversy is not restricted to modern audiences. There was much controversy about divorce even while Jesus was on earth.

Jesus and the disciples left Capernaum and went to Judea. From this point on Jesus begins to spend the majority of His time closer to Jerusalem, culminating in His betrayal and crucifixion. Multitudes followed Jesus as He left Galilee and experienced His healing ministry.

When they arrived in Judea the Pharisees came, testing Him with questions about marriage and divorce. Jesus had already taught on this issue during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:31-32) so the Pharisees undoubtedly knew what He believed.

They asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Essentially they were asking for Jesus' interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In this passage Moses taught that if a man's wife "finds no favor in his eyes" because of "some uncleanness" the man was to provide a certificate of divorce to the wife. She was then free to marry again. In the time of Jesus there were two predominant theories concerning divorce in the nation of Israel. One theory taught by Rabbi Hillel interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1-4 very loosely. To Hillel "uncleanness" could be something as insignificant as the wife burning the husband's breakfast. Uncleanness could also be more serious, including sexual sin, but it could also simply be a case where a man found another woman more attractive to him than his wife. However uncleanness was interpreted it resulted in the wife finding "no favor" in the eyes of the husband resulting in divorce.

In opposition to Rabbi Hillel, another Rabbi named Shammai interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1-4 very strictly. In this interpretation uncleanness could only be the result of sexual sin on the part of the wife. According to Shammai, a sexual sin such as adultery would result in "uncleanness" requiring the husband to divorce his wife. The only problem with this interpretation is that adultery was a sin punishable by death in Israel (Leviticus 20:10). So, the uncleanness must have been some type of sexual sin less serious than adultery.

In either case, the Jews of Jesus' day were divided as to the reasons for and the appropriateness of divorcing. The Pharisees knew that Jesus had already publicly taught that any man who divorced his wife and married another (unless he divorced the wife for sexual immorality) was guilty of adultery (essentially covenant breaking). So, the Pharisees thought that they could force Jesus to align Himself with the teachings of Rabbi Shammai which would result in the followers of Rabbi Hillel turning against Jesus.

In response Jesus asked "Have you not read..." and pointed the Pharisees back to Genesis 1:27 where it said that God created the human race male and female. He also pointed them to Genesis 2:24 where it said that a man was to leave his father and mother, be joined to his wife, and that the two would then become one. In His reply Jesus stated several things which must be emphasized in our current society.

The first thing is that Jesus does not recognize homosexual marriage. The only legitimate marriage union is between a man and a woman, regardless of what some people believe today. The second idea that needs to be understood today is that when a man and woman join together in marriage it results in a new relationship. They are no longer two separate people, but one. They can no longer live their lives as if they only had to consider themselves. Now they must consider their partner because they have been united in marriage.

This is why Jesus emphasized the teaching of verse 6, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate". According to Jesus, because of the new relationship existing as a result of marriage, it is meant to be held sacred. According to Jesus marriage is intended to be a permanent relationship, there should be no divorce whatsoever. Jesus does not ally Himself with either the teaching of Rabbi Hillel or even of Rabbi Shammai; He restores God's original design for marriage.

The Pharisees clearly understood what Jesus said. So, they asked Him why Moses commanded a certificate of divorce to be given in cases where "uncleanness" arose. The Pharisees still wanted to force Jesus into choosing sides in order to reduce His influence. In reply Jesus revealed the true reason why any failed marriage results in divorce. Jesus identified "the hardness of your hearts" as the reason God's original plan for marriage was not carried out. Moses (and God) realized that there were some people who would not be content to remain with their spouses and therefore Deuteronomy 24:1-4 addressed the results. In Old Testament times a woman had no rights, she was totally dependent upon her husband taking care of her. If the husband simply kicked her out of his house because he did not love her anymore then she would have nowhere to turn. Since God knew that some men would have hard hearts regardless of what the law said He allowed for the unwanted wife to have an opportunity to marry again. Divorce was never God's original desire. It was permitted to insure that women had opportunities to survive. As Jesus said in verse 8, "but from the beginning it was not so".

Jesus restored God's original intent for marriage, that it be a permanent union between a man and a woman. In verse 9, Jesus specifically warns that any person who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery (covenant breaking). Jesus dismisses the arguments of Rabbi Hillel. In fact, Jesus goes so far as to say that a person who marries the divorced person also commits adultery (covenant breaking). To Jesus marriage was a serious issue.

A few things need to be noticed about Jesus' teaching in verse 9. First, Jesus warns against divorce. He wanted married people to remain married in accordance with God's original design. But, if someone refuses to remain married, they need to understand that divorcing for any reason except sexual immorality by their spouse results in sin. The breaking of a covenant recognized by God is a serious offense. Adultery is a sin, but adultery is a sin just like any other sin, it can be forgiven (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) if it is repented of. Finally we need to understand that divorce ends a marriage. Notice that Jesus stated that "whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality AND MARRIES another" in this case the first marriage has ended and the second marriage has begun. The second marriage is as much of a marriage as the first. The problem is that sin has occurred. Repentance is in order for forgiveness to take place. What should be the position of the church with regard to those who find themselves in this situation?

In the past it was commonly taught that a person who was divorced had to remain unmarried or be reconciled to their first spouse. The only exception was if the original spouse had been guilty of sexual immorality (this exception allowed the divorced person to remarry). But, is this really what Jesus is teaching? Remember that Jesus stated that a person divorced his wife AND MARRIED another. Certainly Jesus did not teach that a person in this situation must then divorce the second wife and return to the first wife, or failing that, the person must divorce the second wife and remain single and celibate. Perhaps the best way to repent would be to quit divorcing your spouse! A person who is guilty of adultery should ask God's forgiveness and live with their current spouse in such a way that divorce does not reoccur. This interpretation is supported by the disciples' statement in verse 10 and Jesus' subsequent teaching about celibacy in verses 11-12. It is further supported by Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:1-2, 7-9.

The disciples understood the implications of what Jesus was teaching. If a man was supposed to stay married to his spouse, if the teachings of Rabbi Hillel were in error, if divorce

for any reason other than sexual immorality resulted in sin, then it would be better for a man not to get married in the first place. However, we know that Jesus did not teach on divorce in order to restrict men from entering into marriages, nor that a single, celibate life was required. In this case the disciples overreacted to Jesus' teaching providing Him with an additional opportunity to emphasize the importance of marriage.

Jesus teaches on celibacy (Matthew 19:11-12)

When the disciples understood Jesus' teachings about marriage and divorce they exclaimed that it would be better for men not even to get married in the first place. Jesus replied that not everyone could accept this saying (not His teaching in verses 4-9, but rather the overreaction of the disciples in verse 10).

Only those who because of various reasons do not have a need for a physical relationship with another person can be expected to abide in a celibate state. Jesus recognizes several types of persons who have no need for a physical relationship and who therefore could live without benefit of marriage. There are some people who are born without the capacity to engage in physical relationships, others who have been made "eunuchs" by others and still others who make themselves "eunuchs" (choosing to live single, celibate lives) for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

The Apostle Paul was one who chose to live a single, celibate life. In his letter to the Corinthians he responded to their questions about marriage. Some of his responses are quite interesting. In 1 Corinthians 7:1 he states that it is good for a man not to touch a woman (in other words, to be celibate). However in 7:2 he states that in order to avoid sexual immorality each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband. The reason for this is that most people have a normal attraction toward those of the opposite gender and therefore would not be able to live single, celibate lives. Their desires would lead them to

sexual immorality, therefore it is better for those people to marry. In 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul once again states that he wished everyone could be like himself (single and celibate), but each one has their own gift from God (some can be celibate, others cannot). So, in 7:9, Paul states that if a person cannot exercise self-control they should marry.

This is in accordance to the way Jesus ended His response to the disciples in Matthew 19:12. Jesus stated, "He who is able to accept it, let him accept it". This shows that some people (perhaps most) will not be able to accept a single, celibate life.

In conclusion, Jesus taught that marriage was between a man and a woman. He also taught that marriage results in a new relationship requiring a lifetime commitment. If a spouse commits sexual immorality the remaining spouse can divorce them and marry again without sin. In any other instance where divorce occurs, sin occurs. This sin can be forgiven. The church must provide teaching to prevent divorce, but must also be there to minister to those who find themselves in this situation because of the hardness of people's hearts.

Jesus blesses the children (Matthew 19:13-15)

After Jesus concluded His remarks concerning marriage and divorce, little children were brought to him. These were probably children of those comprising the multitude which followed Jesus (19:2). The parents wanted Jesus to touch and pray for the children, but the disciples rebuked them. Matthew does not say why the disciples tried to prevent this from happening.

Jesus then rebuked His own disciples and commanded that the children be brought to Him. He commanded His disciples not to forbid the parents' request because these children were symbolic of the kingdom of heaven. Once Jesus blessed the children He departed from that area. This incident should be a lesson for us today as we seek to serve God. We should remember that we are to be like little children in our dealings with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The rich, young man (Matthew 19:16-22)

After they departed a rich, young man found Jesus and, calling Him, "Good Teacher", asked what good thing he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life. This man had a commendable intent but was focused on the wrong things. He wanted to know what "he" could do rather than what God wanted.

Jesus begins His response by demanding to know why the young man was calling Him "good". Didn't the young man know that only God was good? In essence, Jesus is saying that this young man was calling Him God because he called Jesus good. Then Jesus also stated that if the young man wanted to enter into life he must keep the commandments.

The young man wanted to know which commandments Jesus was referring to. Jesus then listed several of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. To this the young man replied that he had kept all of these commandments from his youth. The young man's reply is quite surprising in its arrogance. No one is able, or ever has been able, to keep all of God's commandments. Perhaps the young man felt that he had overstated his obedience because he knew that his own efforts were insufficient. He then asked Jesus what more he lacked in order to inherit eternal life. This exposes the problem of legalism. Anytime that we try to earn our way to salvation we realize that we still lack something. No matter how perfectly we think we are keeping God's commands, somewhere deep inside we know that we fall short.

Jesus then said to the young man that if he wanted to be perfect he should sell everything he owned, give the money to the poor, and follow Him. Jesus is not demanding here that all of us must sell everything we own and give to the poor in order to follow Him as some people mistakenly claim. Jesus knew that this young man loved money more than anything else and by asking him to give it all up He was forcing the young man to face his greed.

The young man, faced with the absolute answer to his question, refused to accept that answer and went away sorrowful because he loved money more than anything else, including eternal life. This incident should serve as a warning to us not to hold onto riches when this interferes with our obedience to God.

Possibilities and rewards (Matthew 19:23-30)

When the young man left Jesus said to the disciples that it is "hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven". This does not mean that a rich person cannot become a Christian, only that the path for such a person is so much harder because of their desire to keep what they have.

Jesus amplifies His declaration of the difficulties facing rich people by stating that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Some have tried to soften Jesus' teaching in this passage by claiming that there was a narrow pathway in the city of Jerusalem where a camel essentially had to kneel in order to get through the passageway. It is the belief of the author that Jesus said exactly what He meant and meant exactly what He said. Imagine an animal as large as a camel trying to fit through the eye of a sewing needle. It is an impossibility, not just difficult, but impossible! That is exactly how the disciples understood Jesus.

The disciples asked, "Who then can be saved?" They knew that it was impossible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, so they correctly understood how difficult it would be for not just a rich person, but any person to be saved. In reply, Jesus showed that with God all things are possible, even those things that appear to be impossible to man, like a camel passing through the eye of a needle.

After observing Jesus' discussions with the rich, young man Peter asked Jesus what he and the other disciples would receive. Peter correctly understood the differences between the

rich, young man and the disciples. While the rich, young man refused to leave everything behind in order to follow Jesus the disciples had forsaken everything.

Jesus promised the disciples that they would be richly rewarded in the regeneration (the New Heaven and New Earth). In the regeneration the disciples would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This is a glimpse into the future when Jesus returns and all things become new. In the regeneration the Twelve Apostles have a special role to play. But, Jesus then continues teaching about rewards by including anyone who has left their family or riches to follow Him. Jesus promises that anyone who does this will receive a one hundred fold increase and eternal life. The comparison with the rich, young ruler is quite apparent. Then Jesus begins teaching about God's way of looking at things (which will be continued in the next chapter) by stating that many who are first will find themselves last while those who are last will be first. This type of thinking is completely contradictory to our normal understanding of how things work.

Matthew chapter 20

This chapter provides information relating to the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry. It also brings the reader to the very outskirts of Jerusalem as Jesus engages in the activities that will culminate in His death, burial, and resurrection. The first twenty chapters of the Gospel of Matthew record events from just prior to the birth of Jesus, through His boyhood in Nazareth, through the ministry in Galilee.

The parable of the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

This passage is an extension of Matthew 19:30, it continues the thought that Jesus began in His discussion with the disciples following His encounter with the rich, young ruler. It is in the form of a parable.

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He found some who were willing to work and agreed to pay them a denarius for their labor. The landowner went back out around 9:00 in the morning and found others who were standing idle. After agreeing to pay them "what is right" they also went to work. This was repeated again at noon and 3:00 in the afternoon. Finally, at the very end of the day, the landowner went out and found still more laborers who had not been hired. He sent these men into the vineyard at 5:00 (the eleventh hour).

When the day was over the landowner commanded his steward to assemble the workers and pay them their wages beginning with those who had been hired at 5:00. Even though they had only worked for a short time each of these laborers received a denarius. Finally the workers who had labored all day were paid, and even though they felt they should receive more, they received the same pay as those hired at the eleventh hour.

These men complained that the landowner was being unfair because they had worked all day in the heat and received the same wages as those who had only worked for one hour. This is typical human thinking.

The landowner replied that he had done them no harm. He had paid them what they agreed to work for when he hired them. He commanded them to take their denarius and go their way. He also declared that it was lawful for him to do what he wanted with his own money. He then asked, "is your eye evil because I am good?" (a verse that helps explain Matthew 6:22-23). In similar fashion to Matthew 19:30, Jesus once again says that the last will be first and the first will be last. He concludes the parable by stating, "many are called, but few chosen".

Jesus predicts His death and resurrection (Matthew 20:17-19)

Matthew records that Jesus was getting ready to go up to Jerusalem. This was a common phrase. Jerusalem sat high above the surrounding countryside. When a traveler went to Jerusalem they had to go "up".

While they were on the way to Jerusalem Jesus took the disciples aside and told them again that He was going to be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, that He would be condemned to death, delivered to the Gentiles (in this case, the Roman authorities) who would mock, scourge, and crucify Him, and that He would rise again on the third day.

This is the very foundation of the Christian faith. Without the death, burial, and resurrection we would have no Gospel. Without the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus we would have no way to be saved from our sins and receive the gift of eternal life. Because of the resurrection of Jesus we have the promise of our own resurrection.

To serve and give His life (Matthew 20:20-28)

The mother of James and John (referred to by Matthew as Zebedee's sons) came to Jesus with a request. Jesus asked what she wanted and she replied that she wanted her sons to sit, one at the right hand and one at the left, of Jesus in His kingdom. Either the mother of James and John had heard Jesus speak about the Apostles sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28) or her sons had told her about what Jesus said. In either case, this woman was determined that her sons would have the place of honor sitting next to Jesus.

In reply, Jesus stated that she did not know what she was asking for. He asked James and John if they were able to drink the cup He was going to drink (this cup referred to His death, Matthew 26:39-42) and if they were able to be baptized with the same baptism He was going to

be baptized with (another reference to His death). To their credit, James and John replied that they were able to drink His cup and be baptized with the same baptism.

Jesus replied that they would indeed drink his cup (a reference to the violent deaths that all the Apostles except John suffered), but He stated that only "My Father" (here Jesus claimed to be the Son of God) knew who would sit on the right and left hands of Jesus. This honor is only for those for whom it has been prepared.

When the other disciples heard what was going on they were not happy with James and John. Jesus used this conflict as an opportunity to teach the disciples (and us) about the nature of the kingdom. First, he reminded them in verse 25, that the rulers of the Gentiles "lord it over them" and that those who are "great" exercise authority. But, Jesus stated that "it shall not be so among you" (verse 26). Here we see that there is no room in the church for anyone or any group to set themselves up as an authority over others. There is no place in the church for those who seek power.

Instead, Jesus teaches in verse 26, that "whoever desires to be great among you; let him be your servant" and in verse 27, "whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave". Unfortunately, through the centuries, some in the church have not listened to these words of Jesus and have desired power and glory. This has always resulted in a perversion of the kingdom of God.

Jesus is the primary example for us in this regard. He did not come to be served but to serve. If anyone deserved to be served it was Jesus. He certainly could have come to earth and demanded that people serve Him but He did not. Rather, Jesus came to earth in order to serve (this is demonstrated in His miracles), and He also came to "give His life a ransom for many" (verse 28). It should humble us to contemplate that the One who created all things was willing to

allow Himself to be crucified so that we can be saved. The example of Jesus should keep all of us from desiring power and authority over others.

Healing the blind (Matthew 20:29-34)

As they went out of Jericho (about twenty miles northeast of Jerusalem) a great multitude followed them. Two blind men were sitting along the side of the road while they passed. Hearing the commotion, and realizing that Jesus was passing by, these two blind men began to cry out.

Obviously these men had heard of the miracles of Jesus, so they cried out, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David". It is remarkable that they called Jesus "Lord" and "Son of David", two of His most common titles. The multitude for some reason told them to be quiet, but they continued beseeching Jesus to have mercy on them.

Jesus stopped and called them. He asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Jesus is asking us the same question today. In reply, these men asked for a physical blessing, that they might receive their sight. Jesus had compassion on them, touched their eyes, and healed them immediately. These two formerly blind men then joined the multitude and followed after Jesus.

Matthew chapter 21

Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11)

Jesus and His disciples drew near to Jerusalem. They came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives. Bethphage was a village close to Bethany (Mark 11:1). It was probably the village of Bethany to which Jesus sent two disciples instructing them to look for a donkey tied with a colt.

They were commanded to loose them and bring them to Jesus. If anyone asked what they were doing they were told to tell them that "The Lord has need of them".

Matthew comments that this incident fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, where the prophet said that the King of Israel would come "lowly" and "sitting on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). The disciples went into the village, found the donkey, brought it to Jesus, and laid their clothes on it for a saddle, and then they placed Jesus on the donkey.

Matthew tells us that a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road while others cut down the branches of palm trees (this is why the day that Jesus came into Jerusalem is called "Palm Sunday", a tradition in many churches today). The multitudes cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David", "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 118:26), and, "Hosanna in the highest". The literal meaning of the word hosanna is an appeal to God to help or save.

When Jesus and the disciples came into Jerusalem all the city was asking, "Who is this?" The multitudes replied that this was "Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee". The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem ended the Galilean ministry and set in motion the events that would culminate in the next week with His betrayal, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Cleansing the Temple (Matthew 21:12-17)

The following day (Monday of Holy Week) Jesus went into the Temple of God in Jerusalem. It is not at all surprising that Jesus would go to the Temple first. When He entered the Temple He noticed all of the ungodly things occurring there. The anger of Jesus was aroused and He drove out all those who bought and sold in the Temple along with those who profited from religious pilgrims by exchanging the official Jewish money for what they brought to the city.

The people who exchanged money in the Temple were taking advantage of those who came to Jerusalem to worship by charging a high price for their services. The ones who sold animals for sacrifice were likewise taking advantage of worshippers. This example of greed is one of the reasons Jesus drove them out. He quoted from Isaiah 56:7, where the prophet had said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer", and also from Jeremiah 7:11, where the prophet described the scene as "a den of thieves".

While Jesus was in the Temple the blind and lame came to Him and He healed them. The chief priests and scribes saw Him healing and heard the children crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" and this made them very angry. They asked whether Jesus heard what the children were saying and in response He asked them if they had ever read Psalm 8:2, where this type of praise is described. Following this incident Jesus left the Temple and went to Bethany, east of the city.

The withered fig tree (Matthew 21:18-22)

The next morning as Jesus returned to Jerusalem He saw a fig tree. Being hungry, and noticing that the fig tree had leaves (indicating that it should also have fruit) He came to it and found it had no fruit. He placed a curse on the fig tree stating that no fruit would ever grow on it again. Immediately the fig tree withered which caused the disciples to marvel.

Jesus had a purpose for cursing the fig tree. It wasn't that Jesus was being mean to the tree, but rather this is an object lesson for the nation of Israel. Jesus came to the nation of Israel and should have found fruit, but the vast majority of the Jews refused to believe in Him. As a result the nation of Israel was doomed to wither. In fact, it would only be about 40 years until the Roman Empire completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and disrupted the entire nation of Israel. The withered fig tree is an excellent symbol for God's judgment that was soon to come upon the Jews because of their unbelief.

Because the disciples marveled at this, Jesus explained to them that if they had faith they could do greater things than cursing a fig tree. If they did not doubt they could even command a mountain to be removed and cast into the sea. He concluded this teaching by promising that whatever the disciples asked for in prayer they would receive, if they asked in faith.

The authority of Jesus questioned (Matthew 21:23-27)

Jesus then returned to the Temple where the elders of Israel were waiting for Him. When He arrived they demanded to know who gave Jesus the authority He was using to do the things they had observed. In reply, Jesus said He would tell them the answer if they would answer His question.

He asked them whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from earth. The elders conferred together and came to the conclusion that they could not answer this question. If they said John's baptism was from heaven, then Jesus would ask them why they did not believe John. However, if they said that John's baptism was from earth they were afraid that the people would turn on them because the people considered John to be a prophet. So, they told Jesus that they could not answer. Jesus then refused to answer their question about His authority.

Parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32)

Jesus did not let the elders off the hook easily. He told them a parable about a man who had two sons. He told the first to go into the vineyard and work. The first son said, "I will not", but later repented and did what his father asked. The man then went to the second son and gave the same command. The second son said, "I go, sir", but did not do what he said he would. Jesus asked the elders which of the two sons did what the father asked. The elders were smart enough to figure out that it was the first son who did what the father asked.

Jesus then explained exactly what He meant. He told these elders that tax collectors and harlots would enter the kingdom of God before them. The reason was that the tax collectors and harlots were represented by the first son who initially said "no" to the father but then repented and did what the father wanted. It was the tax collectors and harlots who flocked to hear John the Baptist preach and to be baptized by him. The elders of the Jews were represented by the second son who said he would do what the father asked but then did not. When John came in the way of righteousness these elders refused to believe him.

Parable of the wicked vinedressers (Matthew 21:33-46)

Jesus immediately told another parable that was aimed directly at the elders of Israel. He said that a landowner planted a vineyard, set a hedge, dug a winepress, built a tower, leased the vineyard to vinedressers and went into a far country. This describes God's relationship with Israel.

Eventually the grapes were ripe and ready to be harvested and turned into wine, so they vinedresser sent servants to receive the fruit of his vineyard. However, the hired vinedressers beat, killed, and stoned these servants. The owner of the vineyard sent more servants, but the hired vinedressers beat, killed and stoned them as well. This parable pictures how God sent prophets and messengers to the nation of Israel and the treatment they received.

Last of all the landowner sent his son believing that the hired vinedressers would respect him. When the vinedressers saw the son they agreed to kill him and seize the landowner's inheritance. So they cast the son out of the vineyard and killed him. This pictures God sending Jesus to His own people and how they rejected Him.

Jesus asked the elders what the landowner would do to the hired vinedressers as a result of their actions. The elders, not realizing that they were describing their own fate, stated that the landowner would "miserably destroy" those "wicked" men and lease the vineyard to

other vinedressers. This was fulfilled when the nation of Israel was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. and in the fact that once the gospel was given to the Gentile nations they received it in far greater numbers than the Jews did, to the point that the church eventually became almost completely Gentile.

Jesus asked the elders if they had ever read Psalm 118:22-23 where David tells that the kingdom of God would be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bearing the fruit of the kingdom (Gentiles and believing Jews). Then Jesus states that He is the "stone which the builders rejected" and has become the "chief cornerstone". If you fall on this stone you will be broken, but if the stone falls on you it will grind you to powder. The chief priests and Pharisees heard what Jesus said and knew He was talking about them. They wanted to lay hands on Him to kill Him, but they dared not do so at this time because the people still considered Jesus to be a prophet. All of this would change by the end of this week.

Matthew chapter 22

The parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14)

This is the third in a series of parables that began in chapter 21. In each of these parables Jesus is showing that the Jewish nation would reject Him and be destroyed.

In this parable Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a king who arranged a marriage for his son. He sent out his servants to call those who were invited but they were not willing to come. This is symbolic of the Jewish nation. They were the invited ones but refused to listen to the servants (prophets) that the king sent. Then the king sent out other servants with more detailed invitations. The servants were told to tell those who were invited that the king had prepared the dinner and killed the fatted cattle. All things were ready; they must come to the wedding.

In reply those who were invited made light of it and went their own ways. Some of them even seized the king's servants and killed them. When the king heard about this he was furious and came and destroyed those who were invited and burned up their city. This is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in 70 A.D.

The king declared to his servants that the wedding was ready but those who were invited were "not worthy". He then commanded his servants to go into the highways and invite everyone to the wedding. This is symbolic of the extension of the gospel to the Gentile nations and also of the church. The servants went out and invited everyone to the wedding, including both good and bad and the wedding hall was filled with guests. This pictures the church with all of the imperfections.

The king came to the feast and noticed one guest who did not have on a wedding garment. He asked how the guest was able to come into the wedding without a proper garment, then he commanded his servants to bind him and cast him into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a picture of the final judgment when Jesus shall separate those who are saved from those who are lost. As Jesus concluded, "many are called, but few are chosen" (the same warning found in Matthew 20:16).

Is it lawful to pay taxes? (Matthew 22:15-22)

The Pharisees then plotted how they might entangle Him in what He said. They sent their disciples along with the Herodians to talk with Jesus. How ironic that the Pharisees would join forces with the Herodians since the Herodians were those who supported the dynasty of King Herod and had little in common with the Pharisees. Yet, they joined forces in opposition to Jesus.

These disciples of the Pharisees came to Jesus with false praise. They proclaimed that Jesus was "true" and that He taught the way of God "in truth". They described Jesus as

someone who did not regard the person of men. All of this was deceitful, and Jesus knew it. They were not sincere in anything they said.

Then they asked Jesus if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. The disciples of the Pharisees figured that whatever Jesus answered would enable them to accuse Him. If He answered, "no", then they would tell the Romans that Jesus was speaking against the Emperor. If He answered, "yes", then they would be able to turn the people against Jesus since the people despised the Romans and their tax system. But, Jesus perceived their wickedness and called them "hypocrites".

He then asked them to show an example of the tax money. They showed Him a denarius and He asked whose picture and inscription appeared on the coin. They answered, "Caesar's". Jesus then exclaimed that they should render to "Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". That is that they should keep a distinction between secular and spiritual things. Matthew tells us that they "marveled" at His words and left.

Questions about the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33)

The next group to question Jesus was the Sadducees. This religious group did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. They came to Jesus with what they thought was an unanswerable question. According to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, if a married man died without leaving behind any children, then his brother was obligated to marry the widow and produce offspring in memory of his brother so that his brother's family would continue.

The Sadducees told Jesus the story about a man who married a woman then died childless, so his brother married the widow and also died childless. This continued until finally all seven brothers in one family had married the same woman and died without having children. Since the Sadducees knew that Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead, they wanted to

know how He could reconcile this situation. Who would the woman actually be married to in the resurrection?

Jesus replied with two declarations: "You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures" nor "the power of God". He explained that in the resurrection there would be no marrying or giving in marriage. The spiritual existence does not rely on physical relationships (1 John 3:2). Then He taught the Sadducees about the resurrection. He asked whether they had read Exodus 3:6, which speaks of God as being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? If they had read this they would know that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Matthew records that the multitudes were astonished at His teaching.

What is the greatest commandment? (Matthew 22:34-40)

The Pharisees heard about how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees and they gathered together again to come up with another question to entangle Him in His words. Among them was a lawyer who asked Jesus which commandment in the law was the greatest. The lawyer assumed that Jesus could not answer this question. If Jesus cited one particular command the Pharisees would ask Him why that was more important than any of the others and could turn the people against Him.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest commandment in the law. In this verse we are commanded to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul. He identified this command as the "first and great commandment". Then Jesus immediately quoted Leviticus 19:18, where we are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. Then Jesus declared that on these two commandments "hang all the Law and the Prophets". The same is true today. If we will love God with everything we have and love our neighbors as ourselves we will be accepted by God.

Jesus asks a question (Matthew 22:41-46)

After Jesus had answered the questions of the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and lawyers He asked them a question of His own. He asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ, whose Son is He?" The term, "Christ" means "the anointed One" or the "Messiah".

The Pharisees answered that the Christ was the "Son of David" and this was a true statement. The Messiah had to be a descendant of King David. Jesus was a physical descendant of the great King. Yet, David in Psalm 110:1 calls the Messiah, "Lord" even though this would be fulfilled in one of his own descendants. Jesus then asked the Pharisees how David could call the Christ, "Lord" if He was his son. David thus honors his descendant acknowledging that He is greater than the ancestor. The Pharisees honored the memory of King David but were unable to comprehend that the Christ was to be far greater.

After this exchange with the Pharisees, Matthew records that no one was able to answer His question. He also records that no one dared ask Jesus any other questions from then on.

Matthew chapter 23

Woe to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-36)

After the exchange of questions between Jesus and various Jewish religious groups in chapter 22, Jesus launches into a lengthy condemnation of hypocritical religion focused on the scribes and Pharisees. Matthew tells us that Jesus spoke these words to the multitudes and the disciples, not specifically to the scribes and Pharisees. It seems likely that the scribes and Pharisees were still nearby while Jesus spoke these words of woe.

First, Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees as those who "sit in Moses' seat" indicating that they occupy a place of authority in religion. Jesus commands that His listeners observe whatever the scribes and Pharisees tell them to observe, but they should not imitate the actions of the scribes and Pharisees because they "say and do not do".

Jesus then lists other characteristics of hypocrites. He says that the scribes and Pharisees "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear" and lay them on other people, but they will not assist these people with the heavy burdens. Then He says that they do works simply to be seen by others. They make their phylacteries broad. Phylacteries were worn on the heads of faithful Jews. They contained words from the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 6:8), but the scribes and Pharisees made theirs very obvious in an attempt to show how holy they were. The same was true with regard to enlarging the border of their garments. Israelites were commanded to wear distinctive borders on their clothes (Numbers 15:37-39). Once again the scribes and Pharisees turned this into a show.

Jesus continued listing characteristics of hypocrites such as that they "love the best places at feasts"; the "best seats in the synagogues"; "greetings in the marketplaces"; and to be called "Rabbi" (a word that means teacher).

Jesus then taught that His followers would not be known as Rabbis and teachers because we have one teacher and that is Christ. The followers of Jesus would be known as "brethren" without distinctions such as those practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus commands that we not regard any human as our "father" in a spiritual sense because we have only one Father, He who is in heaven. Contrary to the way the world sees it, Jesus once again emphasizes that those who are greatest will be servants. If we exalt ourselves we will be humbled while if we humble ourselves we will be exalted.

In verse 13, Jesus pronounces the first woe of His discourse. He states, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (a phrase He will repeat seven times in this chapter). The first woe is pronounced because the scribes and Pharisees "shut up heaven against men". They will not enter in, but they also keep others from entering.

In verse 14, Jesus pronounces the second woe, this time because the scribes and Pharisees "devour widows' houses" and "for a pretense make long prayers". For these offenses the scribes and Pharisees would receive a greater condemnation.

In verse 15, Jesus pronounces the third woe because the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of traveling "land and sea to make one proselyte". A proselyte is simply a convert to someone's view. The problem was not that the scribes and Pharisees were making converts, but that they turned these converts into those Jesus referred to as "twice as much a son of hell as yourselves".

The fourth woe is described in verses 16-22 and directed toward "blind guides" and "fools and blind". The woe is pronounced upon those who say that swearing by the temple is nothing, but swearing by the gold that is in the temple means they must carry out their oath. Jesus also pronounces this woe upon those who say that swearing by the altar is nothing, but swearing by the gift on the altar means they must carry it out. Jesus asks, "which is greater" the gold in the temple or the temple itself? "Which is greater" the altar or the gift? Jesus explains that if you swear by the altar you also swear by all things on the altar, and if you swear by the Temple you swear by it and by He who dwells in it, that is, God Himself (1 Kings 8:13). Also, if you swear by heaven you swear by the throne of God and by God Himself.

In verse 23, Jesus pronounces the fifth woe, again directed toward "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" because they paid tithes on even the spices in their cabinets, but neglected the weightier matters of the law. The weightier matters of the law included justice,

mercy, and faith. The scribes and the Pharisees should have focused on these weightier matters without neglecting the less important matters such as tithing. Jesus ends this woe by describing the scribes and Pharisees as "blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel".

In verse 25, Jesus pronounces the sixth woe because the scribes and Pharisees cleaned the outside of the cups and dishes that they used without realizing that what was inside their hearts was extortion and self-indulgence. To those described as a "blind Pharisee" Jesus suggested that they clean up what was inside their hearts before they worried about being so meticulous in cleaning the cups and dishes they used for meals.

The seventh woe is pronounced in verse 27, and is closely related to the sixth woe. Here Jesus states that the scribes and Pharisees were like "white-washed tombs" that were beautiful on the outside but were full of bones and uncleanness on the inside. The scribes and Pharisees appeared righteous on the outside but inside they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The eighth woe is pronounced in verses 29-36 where Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of "building the tombs of the prophets" and adorning the "monuments of the righteous". He further explains that the scribes and Pharisees claimed that if they had lived in the times of the prophets they would not have been guilty of killing them.

Jesus states that the scribes and Pharisees were witnesses against themselves and the nation of Israel. By building the tombs and monuments that commemorated those their ancestors killed they were admitting the guilt of their ancestors. Then Jesus uttered very prophetic words in verse 32, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt". The coming judgment of the nation of Israel would reveal the wrath of God.

In verse 33, Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees as, "Serpents, brood of vipers" and asks, "How shall you escape the condemnation of hell?" The nation of Israel was sent prophets, wise men, and scribes. They did not receive these men. The nation of Israel killed, crucified, scourged, and persecuted the ones who God sent. Then Jesus warns, "that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth". Jesus said that the nation of Israel would answer for all their unfaithful acts, from the blood of Abel (Genesis 4:1-11) to the blood of Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). Jesus concludes this section of woes directed toward the scribes and Pharisees by stating, "all these things will come upon this generation". It is a matter of historical fact that Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation of Israel was brought to an end by the Romans in 70 A.D., not quite 40 years after Jesus spoke these words.

Lament for Jerusalem (Matthew 23: 37-39)

These verses serve as a postscript for the eight woes directed toward the scribes and Pharisees. In these verses Jesus speaks generally of the Jewish nation. His plaintive cry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" shows the great sadness that God experienced in the destruction of the nation of Israel. Jesus once again lists their offenses: they killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent. But, most of all, they rejected their Messiah.

Jesus was the one who was willing and able to gather the nation of Israel together, just like a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but "you were not willing". This is an indictment of the nation of Israel. Tragically, very few of the Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah during the time He lived upon the earth. Very few have accepted Jesus in the subsequent 2,000 years.

Jesus pronounces a final judgment upon the nation of Israel in verse 38, "See, your house is left to you desolate". The nation of Israel (not to be confused with the political state of Israel which was established in 1948) was made "desolate" in fulfillment of the prophecies.

Jesus' final message to the nation of Israel illustrates how they can remedy this tragic situation. Jesus states, "You shall see Me no more until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord". Until such a time as the Jews are willing to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, their house shall remain desolate. Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:26 to specify what must take place in order for the Jewish nation to "see" Jesus again.

Matthew chapter 24

This chapter contains what is called the Olivet Discourse because it records what Jesus said on the Mount of Olives. The Discourse is recorded also in Mark 13 and Luke 21. It will be helpful to compare these parallel passages with what Matthew records in chapter 24.

The Olivet Discourse contains the most comprehensive comments Jesus made on the course of human history and provides details of His return to earth. This chapter contains eschatological (the doctrine of last things) and apocalyptic (a revealing) features and is difficult to interpret as a result. We should not fear apocalyptic sections of the Bible especially when they contain the very words of Jesus.

There is a tension in this chapter between the signs which precede Christ's coming and the suddenness of His coming. In addition, there is much information in this chapter concerning the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70. We need to also keep in mind the distinction that Jesus makes between the two ages: "this present age" and "the age to come". "This age" refers to the present course of human history, the period of time between the establishment of Christ's kingdom as described in the Gospels and the consummation of all things. Another way to look at it is that "this present age" describes the period between the first and second advents of Christ, and what happens after Jesus returns is "the age to come".

We need to keep in mind several things in this study: first, Jesus' words were spoken in a definite historical context. Jesus was on the Mount of Olives speaking as God's final prophet,

using the Temple and the city of Jerusalem as visual aids. Jesus answered the disciples' specific questions. They had heard what Jesus said in Matthew 23:38 about "your house shall be left to you desolate". This was a clear judgment on the nation of Israel, and was given more force in Matthew 24:2 when Jesus spoke about "not one stone shall be left upon another". No wonder the disciples asked, "when will this happen?" If the Temple was destroyed then surely it would mean the end of the world.

Second, we must understand that Jesus' words indicate that history is controlled by God. It is moving to a conclusion which takes place at the end of the age, or what is known as "the Day of the Lord". Jesus was not guessing about what would happen and even though Matthew 24:36 tells us that He does not know exactly when, His return is a certainty.

Third, Jesus stressed both the signs which precede and the suddenness of His return. There is a tension between those parts of the Discourse to be fulfilled in the disciples' lifetimes (see Luke 21:20) and those that will be fulfilled at the end of the age (see Luke 21:27). The question is, "which parts are fulfilled in A.D. 70 and which are at the end"?

Fourth, when Jesus returns, He will gather His elect from the four corners of the earth and shake the natural order of things (Matthew 24:29-31). His return will be a time of judgment on all (Matthew 24:37-39) and will include "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:15-22).

There are two distinct elements in the Olivet Discourse. One was historical, fulfilled when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70; and the other is distinctly future, fulfilled at Christ's return at the end of the age. There are also portions that might have a double fulfillment, both in A.D. 70, and at the end of the age. The prophetic parts of the Discourse can be divided roughly into the following sections: 1) the disciples show off the Temple and Jesus predicts its destruction (verses 1-2); 2) the disciples' questions (verse 3); 3) Jesus discusses

signs of the end of the age (verses 4-14); 4) Jesus prophecies about Jerusalem (verses 15-28); and, 5) Jesus prophecies about the coming of the Son of Man (verses 29-51).

Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple (Matthew 24:1-2)

In Matthew chapter 23, Jesus pronounced eight woes on the scribes and Pharisees. He then pronounced judgment on the nation of Israel by saying, "your house is left desolate". Several days prior to this Jesus had entered into Jerusalem in triumph. His disciples undoubtedly felt that the reign of Christ was ready to begin. Now He announces that the future would include specific events to occur within a generation, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He also will speak in this chapter concerning what will happen to the world after an indefinite period of time.

Luke reports additional material concerning when Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:43-44). When the disciples showed Jesus how beautiful the Temple was they must have been shocked to hear Him say that it would be completely destroyed. Imagine standing in Washington, D.C. and looking at all of the buildings and monuments only to hear someone say that it would all be destroyed. We would be horrified! It would be the end of our nation if something like that were to happen. In a small way that is how the disciples must have heard Jesus' words. It would mean the end of their world if the Temple was destroyed. It would be natural for the disciples to assume that the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world were the same event.

While the destruction of Jerusalem was terrible, it was not the end of the age, only the end of the nation of Israel as God's chosen people. Jesus did not return in A.D. 70. There are some (known as preterists) who interpret Matthew 24 as being completely fulfilled in A.D. 70. There are others (futurists, such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye) who interpret Matthew 24 as belonging still in the future and having nothing to do with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.

70. Neither of these views can explain Matthew 24 completely. It seems better to note that some of this chapter refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 while other portions refer to the second coming of Jesus.

The disciples asked three specific questions that day. One question dealt with the destruction of the Temple, and two others referred to the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. If we keep these questions in mind as we study this chapter it will help us interpret what Jesus said without making the mistake of either the preterist or the futurist. Since the disciples assumed that the destruction of the Temple could only mean the end of the world, Jesus answered their questions in order to correct their misconceptions.

The three questions (Matthew 24:3)

The disciples asked three questions of Jesus: 1) when will these things be (referring to the destruction Jesus spoke of in verse 2)? 2) What will be the sign of your coming? and 3) of the end of the age? Clearly, the last two questions are linked, and we must remember that in the minds of the disciples it was inconceivable that the Temple could be destroyed without the world coming to an end as well. So, in their minds, all three of these questions referred to the same event.

Jesus answered their questions to show that the destruction of Jerusalem was a separate event from the second coming or the end of the age. Israel, as God's people would be cut off and dispersed; this was a judgment of God. Another judgment would occur at the second coming signaling the end of the age. Jesus set forth a series of signs of the end called "the beginning of sorrows" (verse 8) that not only indicated God's judgment on Israel, but characterize the entire period of time from the time He spoke these words, past A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed, through the end of the age.

Signs of the end (Matthew 24:4-14)

Jesus answers the last question first. This was the question about the "end of the age". He warns us to take heed that no one deceives us. Many would come in the name of Jesus and many will be deceived. Jesus tells us that there will be wars and rumors of wars, but we are not to be troubled when this occurs. All these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet (verse 6).

In addition, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom (a recurring theme in human history). There will be pestilences, famines, and earthquakes in various places (as there have been since the time Jesus spoke). But, Jesus states that these signs are only "the beginning of sorrows" (verse 8). Things will get worse as the time of the end approaches.

Jesus warns that His followers will be delivered up to tribulation (verse 9), not raptured as many people believe. This tribulation will result in death for some. Others will be hated for Jesus' sake and many will be offended. During the time of tribulation Jesus predicted that some Christians will betray and hate other Christians and that many false prophets would arise. At the time of the end "lawlessness will abound" (verse 12) and the love of many Christians will "grow cold". This will be a time of terrible tribulation. Yet, Jesus promises that "he who endures to the end will be saved" (verse 13). Jesus then states that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the entire world as a witness to all nations. Even in the face of tribulation and lawlessness the gospel will be preached. Then, and only then, "the end will come" (verse 14).

The destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-28)

We must keep in mind that what Jesus says in Matthew 24 is not necessarily in linear form. That is, just because something is said before something else does not mean that it will occur before the other. This section is a perfect example. After answering the disciples' last question, He now answers their first question. What He says in verses 15-20 describe events

that would take place during the destruction of Jerusalem. It is possible that verses 21-28 also refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, but they seem to be a repetition of events that will occur at the end of the age. This could be an example of a double fulfillment.

Jesus said, "when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (verse 15) then certain steps need to be taken. What was the "abomination of desolation"? Why would Matthew insert the words, "let the reader understand"? This verse has been the focus of much debate and confusion.

In the year 163 B.C. Antiochus Ephiphanes set up a pagan statue in the Holy of Holies. There are some accounts stating that he sacrificed a pig on the altar of the Temple. This act led to the Maccabean Revolt in which the Jews won their independence for a short time. However, the Temple was desecrated by this act. It had to be purified before the Jews were able to reinstitute their sacrifices. This purification was celebrated each year by the Jews in the feast known as Hanukkah (John 10:22).

Every Jew during the time of Jesus was aware of this event. What the Romans would do in A.D. 70 would be even worse. When the Romans were through the Temple would be totally destroyed, never to be rebuilt. From A.D. 70 to the present there have been no animal sacrifices, or sacrifices of any kind conducted in Jerusalem by the priests. What the Romans did was certainly "desolation" as far as Jewish religion was concerned. This was what Jesus had reference to when He predicted "your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38).

Daniel the prophet had predicted these things in several passages (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11). Matthew referred the readers of his Gospel to those passages, words that they were very familiar with. In Luke's Gospel Jesus warned that when the people saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, "then know that its desolation is near". The Roman armies were the instruments of desolation.

When the people of Jerusalem saw the Roman armies, they were to realize that the time to flee was at hand, in fulfillment of what Daniel said. Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains (this is exactly what the Christians did when they saw the Romans surrounding Jerusalem, a fact verified by history). Jesus warned that people would not have time to go back into their houses if they were on their roofs or in the fields. There was only a small window of opportunity for the residents of Jerusalem to flee once the Romans arrived. Jesus also pronounced woes upon those who were pregnant or nursing when this moment arrived because these women would have more trouble trying to escape. Jesus stated that people should pray that this event wouldn't occur in the winter or on the Sabbath since winter weather would bring more hardship on those wishing to escape, and the gates of the city would be shut on the Sabbath, making escape impossible.

Beginning with verse 21, Jesus returns to a discussion of the last days. It is entirely possible that verses 21-28 also have some reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus speaks of "great tribulation" (verse 21) which will have no precedent or equal in human history. This tribulation will be so severe that unless God intervenes no one would be left alive (verse 22), but for the elect's sake God will cause this tribulation to be shortened. The elect denotes those who follow Christ.

Again, in verse 23, Jesus warns us not to listen to those who claim to know where Jesus is. In verse 24, He again warns about false Christs and false prophets who will arise and possess great powers to show signs and wonders. We are warned not to follow them. People will be told that Jesus is in the desert or in the inner rooms somewhere. People will be told that Jesus has returned, but we are not to believe this. When Jesus returns everyone will know. Jesus compares His return to the lightning which flashes across the sky. His return will not be in secret. There is no mention here of a secret rapture of the church. When He returns we will all know it.

Jesus provides another visual image warning us to be ready. In verse 28, He says, "wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together". When we see vultures circling in the sky and gathered in a certain place we know that an animal has died. Jesus states that His return will be preceded by certain signs and we should be ready. There is a parallel passage in Luke 17:20-37. Verse 28 ends His discussion of the end of the age. Beginning in verse 29, Jesus answers the second question of the disciples, the one dealing with the signs of His coming.

Coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:29-31)

In this section Jesus answers the second question of the disciples concerning His return. Jesus states that "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" (referring back to verses 21-22) certain things will happen indicating that He will return soon. These signs include the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, stars falling from heaven, and a great shaking of the powers of the heavens. Isaiah spoke of this same event using very similar language (Isaiah 13:9-11). These are the last warnings to the earth before Jesus returns.

After these final warnings Jesus says that "the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven". This represents the second coming of Christ. When He returns all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The return of Jesus also ushers in the end of the age and the beginning of eternity. After Jesus was resurrected He spent forty days with His disciples then ascended to heaven. In Acts 1:9-11 we find that the angel told the disciples that Jesus would return in the same way He ascended. It is interesting to note in Acts 1:12 that Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, the very location that the Olivet Discourse was given from.

When Jesus returns He will send His angels to gather the elect accompanied by the sound of a trumpet. In later writings concerning the return of Jesus we find this same scene

revealed (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Peter 3:10-13). The events following the return of Jesus are easy to understand. There is no time following His return to get ready. We must be ready for His return.

The parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35)

Jesus uses this parable to emphasize our need to understand the signs and warnings. It was common knowledge that when a fig tree put forth leaves that summer was near. The fig tree was a sign of summer. In the same way Jesus warns us to recognize the signs of His return and be ready. When the final signs appear there will not be much time left. It will be near, "even at the doors".

Jesus then states that "this generation will not pass away" until all these things take place. This is a difficult passage. Either Jesus meant that only the signs concerning Jerusalem would be fulfilled in the lifetime of the disciples (which did occur), or He used the term "generation" to represent the totality of human history culminating in His second coming. Either way, we know that His words are true and will come to pass. Jesus states that heaven and earth will pass away but not His words. We know Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, and we know Jesus will return at the end of the age.

No one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36-44)

These verses refer again to the second coming. Jesus emphasizes that no one but God knows when He will return. It is pointless for us to try to determine the time of His coming although many people have tried.

Jesus said that His coming will be marked by the same conditions that accompanied the flood (Genesis 6). While the flood was not a surprise, since Noah tried to warn the people (2 Peter 2:5), they would not heed the signs. Society continued right up until the very day when

God sent the flood. People were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage without any thought of their imminent judgment. When Jesus returns it will be exactly the same.

When the flood came all of the evil ones were taken away. Jesus pictures a scene where two men will be in the field. One will be taken and the other left (see verse 31). The same is true about two women grinding in the mill. This is not what many people refer to as "the rapture". This event occurs at the end of the age. Remember that it was only the evil ones who were taken away in the flood, not the righteous.

Jesus warns us again in verse 42, "Watch therefore". We must be ready for His return. All of us realize that if we knew a thief was planning to break into our house at a certain time we would be ready. Since we do not know when Jesus will return we must be ready at all times.

Parable of the faithful and evil servant (Matthew 24:45-51)

Who is a wise and faithful servant? This is the question He asks of us. The wise and faithful servant is the one doing what the master wants. This servant will be rewarded. But, if a servant thinks that Jesus will not return since it has been so long, they might begin to beat the other servants. This is the evil servant, the one who does not keep himself in readiness for the Lord's return.

The wicked servant will be surprised when the Lord comes on a day he is not expecting. The Master will cut him in two and put him with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the fate of those who are not ready for the Lord's return.

Matthew chapter 25

This chapter contains the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse. In this chapter Jesus tells two parables and provides the basis for judgment at the end of time. While chapter 24 contains specific signs concerning the certainty of Christ's return, chapter 25 contains warnings for

Christians to be ready. There are numerous other passages in the New Testament containing information about the last days (Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:50-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3-13). Each of these passages also speak concerning the sure return of Jesus in the last days. But chapter 25 represents Jesus' final warnings to be ready for when that day arrives.

Parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. So far, so good. These virgins were doing the right thing. Unfortunately, not all the virgins were prepared to wait. Five were wise and took extra oil with their lamps while five were foolish and made no preparations for a delay.

When the bridegroom was delayed the virgins all slumbered and slept until an announcement was made that the bridegroom was on his way and they should go out to meet him. All the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps; once again they were all doing the right thing. But, the foolish virgins realized that they did not have enough oil and begged the wise virgins to share theirs. The wise virgins refused and instructed them to go and purchase more oil. This shows that each person is responsible for their own preparedness. The oil for the lamps cannot be shared since that would result in everyone being unprepared.

While the five foolish virgins went and bought oil the bridegroom arrived and the wedding began. Jesus states that those who were ready went with him. This is a warning to all Christians to be ready at a moment's notice and to make preparations in advance. Once the wedding began the doors were shut.

Later, the five foolish virgins arrived at the door and asked to be admitted. The bridegroom refused them saying, "I do not know you". Then Jesus specifically says, "Watch therefore" because we do not know when He will return.

The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Jesus then said that the kingdom of heaven is like a man who travels to a far country, but before he leaves he calls his servants and distributes his goods to them. The master wants to make sure that his business continues even while he is gone on the long journey. He has three servants and he divides his goods up according to their abilities. One servant receives five talents (a talent was a measure of weight, approximately 75 pounds). One servant received two talents and the third servant received one talent. Then the master left on his journey.

While the master was gone the first servant took the five talents and earned five more talents. The second servant took the two talents and earned two more while the third servant refused to do anything with the one talent except bury it in the ground for safekeeping.

After a long time the master returned from his journey and gathered his servants together so they could give an account of their activities. The first servant came with the five original talents and the five additional ones. The master praised him calling him a good and faithful servant who had been faithful over a few things. The master then promised to make him ruler over many things and invited him to enter "into the joy of your lord". When the second servant came he brought the two original talents and the two additional talents he had earned. The second servant received the same praise and reward as the first.

Then the third servant came and tried to explain why he had not done anything with the one talent he had received. The master was furious and wanted to know why the servant had not at least put the talent in a bank to earn a little interest. Instead of praising the servant the master called him wicked and lazy. Then the master commanded that the talent be taken from the third servant and given to the one who now had ten talents.

The teaching of this parable according to Jesus in verse 29 is that those who have something to show for themselves in the judgment will have abundance, but those who have

nothing to show for themselves will have absolutely nothing. In verse 30, Jesus speaks about the destiny of unprofitable servants. They are to be cast into outer darkness where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)

Jesus begins this teaching with "When the Son of Man comes in His glory". This part of the Olivet Discourse concerns events immediately after the Second Coming at the end of the age. When Jesus returns He will do so with "all the holy angels" then He will sit on the throne of His glory and all the nations will be gathered before Him. This is a description of the Judgment immediately following the return of Christ. This is also described by John in Revelation 20:11-13.

Jesus is the one who divides the sheep from the goats. The sheep are assembled on His right and the goats on the left. Then Jesus says that He will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". It is a remarkable blessing that these believers receive! Something that God has been preparing since the beginning of time, a kingdom specifically made for them.

The basis for these individuals receiving the kingdom is that when Jesus was hungry, they fed Him. When Jesus was thirsty, they gave Him something to drink. When He was a stranger they took Him in. When He was naked they clothed Him. When He was sick they visited Him. And, when He was in prison they came to Him. After Jesus mentions all these things the righteous ask, "When did we do this for you?" Jesus explains that when they did these things "to one of the least of these" they did it to Him.

Then Jesus turns His attention to those on the left and commands that they depart from Him. He refers to them as "cursed" and tells them they will go to "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels". It is important to note that hell was not prepared for men and women,

only for Satan and his angels. However, there will be many people in the Judgment who are sent to the same place Satan will be. It is also important to note that there are only two destinations; there are only two categories of people. There are the righteous and the cursed.

Jesus condemns the ones on His left because they did not do any of the things that the righteous were rewarded for. In response, the ones on the left ask Jesus, "when did we ever see you in those kinds of conditions and not minister to you?" Here Jesus explains that because they refused to minister to the "least of these" it was the same as refusing to minister to Him. This is a sober warning to Christians. We must be active in ministering to the "least of these". Our eternal destiny depends on how we do on this point.

Jesus ends the Olivet Discourse by stating that the ones who refuse to help others will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous will receive eternal life.

Matthew chapter 26

Plotting to kill Jesus (Matthew 26:1-5)

Following His words of warning concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, culminating in the parables of chapter 25, exhorting us to watch, Jesus then said to His disciples: "after two days is the Passover". The Passover feast was one of the most important events in the Jewish nation. It commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and is described in detail in Exodus 12:1-28. While Jesus lived upon the earth He faithfully kept the Passover celebration with its sacrificial lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

This last Passover that Jesus was to keep upon the earth would be different from all previous ones. Jesus continued speaking to His disciples, saying, "and the Son of Man will be

delivered up to be crucified". Here Jesus specifically prophesies about His impending death. Paul teaches that Jesus became our Passover by what He experienced (1 Corinthians 5:7).

While Jesus was speaking to His disciples the chief priests, scribes and elders of the Jewish nation were meeting at the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, and plotting to kill Jesus. Their only concern was that it be done in such a way as to not cause an uproar among the people. Because of this they planned to carry out their plans after the feast.

The anointing of Jesus (Matthew 26:6-13)

Shortly after this Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, the leper. This was probably on Wednesday evening. A woman came to Him in the house with a flask of very expensive fragrant oil. John identifies this woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 12:1-8). The woman poured the oil on Jesus' head resulting in the disciples becoming indignant and asking why she wasted the oil. Their thoughts were that the oil should have been sold and the profit used to help the poor.

When Jesus became aware of their indignation He asked the disciples why they troubled the woman. Then Jesus explained that she had done a "good work" for Him. Jesus further explains that while the poor will always exist, His time on earth was rapidly drawing to a close and that the woman had poured this oil on His head in preparation for His burial. Jesus then declared that this selfless deed would be remembered throughout history and as a result it has come down to us through Matthew's Gospel.

Judas agrees to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16)

After this Judas left and went to the chief priests with a proposal. He asked how much they would give him if he agreed to betray Jesus into their hands. It seems that the Jewish leaders were hesitant to act against Jesus without a traitor in His inner circle, and Judas fulfilled

that role. The chief priests counted out thirty pieces of silver (the price for a common slave in Jesus' time) and gave them to Judas. Following his receipt of the silver Judas sought an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Jesus celebrates the Passover (Matthew 26:17-25)

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (another term for the Passover) the disciples came to Jesus asking where He wanted them to prepare the Passover meal. This would have been early on Thursday morning.

In response, Jesus instructed them to go into the city and say to a certain man, "My time is at hand: I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples". The disciples went into the city and found the man and began to make preparations for the feast.

When evening had come (after sundown on Thursday) Jesus sat down with the disciples and ate the Passover meal. While they were eating Jesus then declared that one of the disciples would betray Him. This revelation caused great anxiety among the disciples and they all began to ask Jesus who He meant. They each asked, "Lord, is it I?" Jesus declared that the one who had dipped his hand in the dish with Jesus was the one who would betray Him. This pointed the finger squarely at Judas who asked, "Rabbi, is it I?" and Jesus responded, "You have said it". Jesus had also stated that "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him" a clear reference to those Old Testament texts referring to the betrayal of Jesus, but He also warned that it would have been better for His betrayer not to have even been born. John records that after this exchange Judas left (John 13:30).

The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-30)

Following the departure of Judas, Jesus continued the feast with the remaining eleven disciples. But, at some point, Jesus did something that was totally new, something that was not

a part of the Passover feast. While they were eating Jesus took bread (the unleavened bread used in the feast), blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to the disciples with the words, "Take, eat; this is My body". At this point Jesus began the institution of what we refer to as the Lord's Supper, or communion. Jesus used the bread available and gave new, spiritual significance to that bread. From now on it would be symbolic, or a representation of, His body. This bread did not literally become the body of Jesus because He was physically present with the disciples. However, in the Lord's Supper Jesus proclaims that the bread "is" His body.

Jesus then took one of the cups (tradition implies that there were four cups in the Passover feast), gave thanks and gave it to them with the command, "Drink from it, all of you" and with the significance that, "this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins". From now on the fruit of the vine (which logically should be unfermented since no leaven was allowed in any Jewish home during Passover) would be symbolic, or a representation of, His blood that was shed. In the same fashion as the bread, the fruit of the vine did not literally become the blood of Jesus because His blood had not yet been shed. In the Lord's Supper Jesus declares that the fruit of the vine "is" His blood.

The Lord's Supper should be the most central aspect of any Christian's worship. In it, we share in a remembrance of the body and blood of Jesus. His body was given for us. His blood was shed for us. Jesus proclaims that His blood was shed for many for the remission of sins. Our sins are remitted, or forgiven, in the blood of Christ (Hebrews 16-22). When we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine we are privileged to remember what He has done for us.

Following the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus explained that He would not partake of it again until such time as "when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom". This is a promise to us as well as to the disciples. One day we will partake with Jesus! When the feast was over Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus predicts Peter's denial (Matthew 26: 31-35)

At the Mount of Olives (sometime Thursday night) Jesus prophesied that all of the disciples would be made to stumble because of Him that very night. Jesus then quotes from Zechariah 13:7, that the shepherd would be struck and the sheep would be scattered. Then Jesus prophesied that He would "go before" the disciples into Galilee following His resurrection (Matthew 28:7). After His prediction that one of them would betray Him, the disciples were very upset that Jesus would now say they would all stumble.

Peter spoke for all the disciples when he said, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble". If we had been there that night we probably would have said the same thing. Jesus then specifically said to Peter that before the sun came up the next morning he would deny Jesus three times.

This declaration struck Peter hard. He was sure that he would never betray Jesus. In fact, he boasted that even if he had to die he would not betray Jesus. The other disciples said the same thing.

Jesus prays in the garden (Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus took His disciples to a place called Gethsemane where there was a garden. He told them to sit while He went to pray, then He took Peter, James, and John further into the garden. At this time Jesus was obviously sorrowful and distressed, knowing what would shortly happen.

He told Peter, James, and John, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death". The weight of the world was on His shoulders. Jesus knew that the appointed time had come. After asking Peter, James, and John to wait and watch He went a little further into the garden and prayed.

Jesus fell on His face as He prayed asking God to let the cup pass from Him if it was possible. The cup He referred to was His impending death (Matthew 20:22). Yet, Jesus prayed for this to happen only if it was God's will. He then returned to where the disciples were and found them asleep. He wondered that they could not stay awake and watch for even an hour, then He commanded them to "watch and pray" so that they would not enter into temptation because the human spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Then Jesus went again to pray declaring that if the only way for the cup of His death to pass away was for Him to drink it, then the Father's will would be done. After the second prayer He returned to the disciples and found them asleep again because they were weary.

Jesus left them the third time and prayed again using similar words, then He returned to the disciples and roused them from sleep. He then declared, "Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners". He commanded them to get up and stated, "See, My betrayer is at hand".

Betrayal and arrest (Matthew 26:47-56)

At that very moment Judas arrived leading a large group who had been sent by the chief priests and elders. This multitude was armed with swords and clubs. Judas had previously given them a sign to help them identify Jesus. He told them that he would kiss Jesus and they should seize Him. Since it was dark the mob needed someone who was familiar with Jesus in order to arrest the correct person. Judas, being one of the twelve, would be able to identify Jesus even in the dark. Once he did, he said, "Greetings, Rabbi" and kissed Him. This was the moment of betrayal, the culmination of events that began when Judas bargained for thirty pieces of silver.

Jesus replied, "Friend, why have you come?" This question must have penetrated the very core of Judas' being. Jesus knew why they were there and so did Judas. At that moment Jesus was seized by the crowd.

Matthew then records that one of the disciples (John 18:10 states that it was Peter) took a sword and used it to defend Jesus. He cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest (whose name was Malchus according to John 18:10). Luke describes this scene in Luke 22:47-53. The disciples were completely outnumbered by the crowd but Peter was going to try and protect Jesus.

Jesus then commanded Peter to put away his sword, explaining that all those who take the sword will die by the sword. Jesus knew that if Peter continued to resist he, along with all the other disciples, would probably have been killed that night. Jesus was also speaking in a more general sense about the results of physical confrontations. When people resort to using earthly weapons they must expect the natural result which is physical death.

Jesus then stated that He could call on the Father to provide Him with twelve legions of angels (12,000 angels) if He truly wanted to be rescued. But, Jesus asked, "How then could the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" There are numerous references from the Old Testament which spoke concerning the betrayal and death of the Messiah (Isaiah 50:6; 53:1-12). What Peter was trying to do in defense of Jesus was contrary to the plan and will of God.

Jesus then asked the multitudes why they had come against Him as a mob. He stated that He had preached daily in the Temple without being seized. Jesus already knew the answer. Things had happened in precisely the way God intended, in accordance with the prophecies of the Old Testament scriptures. At this point all the disciples forsook Jesus and fled, even Peter who had sworn to die with Jesus.

First trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:57-68)

The mob took Jesus to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Peter followed Jesus at a distance and proceeded to the courtyard of the High Priest's house in order to "see the end".

The chief priests, elders, and all the council of the Jews sought false witnesses who could provide false testimony which would result in His death, but they found no one. There were many false witnesses who spoke, but none of their stories agreed. Finally, two false witnesses came forward and declared that Jesus had said that if the Temple was destroyed He could rebuild it in three days. Jesus had said something similar to this (John 2:19) but He was referring to His own body as the Temple. In John 2 Jesus said what He did to teach the listeners about His death, burial and resurrection, but these false witnesses claimed He was talking about the actual Temple in Jerusalem.

Even if Jesus had meant the physical Temple in Jerusalem this would not have been a sufficient reason to desire His death. While the false witnesses spoke Jesus remained silent. The High Priest then asked Jesus to swear an oath and tell them whether or not He was the Son of God. Jesus replied, "It is as you said". Then He went on to proclaim that in the future the Jews would see the Son of Man "sitting at the right hand of the Power" and "coming on the clouds of heaven". These were clear references to Jesus being the Son of God. Sitting at the right hand of the Power refers to the fact that Jesus' rightful place is next to God, the Father, while coming on the clouds of heaven was a clear reference to His triumphal return at the end of time.

When the High Priest heard what Jesus said he was horrified and tore his clothes (a symbolic gesture showing great stress and shock). To the ears of the High Priest and those in his house, what Jesus said was unmistakable; He was claiming to be the Son of God. This was the ultimate blasphemy as far as the Jewish people were concerned. Caiaphas declared that they did not need any more witnesses; they had the very words of Jesus to condemn Him with. He asked the crowd what they thought and they replied, "He is deserving of death".

Following this they spat upon Jesus, beat Him, and struck Him. They asked Him to prophecy and identify those who did these things. There are no words that can adequately describe the shame and humiliation, the suffering and anguish that Jesus endured. We should remember that He suffered all these things for us!

Peter denies Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75)

Peter had already forsaken Jesus with the rest of the disciples. Now, as he stood in the courtyard of the High Priest, he would fulfill what Jesus had predicted about him. Undoubtedly he had heard Jesus' confession as the Son of God and the reaction of the Jewish leaders.

First, a servant girl came and stated that she had seen Peter with Jesus. To this Peter replied, "I do not know what you are saying". This was the first denial. Then, another girl said that Peter had been with Jesus. To this Peter replied with an oath, "I do not know the man". This was the second denial. Finally, those who stood by said that surely Peter was one of the disciples because his speech (accent) gave him away as a Galilean. In response Peter began to curse and swear, stating, "I do not know the man!" This was the third denial. Luke records that at this final denial, Jesus turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61). At the same time a rooster crowed (in the middle of the night!) and Peter remembered what Jesus had said previously (Matthew 26:34). When Peter realized what he had done he went out and wept bitterly.

Matthew chapter 27

Jesus led to Pontius Pilate (Matthew 27:1-2)

When morning came (Friday morning after sunrise) the chief priests and elders of the Jews plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. The events of chapter 26 record the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas, the High Priest resulting in the condemnation, "He is deserving of death" (Matthew 26:66). However, the Jewish nation had been conquered by the Roman

Empire and the Jews no longer had any power or authority to condemn someone to death. They needed the power and authority of the Roman Empire in order to carry out their desire to see Jesus killed.

So, they bound Jesus and led Him away, early on Friday morning to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Pontius Pilate possessed the power to condemn Jesus to death and to have Him executed, but as we shall see in this chapter, Pilate did not want to carry out the wishes of the Jewish leaders. He presided over the Roman trial of Jesus and sought to release Him, however, in the end, Pilate gave in to the wishes of the people and condemned Jesus.

The death of Judas (Matthew 27:3-10)

When Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned by the Jewish leaders he was filled with remorse. Unfortunately the remorse that Judas felt did not lead to repentance as in the case of Peter, who denied Jesus three times, yet went on to be the leader of the Apostles. In Judas' case remorse led to suicide. Undoubtedly Judas never expected the Jewish leaders to demand the death of Jesus, and even if he had, he would never have thought that God would allow it. Surely God would prevent His Son from being killed, or Jesus would exercise His power and stop whatever was happening. But this was not what happened.

Judas returned to the chief priest with the thirty pieces of silver that he had earned for betraying Jesus. He asked them to take back the money, hoping that this would secure the release of Jesus. He confessed, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood". The chief priests refused to take back his money and Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver on the ground and left.

Matthew records that Judas went out and "hanged himself". Luke provides more details of the final end of Judas in Acts 1:15-20. One of Jesus' own disciples had betrayed Him and committed suicide.

The chief priests picked up the money Judas threw down and suddenly were concerned about what was lawful. They had just participated in an illegal trial resulting in the condemnation of Jesus, but now they felt that it would be unlawful to put the money that Judas had returned into the treasury because it was the price of blood. They decided to use the money to buy the potter's field to bury strangers in.

This field had become known as the "Field of blood" by the time Matthew wrote his Gospel. Matthew also attributes this action to something Jeremiah wrote. Verse 9 is actually a quotation from Zechariah 11:12 while verse 10 is based loosely upon Jeremiah 32:6-9, although it is not a direct quotation.

Jesus faces Pilate (Matthew 27:11-14)

The trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate is recorded by each of the Gospel writers (Mark 15; Luke 23; and John 18). Matthew's account shows that Jesus stood before the Roman governor who asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" In reply, Jesus admitted that it was true. Then the chief priests began to accuse Jesus of various things while He remained silent.

The fact that Jesus refused to testify in His own behalf, or even to refute what His accusers were saying amazed Pilate. He asked another question, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" Yet Jesus remained silent.

Since the Jews could not legally execute someone they had to have the Roman government do so. Pilate knew Roman law. He knew which crimes carried the death penalty. At this moment in the trial of Jesus Pilate had no intention of condemning Him, even with all of the charges the chief priest brought before him.

The release of Barabbas and condemnation of Jesus (Matthew 27:15-26)

At the Feast of Passover the Roman government had begun the custom of releasing one prisoner to the Jewish people. This was an attempt to pacify the population in the face of tremendous opposition to Roman rule. Pilate thinks that this custom will allow him to release Jesus.

In the prison at that time was a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. Mark tells us that Barabbas was in prison for murder (Mark 15:7). Pilate waited until the people were gathered and then gave them a choice. "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" Matthew records that Pilate knew the Jews had delivered Jesus because of envy and he felt that no one would rather have a murderer released. So, Pilate gives the people a choice: Barabbas or Jesus.

Before the crowd responded Pilate's wife sent a message to him as he sat upon the judgment seat. She warned Pilate to have nothing to do with Jesus, who she calls a "just man" because she had "suffered many things in a dream" because of Him. This message from his wife undoubtedly influenced Pilate to more fervently seek to release Jesus.

But, the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas to be released and to "destroy" Jesus. Pilate asked his question again, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" The crowd replied, "Barabbas!" Then Pilate asked, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let Him be crucified!" This was not what Pilate expected. He knew Jesus was innocent of the charges they brought against Him. He asked, "What evil has He done?" In response, the crowd cried out even louder, "Crucify Him!"

Pilate realized that he was beginning to lose control of the situation, so rather than defend Jesus he commanded that a basin of water be brought to him. He washed his hands in

the water in full view of all the people, proclaiming, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." This was a symbolic act on Pilate's part, but it does not excuse him from the terrible sin that he was responsible for. It was Pilate who ordered the execution of Jesus. He was guilty of the death of the Son of God.

After Pilate washed his hands and proclaimed his innocence, the crowd cried out, "His blood be on us and on our children", which was terribly fulfilled in subsequent history beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Then Pilate released Barabbas and ordered Jesus to be scourged and then crucified.

Soldiers mock Jesus (Matthew 27:27-31)

While Matthew does not record the actual scourging of Jesus he describes how the Roman soldiers made fun of the Savior. Words cannot adequately describe the brutality that Jesus endured during this time. Matthew records that the whole garrison of Roman soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium (which was the governor's headquarters) and then humiliated Him.

They stripped off His clothes and put a scarlet robe (a symbol of royalty) on Jesus. Then they twisted a crown of thorns and placed it on His head. To complete the wardrobe they placed a reed (symbolic of authority) in His hand. Once they had dressed Jesus in this fashion they bowed before Him and mocked Him. They cried out, "Hail, King of the Jews". Then they spat on Him, took the reed out of His hand and beat Him with it. How long this continued no one knows, but when the soldiers tired of mocking Jesus they put His clothes back on Him and led Him out to be crucified.

The crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:32-44)

Now as they came out of the city of Jerusalem, because a crucifixion could not take place within the city walls, the Roman soldiers saw that Jesus was physically unable to carry His

cross. Part of the punishment of crucifixion was that the condemned person had to carry their own cross to the place of execution. However, because of a lack of sleep and the physical abuse that He had endured since late Thursday, Jesus was unable to carry His own cross. There was a man named Simon, from Cyrene (a Roman province in modern-day Libya, far to the west of Israel, on the north coast of Africa) who was coming in to the city. The Roman soldiers made Simon carry the cross of Jesus. Mark 15:21 tells us that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus, which indicates that these two sons were well-known by the time Mark's Gospel was written. It is traditionally believed that Simon and his sons were prominent Christians in later years.

Simon carried the cross to Golgotha, the place of a skull. This name came about either because the geographic feature resembled a skull, or because of the executions that were carried out there. They gave sour wine (similar to vinegar) mingled with gall (literally, bile) to Him, but when Jesus tasted it He would not drink. At Golgotha, the Romans crucified Jesus. Matthew does not elaborate on the sheer brutality of a Roman execution.

They stripped Jesus' clothes from His body and gambled for their possession. Jesus was crucified naked, which was part of the humiliation of that form of execution. When the Roman soldiers cast lots for the clothes of Jesus they unknowingly fulfilled Psalm 22:18. The entire Twenty-second Psalm is filled with details that were fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. The Roman soldiers placed a sign over Jesus' head which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews". Then they sat down and kept watch over Him.

There were two others crucified that day. Both of these men were robbers and their crosses were placed on either side of Jesus. At the scene of death, people passed by and blasphemed against Jesus. They wagged their heads and said, "You who destroy the temple

and build it in three days, save yourself". They also said, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross".

The chief priests also were there along with the scribes and elders mocking Jesus. They said, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save". This was an absolutely true statement, even though they meant it in a mocking fashion. It was true that Jesus could not save Himself, because if He had we would have no hope of salvation! The chief priests also said, "If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross and we will believe Him". This statement was a complete falsehood. Even if Jesus would have come down from the cross these people who cried out for His death would not have believed Him. They would have found another way to put Him to death. Jesus' death was necessary for our salvation (John 3:14-16).

Finally, the chief priests said, "He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him". If ever there was a time when God thought about bringing an end to the entire affair, this would probably have been the time. Fortunately for us, God sacrificed His own Son for us. The chief priests quoted Psalm 22:8 almost word for word. Then they repeated their charge, "for He said I am the Son of God". Matthew records that even the two robbers who were crucified with Him mocked and blasphemed as well. Luke, however, records that one of the robbers changed his mind about Jesus and was saved (Luke 23:39-43).

The death of Jesus (Matthew 27:45-56)

Matthew tells us that there was darkness over the face of the earth from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). This was a highly unusual occurrence. About 3:00, Jesus cried out in Aramaic, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*" which translates into, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and is a quote from Psalm 22:1.

When those who were standing there heard what Jesus said, some of them thought He was crying out for Elijah the prophet. Others took a sponge, placed it on a reed and offered Him

a drink of sour wine (which fulfilled Psalm 69:21). The rest said to leave Him alone and see if Elijah would come for Him. Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. At around 3:00 on Friday, Jesus died for our sins.

When He died, the veil of the temple separating the holy place from the Most Holy Place was torn in two from the top to the bottom. This symbolically showed the ending of the Old Testament law. Along with the ripping of the veil, there was an earthquake accompanied by rocks being split. Matthew records that graves were opened and many bodies of the saints were raised. He also tells us that after the resurrection of Jesus these saints went into the holy city (Jerusalem) and appeared to many.

The Centurion and the soldiers with him saw all these events and were greatly afraid. The Centurion himself confessed, "Truly this was the Son of God". Matthew also writes that when Jesus died the disciples were nowhere to be found. However, many women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee and who ministered to Him were there, including Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children (James and John). It is significant to note that it was the women followers of Jesus who were present at the death of Jesus and they were also the first at His tomb when He was raised from the dead.

The burial of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-61)

When evening had come (almost dark, late on Friday afternoon), Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, and a secret disciple of Jesus, went to Pontius Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Another secret disciple, Nicodemus, also came according to John 19:38-42. Together they took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in a linen cloth, laid it in Joseph's own tomb, and rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and left. Since it was almost dark (when the Sabbath began) these two did not have much time to carry out all the burial rites of the Jewish people.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary also went to the tomb late that day. Luke 23:54-56 tells us that they brought spices to anoint the body of Jesus for His burial, but they arrived too late in the day to do this work since the Sabbath had begun, so they sat down opposite the tomb and watched.

Guarding the tomb (Matthew 27:62-66)

On the next day, (Saturday, the Sabbath) which followed the Day of Preparation (Friday), the chief priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They reminded Pilate that Jesus had said that He would rise again after three days (Mark 8:31). They felt that perhaps the disciples of Jesus would find out where He was buried and go and steal the body, claiming that He had risen. In order to keep this from happening they asked Pilate to post guards at the tomb, at least until after the third day to prevent such an occurrence. Pilate concurred with their request and posted soldiers at the tomb. Matthew records that they sealed the stone that Joseph had placed at the tomb.

Matthew chapter 28

The resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1-8)

Now after the Sabbath (Saturday) as the first day of the week (Sunday) began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb in order to carry out their intentions which were interrupted by the Sabbath (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56). It is interesting to note that it was the women followers of Jesus who were the last to leave the tomb on Friday and the first to arrive on Sunday.

When they arrived there was a great earthquake caused by an angel of the Lord who descended from heaven, rolled back the stone from the tomb, and sat upon it. Matthew records the angel's appearance as "like lightning" and his clothing "as white as snow". The sudden

appearance of the angel caused great fear among the guards which Pilate had posted. They were totally incapacitated. No doubt the women were equally frightened, but the angel told them, "Do not be afraid".

The angel continued, "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified". Then the angel spoke these words which are the core of the Christian faith, "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said" (Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). The angel commanded the women, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" and then, "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead". The angel further told the women to tell the disciples that Jesus was going before them into Galilee. When the angel finished speaking, the women went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples.

Worshipping Jesus (Matthew 28:9-10)

As the women ran to tell the disciples Jesus appeared to them. He told them, "Rejoice!" At the birth of Jesus there was great joy (Luke 2:10) and now at the resurrection of Jesus there is joy as well. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary fell to the ground and worshipped Jesus. Then Jesus commanded them, "Do not be afraid" (this is the second time they had been commanded not to fear), and Jesus repeated the angel's instructions to the women.

The soldiers are bribed (Matthew 28:11-15)

Matthew departs from his narrative concerning the resurrection of Jesus and here inserts information about the reaction of the chief priests. While the women were going on their mission to tell the disciples that Jesus had been resurrected, the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went into Jerusalem and reported everything that had happened to the chief priests.

When the chief priests heard about the earthquake, the angel rolling away the stone, and the empty tomb they counseled together and decided upon a plan. They gave money to the soldiers along with instructing them to tell everyone that the disciples of Jesus had come by night and stolen the body from the tomb while the soldiers slept.

These soldiers knew the penalty for sleeping on duty. They also knew the penalty for failing to carry out their instructions. If the disciples had stolen the body, or if the soldiers had indeed been sleeping on duty, they were subject to the death penalty. The chief priests knew this. So, they offered to tell the same story to Pontius Pilate if he heard about the empty tomb. The soldiers took the money and agreed to tell the story the chief priests had made up. In doing this they showed themselves to be dishonest. They were willing to expose themselves as poor soldiers who slept on duty in order to profit from it. Matthew records that this story was commonly told among the Jews even until the day he wrote his Gospel. In fact, this story is still believed by many in our modern era.

The point remains that the body of Jesus is not in His tomb. Either the soldiers took the body, or the disciples took the body, or someone else took the body, or Jesus really was resurrected early that Easter morning. In any case, all the Jews would have had to do when Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost to preach the first gospel sermon, would have been to produce the corpse of Jesus. This did not happen. In the 2,000 years since the resurrection no one has come forward with the body of Jesus. No one has been able to show a tomb with His body still inside. This leads us to the only other conclusion: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

When the disciples heard the news from the women they departed into Galilee. They went to the mountain that Jesus had appointed for them (Matthew 26:32). Jesus had gone there

before them. When the disciples saw Jesus they worshipped Him, but Matthew records that some doubted. It seems that Thomas was not alone in his doubts.

Then Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus reigns supreme in His kingdom. He then instructed the disciples to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations". No longer were they limited to the nation of Israel, but they were to spread the message of Jesus throughout the whole world. In making disciples they were to, "baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" which is the example we should follow today. Then they were to "teach them to observe all things" Jesus had commanded them. This shows that Jesus' words are the law of the kingdom. It also shows a distinction between preaching (which is designed to make disciples) and teaching (which is to strengthen those who are baptized).

Finally, Jesus promised that He would be with the disciples (and us) always, even to the end of the age. This great promise provides us with strength for our daily lives. In Acts chapter 2 we can read of the coming of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit fills our hearts we have the presence of Christ with us even today.

Amen!