



**THE GOSPEL
OF MATTHEW**

“Your name and renown are the
desire of our hearts.” Isaiah 26:8

THE PURPOSE OF THIS WORKBOOK

This is not a commentary on the gospel of Matthew, but a WORKBOOK that will provide you with the following:

1. Cultural and religious background information that would have been obvious for the first century audience, but not for you. This information is drawn from a number of sources, found in the bibliography and references at the back of the booklet.
2. An explanation of **some** passages that are a bit more difficult to interpret. The booklet tries to explain passages as little as possible (with the exception of Matthew 24) in order for you to wrestle with the text yourself.
3. An almost invisible thread as to how different passages tie into the grand narrative, The Story of the Bible, as unpacked on pages 5-17.
4. Leading questions to help you connect with the text on a personal level. This is where the 'WORK' of the WORKBOOK needs to take place. The impact that this study of Matthew will have on your pursuit of Knowing God and his purposes for you (and our world) will be directly related to your willingness to answer the questions (in writing, with as much vulnerability and detail as possible). Then, talking through it consistently with a more mature follower of Jesus.

Our hope and prayer is that this WORKBOOK will play at least some small role (Romans 10:17) in drawing you into The Story of the Bible.

Watch: A prayer
before you start
your study



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Content

The Story of the Bible

Movement 1	5
Movement 2	6
Movement 3	8
Movement 4	9
Movement 5	11
Movement 6	14

The book of Matthew

Matthew 1	19
Matthew 2	21
Matthew 3	22
Matthew 4	27
Matthew 5	32
Matthew 6	44
Matthew 7	51
Matthew 8	56
Matthew 9	59
Matthew 10	64
Matthew 11	69
Matthew 12	71
Matthew 13	75
Matthew 14	80
Matthew 15	83
Matthew 16	86
Matthew 17	91
Matthew 18	94
Matthew 19	99
Matthew 20	105
Matthew 21	108
Matthew 22	114
Matthew 23	119
Matthew 24	122
Matthew 25	132
Matthew 26	134
Matthew 27	138
Matthew 28	146

Graphics & Videos

Map of Israel	18
Video: The importance of knowing Jesus	26
Temple Complex	109
Archaeological proof for the Roman Crucifixion	143
Ossuary	144

Abbreviations

OT – Old Testament

NT – New Testament

BC – Before Christ

AD – Anno Domini (Latin for the year of our Lord)

The Story of the Bible

In principle the grand narrative of the Bible unfolds in six *(more or less)* movements.

Movement 1

Creation and the Human Calling

(Genesis 1-2)

God creates and orders a wonderful world out of chaos and sets in it a beautiful garden filled with beautiful trees, all kinds of vegetation and wildlife. The garden was created as a sacred space, a cosmic temple you could say, a place where heaven and earth (God's space and our space) came together. It is a place for God's own dwelling, a place where he could take up his 'rest', a place from where he could rule from and reign over the universe (Psalm 132:14). Although the creation was very good (as we see throughout Genesis 1), it wasn't perfect (*tā-mīm* = complete), it seems to be IN-complete. In other words, Genesis 1-2 doesn't appear to be a static work of art, like a picture on a canvas, meant to be looked at, appreciated and enjoyed. Rather, it is the start of something, a plan that is going somewhere.

So, what is the plan?

Where is it supposed to be going?

And how will God take it there?

Then God said, "Let us make mankind [*ā-dām* = *humanity*] in our image, [*se-lem* in Hebrew] in our likeness, so that they [*ā-dām*] may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind [*ā-dām*] in his own image [*se-lem*], in the image [*se-lem*] of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (*Genesis 1:26-28*).

God places humanity at the centre of the garden in order to expand his garden and bear his image ["*se-lem*" in Hebrew/"*eikōn*" in Greek] into it. They were to spread his glory, his pulsating life and being into the world by imaging him into it through the way that they would rule and reign in God's world on his behalf so that, "... the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (*Habakkuk 2:14*).

Human Rebellion and the Fallout

(Genesis 3)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (*Genesis 3:1-13*).

Adam and Eve rebelled against God's purpose for their lives by worshipping created things rather than the Creator. Their idolatry led to a failure of allegiance (or trust), that in turn led to a failure of purpose (expanding the garden and imaging God into it). They wanted to live for themselves and their purposes.

WHAT WAS THE FALLOUT?

In Genesis 3, speaking to the serpent, God said, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (*Genesis 3:15*). This was the start of an intense conflict between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent.

So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (*Genesis 3:23-24*).

Ejected from the garden and from God's presence, the battle between the offspring/children of the serpent and the offspring/children of the woman had begun.

WHAT WAS LOST DUE TO THEIR REBELLION?

They hurt their relationship with God and lost His presence, they lost (or at least distorted) their humanity and human calling. Adam and Eve continued worshipping created things rather than the Creator, they fell under the power of the dark forces (Satan) and they corrupted their relationship with one another. But all these things were just part of something greater. The greatest thing that was lost, was **GOD'S INTENTION FOR CREATION**, for mankind was created for a purpose. They were supposed to take God's good creation and complete it, by expanding the garden and imaging him into it.

Now things start to spiral out of control. They go from rebelling against God's purposes in Genesis 3 to Cain saying to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him ... the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*Genesis 4:8-9*). So, we progress from rebellion to murder (but hiding it), to one of Cain's descendants (Lamech) saying to his wives Adah and Zillah, "listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times." (*Genesis 4:23-24*). Humanity went from rebelling against God and his purposes to murder and hiding it, to murder and boasting about it.

In Genesis 5 then follows a long list of genealogies that shows us two things: **(1)** the original blessing of being fruitful and multiplying was indeed being carried out, and **(2)** that death reigns with the repeated refrain, "and then he died" (*Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31*). In Genesis 6, we have the "sons of God" marrying the daughters of mankind. We don't know exactly who the "sons of God" were, but one thing we do know is that what was happening wasn't good. Instead of mankind bearing God's image, his life, his fruitfulness and beauty into the world, they bring death, darkness, destruction and distortion.

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created – and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground – for I regret that I have made them" (*Genesis 6:5-7*).

WHY DID HE REGRET THAT HE HAD MADE THEM?

Instead of partnering with him by imaging him into the world, expanding the garden and bringing life and beauty into it, they followed their own desires and spread death, violence and corruption. Through the flood, in one act, God brings about both judgment and salvation. Judgment on all that is evil, corrupt and against his purposes; and salvation or rescue for those who are faithful to his purposes. But this was to no avail, as things started to spiral out of control once again leading up to Genesis 11. Mankind tries to build a tower into the heavens, seemingly, in an attempt to recover God's presence that was lost in Genesis 3.

WHY DID THEY BUILD THIS?

"So that we may make a name for ourselves" (*Genesis 11:4*). It is human pride that says, **"I don't want to run God's world and the gift of life he has given me God's way, I want to run God's world and the gift of life he has given me, MY way."** An attempt to build the tower just exposed mankind's arrogance and self-idolatry. From there, God scatters the people throughout the world and all hope for his garden seems lost.

Movement 3

Israel and the Great Commission

'Israel and the Great Commission' can be subdivided into seven movements:

1. The Formation of Israel (Genesis 12-50).
2. The Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings (Exodus 3-18; Numbers).
3. Sinai Covenant and Portable Eden (Exodus 19-40).
4. The Sanctification of Israel (Leviticus).
5. The Preparation for and Possession of "the New Eden" (Deuteronomy, Joshua).
6. The Rebellion and need for a King (Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings).
7. The Fallout/Exile (Daniel), return from Exile and waiting for God's New World (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther).

By now, centuries had passed. In Genesis 12 we come to realize that there is still hope as God had chosen a new couple (a "new" Adam and Eve) through whom he could get his "garden plan" back on track.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. " I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless

you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you**" (Genesis 12:1-3).

From there, God builds Abram into a great nation (Genesis 12-50). He delivers Israel from slavery out of Egypt and takes them through the desert (Exodus 1-18) towards Mount Sinai, where he gives them instructions (Torah) on how to live as his people. He also gives them instructions on building a tabernacle (tent for worship), where his presence will be able to dwell in their midst (Exodus 19-40). The book of Leviticus is about God graciously providing a way for his people to live in his presence without the splendour of his beauty and majesty consuming them. All this while he transforms them, in order to make them a light to the nations. In the book of Numbers, the Israelites head towards the Promised Land, but because of their faithlessness, they end up spending another forty years wandering in the desert.

In Deuteronomy, Moses prepares the next generation to enter the Promised Land, while in the book of Joshua the process of conquering the land starts. From Judges to 2 Kings, we see the building of the temple (1 Kings 5-8) and the people's continuous rebellion and search for a king. We also see God's repeated unheeded warnings dispersed throughout the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel etc). In 2 Kings 25 we see the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as well as the expulsion of the Israelites from the land (just like Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden). In Ezra and Nehemiah (and in other prophetic books), the Israelites return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple, but to no avail, as God's presence does not return. Yet, they hold onto repeated messages from the prophets that God will one day send an anointed (messianic) king, in the line of David, to set things right and to bring about God's New World.

Movement 4

Jesus, the Promised King

(Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)

Four hundred years have passed since Malachi, the last book of the Hebrew Bible (our OT), was written. We now have approximately 25,000 Jews living in Jerusalem, 700,000 in surrounding areas (called the people of the land) and 3 million in the diaspora (the dispersion of Jews beyond Israel). The NT Story begins with "This is the genealogy [genesis in Greek] of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). The word "genealogy" is the same word used in

Genesis 2:4, where it says, "This is the book of the origins (*genesis in Greek*) of heaven and earth, when they came into being" (*LES*).¹ We had creation in Genesis 1 and 2, now we have the "genesis" of New Creation, the "genesis" of "Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (*Matthew 1:1*).

Against the background of the Hebrew Bible, Matthew is saying that this is Jesus, the anointed one, the Davidic king, the son of Abraham (the father of our faith). In Luke 3, Jesus gets baptized by John, where it reads in the book of Luke "and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (*Luke 3:22*). This is an echo of his promise to David:

I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son (*2 Samuel 7:12-14*).

Jesus is the long-awaited Davidic King, the image/eikōn of God (Colossians 1:15). He is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (*Hebrews 1:3*). He is the true Israelite coming to represent his people. He is "The Word [that] became flesh and made his dwelling [skēnō in Greek, meaning tabernacle] among us" (*John 1:14*). He is now the place where heaven and earth meet and are held dangerously together.

Coming out of his time of testing in the desert, Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand" (*Matthew 4:17 - NASB*).² He doesn't announce that you can now go to heaven, as that would have been odd for his Jewish audience. They were not wanting to go to God, they were wanting for God (or at least God's presence) to come back to them. Jesus is saying that in and through him, the kingdom of heaven, the rule and reign and presence of God (that "ā-dām"/humanity has historically rejected) is now on an invasion mission to permeate the earth.

"In him [is] life, and that life [is] the light of all mankind" (*John 1:4*). He is the bread of life (John 6:35). He is the light of the world (John 8:12). He is the good shepherd (John 10:11, promised in Ezekiel 34). He is the resurrection and New Creation (John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15). He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). He is the true vine (John 15 – aka: the true Israel). He is the culmination of all their festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) and he is the life of the age to come. He is the promised king, the image/eikōn of God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Samuel 7:12-13). He is the "Ideal Human" that is going to show us and teach us (Matthew 5-7) what "True Humanity" (and the rule and reign of God) looks like.

He is going to do all of this by giving his life as a ransom for many (Isaiah 53 and Mark 10:45), so that the power that sin has in our lives can be broken, that our debt can be cancelled and that we can be renewed (by and through the power of his Holy Spirit), so that we can continue God's plan of expanding the garden and bearing his image into it.

His resurrection demonstrated that he is the son of God in Power (Romans 1:4). He is the firstborn into God's new creation (Colossians 1:18).

The age to come (the New Creation) and the rule and reign (kingdom) of God has arrived in him and through him.

His death and resurrection enabled Israel to get back on track. Their time of exile could come to an end and they could experience a 'New Exodus'. Their hearts could be transformed, renewed (Ezekiel 36:26-27) and circumcised (Deuteronomy 30:6), so that:

- they could be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3)
- the garden project could get back on track
- ā-dām (humanity) could be restored to be the selem/eikōn (image) of God, by reflecting his love, his kindness, his mercy, his holiness and his wisdom into the world
- "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory [pulsating life and energy] of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (*Habakkuk 2:14*).

Movement 5

The Church as the New Humanity/New Israel

(Acts 1 - Revelation 20)

Jesus has been crucified, buried and resurrected. In Acts 1:3-11, he spoke to the apostles about the Kingdom of God (rule and reign of God) over a period of 40 days and told them to not leave Jerusalem, as they would soon receive power from the Holy Spirit. From there, "he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" (*Acts 1:10*). Two angels appeared and said, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (*Acts 1:11*). In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit is poured out on them with power (as promised).

Peter stood up among the bewildered crowd to explain what had happened. Through the resurrection of Jesus, God had brought about his New World (the age to come, Olam Haba!) and appointed Jesus as the rightful king of

Israel (and the world at large). The signs and wonders that they were seeing were evidence of that, as prophesied (Joel 2:28-32) and was merely a signpost. But a signpost to what? That, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (*Acts 2:36*). Jesus was the long-awaited deliverer. He was the Davidic coming King. He was God in the flesh, coming to rescue them and be a blessing to them, so that they, as Jews, could get back on track in order to be a blessing to the nations and get the nations back on track, in order to get God's creation/garden plan back on track.

He concluded by saying that that is who Jesus is and that they have crucified him!

When the people heard this, they were cut [*pierced*] to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ [Why?] for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:37-38*).

WHY REPENT (TURN AWAY FROM THEIR SIN) AND GET BAPTIZED?

So that:

- the power that sin has had over them could be broken
- the debt of their sin could be cleared (forgiveness)
- they could have a "New Exodus", a "spiritual return from exile"
- they could receive the Holy Spirit that would transform and recreate their hearts
- they could be a New Creation, set on a path of being "Truly Human" again (as per Genesis 1:26-28)
- they can be the image/eikōn of God, bearing his image into the world while they subdue, rule and harness the world's potential and expand 'the garden' (God's glorious life) all over it
- "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (*Habakkuk 2:14*).

Peter continued:

"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." [*A generation that is enslaved by the power of darkness*]. Those who accepted his message [*could make some sense of it*] were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (*Acts 2:39-41*).

WHAT WERE THEY DOING?

They were:

- surrendering their lives to the rule and reign of God
- dying with Jesus, being buried with Jesus and raised into a New Life as a New Creation (Romans 6:3-7) and a New Humanity in God's New World
- putting on "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image *[eikōn]* of its Creator." (as Paul said in Colossians 3:10)
- the New Israel
- now part of the promised family of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)
- the church, the "ekklesia" (Greek for church), the assembly of God (Deuteronomy 18:16), the People of God (1 Peter 2:9-10), the New Humanity (Ephesians 2:15).

WHAT DID THIS "NEW HUMANITY" OR "NEW ISRAEL" LOOK LIKE?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching *[what happened in and through Jesus life, death, burial and resurrection]* and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles *(Acts 2:42-43)*.

WHY AWE?

Because it was all starting to make sense and they could see how their whole history has pointed to this moment.

All the believers *[all those who were faithful to Jesus, those who had a believing allegiance]* were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. *[Why? They had a purpose, a 'job' to do]*. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved *(Acts 2:44-47)*.

WHAT WAS THEIR "GOD GIVEN" MISSION AS THIS "NEW HUMANITY"?

Jesus made that very clear after his resurrection by saying, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" *(John 20:21)*.

WHY DID THE FATHER SEND JESUS?

He sent Jesus to get the "human plan" (Genesis 1:26-28) back on track, so that the creation plan could get back on track.

They had to bring people into what God was doing in and through Jesus (Mark 1:16-20, Matthew 28:18-20), creating New Life where there was death (John 1:4). They were now the temple (1 Corinthians 6:19), the place where heaven and earth meet and are held dangerously together. They were commissioned to build these thriving communities that would bear God's image into the world, by mirroring his love, kindness, wisdom, favour, holiness, beauty and splendour into the world, as they rule, subdue and expand his 'garden' so that, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory [life giving presence and power] of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (*Habakkuk 2:14*).

Movement 6

The Return of the King and the New Creation

(Revelation 21-22)

Two angels appeared and said, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (*Acts 1:11*).

Jesus will one day return to set the world right, to bring about justice on the one side, with salvation on the other, as he brings to completion the plan of renewing all things.

Revelation 21-22 gives us a fairly clear picture as to what this will look like. The book of Revelation speaks to the issue of persecution that the church was experiencing. It is against that backdrop that the apostle John wrote the church this letter filled with a lot of symbolism in order to give them hope and encourage them to stay the course. As with most symbolism in the Bible, it merely serves as a 'signpost' pointing into the unknown future, and at every point John is saying, "It's like this, but much, much more so!"

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth, "for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "**I am making everything new!**" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" (*Revelation 21:1-5*).

"I am making EVERYTHING new!"

WHAT DOES “EVERYTHING” MEAN?

A new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem, a new temple and a new people, that will be new in a new way! Newness itself will be RENEWED, so that instead of a mere transition within ongoing human life, what God has planned will be the renewal of ALL things. “For the old order of things have passed away” (*Revelation 21:4*). It is easy to read Revelation (or the Bible as a whole), and to expect the final scene to be a picture of heaven, and in doing so, missing the full glory of what John is saying (and what God is planning).

WHAT IS JOHN SAYING?

Plato (the Athenian philosopher) was wrong. It isn’t a matter of ‘heaven’ being the perfect world to which we shall (perhaps) one day go, and ‘earth’ being the ragged, second-rate temporary dwelling from which we shall be glad to depart for good. As we have seen in Genesis 1-2, ‘earth’ is a glorious part of God’s glorious creation, but has its challenges and ‘heaven’, though God’s own abode, also has its challenges as we see with the “war in heaven” (*Revelation 12*). God’s ‘two-level’ world needs renewing in both of its elements.

When that is done, we will not only be left with a ‘new heaven’, but a ‘new heaven and a new earth’, that will be joined together completely and for ever, **here on earth.**

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling [*skēnē*] place is now among the people, and he will **DWELL** [*skēnoō*] with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (*Revelation 21:3*).

The word [*skēnoō*] is crucial, because it will bring forth the idea of God ‘dwelling’ in the tabernacle (the tent for worship in Exodus 40) and God ‘dwelling’ in the Temple in Jerusalem, revealing his glory in the midst of his people (1 Kings 8:10). It is also the word that John used in John 1:14 when he said, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [*skēnoō*] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace [*favour*] and truth.” What God did in Jesus, by coming to an unknowing world and an unwelcoming people, by joining heaven and earth together in his Son and then in the church (as the New Humanity), he is doing on a cosmic scale.

He is coming to live, for ever, in our midst. A healing, comforting, celebrating presence. That is why the closing scene in the Bible is not of human beings going up to heaven, but the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth. What we have in Revelation 21-22, is the **utter transformation** of heaven and earth, by means of God abolishing, from within heaven and earth, the

horrible, disgusting and tragic effects of human sin. In other words, the new world will be like the present one in the sense of it being a world full of beauty, power, delight, tenderness and glory. BUT it will also not have death, tears and everything that causes them.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it (Isaiah 60:19), for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (*Revelation 21:22-23*).

The whole city has become God's dwelling place, God's temple, or more exactly, the very centre of God's temple, the holy of holies, the place where God dwells forever.

Who will get to be a part of this city and who will not?

Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (*Revelation 21:7-8*).

In the new creation, there is no room for 'anti-creation'. In the world of life, there is no room for death. Genesis 1 has always been pointing to a New Creation. It isn't the case that the New Creation was an afterthought, a Plan B, once the first creation had gone so badly wrong. Human sin just meant that God's eventual design took a long, winding and often tear-stained and blood-spattered route. The most important tears and blood being those of God himself, in the person of the lamb. But, as with the triumphant conclusion of Exodus, so with Revelation, the goal is achieved by the power of sheer mercy and favour. The mercy and favour through which creation is not abolished but fulfilled, not thrown away and replaced, but renewed from top to bottom.

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (*Revelation 21:24-27*).

The city itself is not a static picture with people simply gazing at the glorious golden streets or at God himself and the lamb. It is a bustling community, filled with activity, as the nations come to worship and do homage. Not only will the people go to the city, but the life of the city will go to the people.

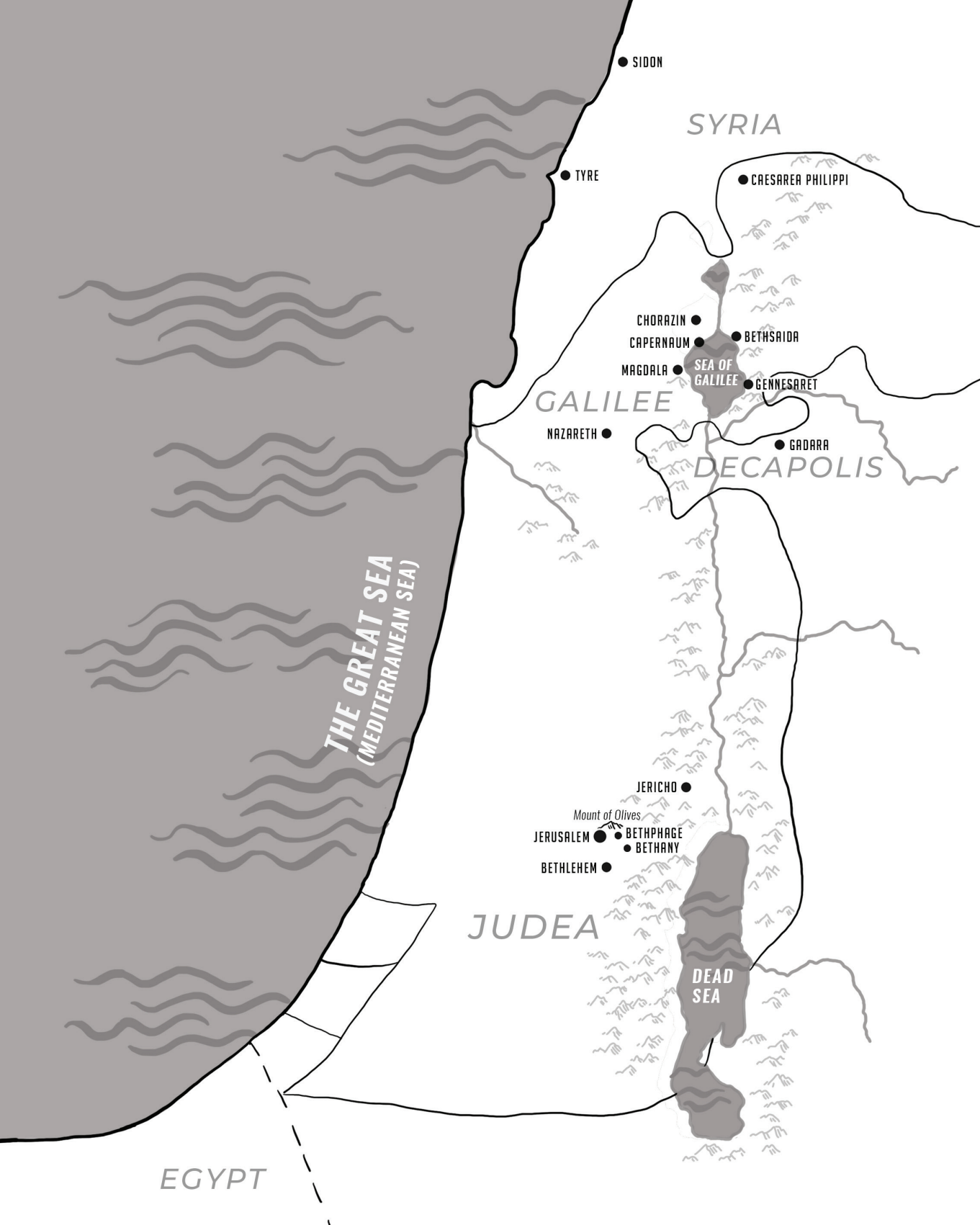
Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city [*echoing Eden*]. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse [*reverse of Genesis 3, Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 27-30*]. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (*Revelation 22:1-5*).

Life, liquid life, the water of life, is flowing from the city to the world around it. God's generous love is the source and goal of all things. How can the city, where He and the lamb are personally present, be anything other than the great wellspring of life flowing out to those who need it! From the initial fulfilment of Genesis 1-2, (via Isaiah 60 and the temple vision of Ezekiel 47) to the ultimate fulfillment of New Creation (Revelation 21-22), the water of life is flowing into the rest of the world.

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light (*Revelation 22:5*).

Things will come full circle, God created humanity as vice regents to reign the world with him and take it forward on his behalf. Now finally, we are back at the beginning – Eden – with the creation plan restored.

And they will reign for ever and ever" (*Revelation 22:5*). [*So that*] "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (*Habakkuk 2:14*).



SYRIA

● SIDON

● TYRE

● CAESAREA PHILIPPI

● CHORAZIN

● CAPERNAUM

● BETHSAIDA

● MAGDALA

● GENNESARET

GALILEE

● NAZARETH

DECAPOLIS

● GADARA

THE GREAT SEA
(MEDITERRANEAN SEA)

● JERICHO

Mount of Olives

● JERUSALEM

● BETHPHAGE

● BETHANY

● BETHLEHEM

JUDEA

DEAD SEA

EGYPT

The Book of Matthew

Introduction

Although the book itself is anonymous, early church tradition links it to Matthew the tax collector (Matthew 9:9, Matthew 10:3) who was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. For about thirty to forty years, the apostles taught orally and passed on their eyewitness accounts about Jesus and his teachings. From these, Matthew collected and arranged them (along with some material from the gospel of Mark) into this amazing tapestry, designed to highlight certain themes about Jesus. Throughout the book, Matthew wants to show us how Jesus is the continuation and fulfilment of the whole biblical story of God and Israel (Luke 24:13-35). He also wants to make clear that Jesus is the Messiah (the anointed king from the line of David), that he is a new authoritative teacher like Moses and that he is "God with us" (Immanuel in Hebrew). In the first three chapters, Matthew sets the stage for what is to come by attaching Jesus' story to the storyline of the OT scriptures (Hebrew Bible).³

SETTING THE STAGE (MATTHEW 1-3)

READ MATTHEW 1:1-17

Why the long genealogy? Although it might not be very important to us, one's family tree was enormously important in the ancient world. We struggle to read all the way through a genealogy like this, but in the ancient world this kind of genealogy would have been equivalent to a roll of drums, a fanfare of trumpets or a herald calling for attention.⁴ Jesus is the son of Abraham, which meant that he was going to bring God's blessing to all the nations (Genesis 12:1-3). Furthermore, he was the Messiah from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:1-14), which meant that he was going to rescue Israel and bring about God's new world.

The Greek word for "genealogy" in Matthew 1:1, is "genesis" which means "beginning". It is also the title of the Greek translation of the book of Genesis, implying that it is a book of beginnings. The book of Genesis gave the story of one beginning, namely God's creation and covenant relations with Israel. Now Matthew gives the story of a new beginning: the arrival of Jesus the Messiah as well as the kingdom of God.⁵

(v.1) **Jesus** ("Iēsous" in Greek), the name normally used in the Gospels and derived from the Hebrew Yeshua, "Yahweh saves", which is a shortened form of Joshua, "Yahweh



Watch the Bible
Project video -
Matthew 1-13

is salvation”.⁶

(v.1) **Messiah** comes from the Hebrew word “māšīaḥ”. The Greek equivalent of “māšīaḥ” is “christos”, from which we get the word “Christ”. Both the words “māšīaḥ” and “christos” mean “anointed” (with oil)

or “anointed one”.⁷ So, Christ wasn’t Jesus’ surname but his title and indication that he was the anointed one promised by God in the Hebrew Bible (our OT) who would bring about rescue from oppression as well as God’s new world.

READ MATTHEW 1:18-24

(v.18) **Pledged to be married?** In the ancient times (as in many African cultures today) being pledged to be married was as legally binding as being married. Therefore, Joseph would have had to get a divorce in order to break that pledge that he had made to Mary.

(v.19) **What is the “Law”?** When the NT authors talk about “the Law”, they are referring to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (our OT) called the Torah (which means instructions or teachings) or the Pentateuch (that is the Greek word for “five books”).

(v.19) **What did it mean to be faithful to “the Law”?** The Jews were not trying to get “saved” through their obedience to the Law (Torah). It was rather their faithfulness to the Law that distinguished them from other nations and showed them to be the people of God, a light to the nations, a people through whom God’s blessing could flow to the nations.

(v.20) **Angels** primarily appear in

the OT as messengers of divine revelation (of instruction, warning or hope) and as interpreters of visionary experiences (e.g. Ezekiel 40–48; Zechariah 1–6).⁸

(v.21) **“You are to give him the name Jesus”** The name “Jesus” was popular in Judaism of the first century. It was given to sons as a symbolic hope for Yahweh’s anticipated sending of salvation (rescue/deliverance).⁹

(v.21) **“He will save his people from their sins”** For many contemporary Christians, “salvation” (sōtēria in Greek) refers to going to heaven when you die, which is simply not what the Bible means by this term. The most fundamental meaning of salvation in Scripture is twofold: it is God’s deliverance of those in a situation of need from that which impedes their well-being, resulting in their restoration to wholeness. Wholeness or well-being is God’s original intent for creation, and that which impedes wholeness – sin, evil, and death in

all their forms – is fundamentally opposed to God's intent for creation.¹⁰

(v.22) **Who were the prophets?**

When we think of prophets and prophecy, popular culture can lead you to think of someone who can tell the future. In Biblical language, a prophet might be given a vision of the future, but most (95%) of their role was connected to explaining how things said in the PAST would come true if warnings were not heeded. As agents of God, prophets acted in various capacities (as was required of them), in order to carry out his will and fulfil his purpose. They served as God's spokesmen by heralding impending judgment (Jonah 3:4; 1 Kings 16:7), advocating repentance (2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chronicles 24:19) and conveying messages from God to the nations (Jeremiah 46:13; Ezekiel 25:2). They performed supernatural activities such as revealing future

events (1 Kings 11:29-31; Daniel 2:38-44; Isaiah 53:4), receiving dreams and visions (Numbers 12:6; Ezekiel 7:26) and working miracles (2 Kings 5:3; 2 Kings 4:3-6). They served as intermediaries between God and the people (Deuteronomy 18:16-18; 2 Kings 20:1) and between the people and God (1 Samuel 7:9; 2 Chronicles 32:20). In that context, they also served as watchmen (Ezekiel 3:17-21). They served as leaders in the community by giving advice (Zechariah 7:2-3, 1 Samuel 9:6), by giving encouragement (Acts 15:32; Ezra 5:1-2), by leading the people (Hosea 12:13; 1 Kings 18:40) as well as appointing kings and leaders (1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Kings 1:34). They also served as authors of the sacred text that we now call the Bible (1 Chronicles 29:29, Isaiah 30:8).¹¹

(v.23) **Immanuel** means "God with us" and is a quotation from (Isaiah 7:14).

READ MATTHEW 2:1-12

(v.1) **Who was King Herod?** The king who, by arrangement with Rome, ruled Jewish Palestine during the time that Jesus was born (from 37 BC to 4 BC).

(v.1) **Who were the Magi?** The term "Magi" (*magoi*) was originally used in early records to refer to a priestly class in ancient Persia, perhaps followers

of Zoroaster, the Persian teacher and prophet. These Magi were leading figures in the religious court life of their country of origin, employing a variety of scientific (astrology), diplomatic (wisdom), and religious (magical incantations) means to try to understand present and future life.¹² Traditionally they are known as "wise men" and are often referred to as the

“three wise men”, due to the three gifts given to Jesus.

(v.4) Who were the chief priests?

They were members of the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish religious, political and legal counsel in Jerusalem in NT times)¹³, joining the high priest in giving oversight to the temple activities, treasury, and priestly orders.¹⁴

(v.4) Who were the teachers of the law? The term “teacher of the law” (also known as “scribe”) was once most closely associated with reading, writing, and making copies of the Scriptures. But by NT times, it came to signify an expert in

interpreting the Law (Torah) and was used interchangeably with the term “lawyer” or “expert in the law.”¹⁵

(v.5) Why is Bethlehem important?

The prophet Micah prophesied that a great ruler would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2,4). David was from Bethlehem (1 Samuel 17:12) and was also crowned in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:13).

(v.11) Why bring him gifts? When approaching royalty or persons of high religious, political, or social status, gifts were often brought to show respect.¹⁶ The gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh allude to Psalms 72:10.

READ MATTHEW 2:13-23

(v.13) Why the reference to Egypt? Jesus was (as the representative of Israel) called out of Egypt, just as the people of Israel were (Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1).

(v.18) What is Jeremiah’s prophecy about? There is much speculation

about this, but no one has a clear explanation as to its purpose and the story’s connection to Jeremiah 31:15.

(v.22) Who was Archelaus? He was the eldest son and successor to Herod the Great and ruled over Judea and Samaria from 4 BC until 6 AD.¹⁷

READ MATTHEW 3:1-12

(v.1) Who was John the Baptist? John the Baptist (also called the “baptiser” in Mark 6:14) was the son of the priest Zechariah and Elizabeth

(who was a relative of Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1:5, 36). John was born approximately six months before the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26). His

youth was spent in obscurity until he received a divine call to this prophetic vocation (Luke 3:2) and entered upon a public ministry. After John placed his seal of approval upon Jesus (John 1:24–36), their ministries overlapped for a short time. Soon after, John was arrested and put to death by Herod Antipas (Mark 6:27).¹⁸

(v.2) **What does it mean to repent?**

For the OT prophets “repentance” is a call for change in a person’s attitude toward God, which would impact one’s actions and one’s overall direction in life. External signs of repentance regularly included confession of sin, prayers of remorse, and abandonment of sin.¹⁹

(v.2) **What is the kingdom of heaven?**

The kingdom is in essence God’s rescue operation for his whole world that is taking place through Jesus. He has come to confront evil (especially spiritual evil) and to restore God’s rule and reign over the whole world (Matthew 6:10). He will do this by creating a new family of people (a Messianic community or a “New Israel”) who will follow him, obey his teaching and live under his rule.²⁰ So, when John the Baptist (and Jesus in Matthew 4:17) said, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near”, he is saying, repent for the rule and reign of God is at hand.

(v.3) **What is the quote from Isaiah about?** The passage in Isaiah 40:3 was part of an oracle written to the

people of God while the majority of the people were living in captivity in Babylon (because of their sin). The context of the oracle was that all is not lost, but that there will come a time when their service (time in exile) would have been completed, their sins paid for and when God would return as king of his people (Isaiah 40:1-3). Leading up to this would be “A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3).

(v.4) **What’s up with John B’s dress code?**

Matthew 3:4 is an echo of 2 Kings 1:8, where it talks about the prophet Elijah wearing similar clothing. Matthew 11:1-14 will further unpack their connection.

(v.5) **What was the deal with John’s baptism?**

Because water rituals were more common in antiquity than they are today, ancient people would have understood the symbolism of baptism more readily than most modern readers do. The Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hittites and Hebrews used water in purification rituals. Jewish people in Jesus’ day were generally meticulous about the ritual washings commanded in the Hebrew Bible, to the point of well-to-do people in the wealthy neighbourhoods of Jerusalem having had their own ritual immersion pools. The Essenes of the Qumran community (the people who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls) were among

the most meticulous; besides the initial washing required to join the sect, they were always washing themselves subsequently to insure ritual purity. Ceremonial washing became part of Jewish faithfulness. Jewish people practiced one particular kind of once-for-all ritual washing, however. This was the baptism administered to Gentiles (non-Jews) when they wished to convert to Judaism and wash away their former impurity. Full immersion, coupled with circumcision (for males) and a sincere heart, meant conversion. Sometime later, Jewish teachers insisted that a Gentile converted in this manner became “like a newborn child”, completely separated from his or her Gentile past. John the Baptist proclaimed his baptism as a “baptism of repentance”, a once-for-all act, purifying a person from their former ways in view of the coming kingdom (rule and reign of God). Quite in contrast to the type of once-for-all baptism of Gentiles mentioned above, however, John demanded that Jewish people also undergo this rite. He regarded Jewish people as in need of “conversion” to God’s way as much as Gentiles did (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8).²¹

(v.7) **Who were the Pharisees and Sadducees?** The first century historian Flavius Josephus refers to the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes as “schools of thought”,

(among Jews at the time)²² something of a mix between a religious faction and a political affiliation.

The name **Pharisee** is probably derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic “perušim” (the separated ones) alluding to both their origin and their characteristic practices. They tended to be politically conservative and religiously liberal. They held the minority membership on the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish religious, political and legal counsel in Jerusalem in NT times).²³

What did they believe? The Pharisees believed in the supreme place of Torah (first five books of the OT), with a rigorous scribal interpretation of it. Their most distinct characteristic was their adherence to the oral tradition (later on codified in the Mishnah), which they obeyed rigorously as an attempt to make the written law relevant to daily life (and never overstep its boundaries). They had a well-developed belief in angelic beings. They had concrete messianic hopes, as they looked for the coming Davidic messianic kingdom. They believed that the Messiah (the coming Davidic king) would overthrow the Gentiles and restore the fortunes of Israel with Jerusalem as capital. They believed in the resurrection of the righteous (those who were faithful to the Torah) when the messianic kingdom arrived, with the accompanying

punishment (and judgment) of the wicked.

They viewed Rome as an illegitimate force that was preventing Israel from experiencing its divinely ordained role in the covenants that God made with their ancestors. They held strongly to divine providence (God's intervention in the universe), yet viewed humans as having freedom of choice, which made them responsible for their own thoughts, desires and actions. As a lay fellowship (or brotherhood) connected with local synagogues, the Pharisees were popular with the common people of the land.²⁴

The **Sadducees** were a small group with aristocratic (elite) and priestly influence, who derived their authority from the activities of the temple. They tended to be politically liberal and religiously conservative and held the majority membership on the Sanhedrin.

What did they believe? They held a conservative attitude toward the Scriptures, accepting nothing as authoritative except the written word, literally interpreted. They accepted only Torah (the five books of the OT) as authoritative, rejecting any beliefs not found there (aka the Prophets and Writings).

For that reason, they denied the resurrection from the dead, the reality of angels, and spirit life. They produced no literature of which we

are aware. They had no expressed messianic expectation, which tended to make them satisfied with their wealth and political power. They were open to aspects of Hellenism (Greek culture) and often collaborated with the Romans (the ruling power of the day). They tended to be removed from the common people by their economic and political status.²⁵

(v.11) **What does it mean to be baptised with the Holy Spirit and fire?** It is pointing to Acts 2, when God would be ushering the people into his new messianic community with the Holy Spirit and fire.

(v.12) **What is the deal with the “winnowing fork”?** Drawing on a scene well known to his listeners, he declares that the coming Messiah already has the winnowing fork in his hand. The harvest is ready to begin. At the end of a harvest season, the farmer brought the harvested wheat into the threshing floor, a stone or hard-packed dirt surface, often with a short wall around the perimeter. He then took a large pitchfork and tossed the wheat into the air, where the wind blew the lighter chaff away, leaving only the good wheat heads in the threshing floor. The wheat was then stored in the granary for later grinding into flour to make bread, but the chaff was raked into piles and burned.²⁶

Why do you think John was so “hard” on the Pharisees and Sadducees in (v.7)?

What do you think John meant in (v.8) by saying that they need to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (read Acts 20:26) and that having Abraham as their father (v.9) was not enough?

What kind of fruit do you think God was looking for? Read Galatians 5:20-25.

In what ways do we today claim to be Christians, when the fruit of our lives show something very different? Give specific examples.

Watch: The importance of knowing Jesus



READ MATTHEW 3:13-17 - JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

(v.15) **Why did Jesus have to be baptized by John to fulfil all righteousness?** Jesus affirms, in effect, that it is God’s will (“all righteousness”) that John baptize him; and both John and Jesus “fulfil” that will, that righteousness, by going through with it (“it is proper for

us”).²⁷ What exactly does it mean and why did it have to happen that way? Jesus unfortunately doesn’t tell us why, therefore we can only speculate.

(v.17) **“This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased”** is an echo of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

READ MATTHEW 4:1-11

(v.1) **Who is the devil or the “tempter”?** The Bible is never very precise about the identity of the figure known as Satan. The Hebrew word means “the accuser”, and at times Satan seems to be a member of God’s heavenly council, with special responsibility as director of prosecutions (1 Chronicles 21:1; Job 1–2; Zechariah 3:1-2).

However, Satan is linked to the serpent of the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1–15) and with the rebellious morning star, cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12–15), and was

seen by many Jews as the quasi-personal source of evil standing behind both human wickedness and large-scale injustice, sometimes operating through semi-independent “demons”. By Jesus’ time, various words were used to describe this figure, including Beelzebul/b (literally ‘Lord of the flies’) or simply ‘the evil one’; and Jesus warned his followers against the deceits this figure could perpetrate.

Jesus’ opponents accused him of being in league with Satan, but the early Christians believed that Jesus in

fact defeated Satan, both in his own struggles with temptation (Matthew 4; Luke 4), his exorcisms of demons, and his death (1 Corinthians 2:8; Colossians 2:15). Final victory over this ultimate enemy is thus assured (Revelation 20), though the struggle

can still be fierce for Christians (Ephesians 6:10–20).²⁸

Jesus' quotations:

(v.4) is from Deuteronomy 8:3;

(v.7) is from Deuteronomy 6:16;

(v.10) is from Deuteronomy 6:13.

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? List at least two things.

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What are some of your greatest temptations? Be specific.

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What are two to three things you think you can do to better resist those temptations? Read 1 Corinthians 13:10.

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READ MATTHEW 4:12-17

(v.15-16) **What is the Isaiah prophecy all about?** Matthew sees Jesus move (Matthew 4:13) from Nazareth to Capernaum (as his Galilean residence) as an explicit fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2. Zebulun and Naphtali were the OT territories closest to first-century Galilee. The prophet Isaiah was predicting that the people living in darkness (the

Jews in exile) would see a great light return to their homeland. Matthew is saying that Jesus is now the light dawning on the peoples of those regions, presumably including Gentiles, as well as Jews.²⁹

(v.17) **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** See notes on (Matthew 3:1-12).

READ MATTHEW 4:18-22

(v.19) **“Come follow me”** The normal pattern in Israel was for a prospective disciple to approach a rabbi and ask to study with him (e.g. Matthew 8:19). At the outset of his kingdom mission, Jesus establishes a new pattern, because he is the one

who takes the initiative to seek out and call these brothers to enter into a permanent relationship with him. ^{30, 31} From here on he will be training them for a leadership role to bring about God’s new world.

Why do you think Jesus asked these guys to follow him? Where was he going with this? Read Mark 3:13-15.

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What do you think it would have meant to follow Jesus in the first century?

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What do you notice about their response to Jesus’ calling in (v.20 and 22)?

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What do you think it means to follow Jesus today? Give exact examples.

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Would you say that you are currently a follower (disciple) of Jesus? Why would you say so? Be specific. _____

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They left everything behind in order to follow Jesus. What are some things that are preventing you from following Jesus the way that you should? Why would you say so? _____

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READ MATTHEW 4:23-25

(v.23) **What is a synagogue?** “Synagogue” is a word derived from the Greek word “synagōgē”, which originally meant an assembly. It initially described local gatherings of Jews and then the building where Jewish congregations met for prayer and worship. Jesus is depicted as teaching and performing miracles in synagogues in Galilee (Matthew 4:23; Luke 4:15), especially in Nazareth (Matthew 13:54; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16) and in Capernaum (Mark 1:21; Luke 7:5; John 6:59).³²

(v.23) **What is the good news of the kingdom?** Traditionally people have viewed the “good news” as Jesus

dying for your sins, so that you can go to heaven. The biblical authors though, viewed the good news of the kingdom as God’s presence returning to Israel in and through Jesus (and all those who are in him) in order to bring about God’s new world. (Also see note on Matthew 3:3).

(v.25) **What was the Decapolis?** Decapolis literally means “ten cities”. The term refers to a region in southern Syria and north-eastern Palestine that was composed of a number of Hellenistic cities with the surrounding countryside pertaining to each.³³

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? List at least four things.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

Handwriting practice lines for the 'THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:' section.

QUESTIONS I HAVE:

Handwriting practice lines for the 'QUESTIONS I HAVE:' section.



See the full colour image or read more on first-century synagogues here



Interlude

Jesus, the “new” Moses: Throughout the book, Matthew wants to show us this (Deuteronomy 18:15). Jesus came out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15) as Moses did, he passed through the waters of baptism in the Jordan river (Matthew 3:16) as Moses passed through the Red Sea and he entered into the wilderness for forty days (Matthew 4:1) as Moses entered the desert for forty years. From there, Jesus goes up onto a mountain to deliver his new teaching (Matthew 5-7) as Moses received the Torah from God up on a mountain. Through all of this, Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the promised greater-than-Moses figure, who would deliver Israel from slavery, give them new divine teaching, save them from their sin and bring about a new covenant relationship (Jeremiah 31:31-32) between God and his people as he fulfils the story line of the Torah (Luke 24:13-35). Through his teachings in Matthew 5-7, Matthew explores what it looks like to follow Jesus and live in God’s kingdom. This is an upside-down kingdom where there are no privileged members. The poor, the “nobodies”, the uneducated, the irreligious, the wealthy, the educated and the religious - everyone is invited and called to turn, to repent, to follow him and join his messianic community. Through his teachings he makes it clear that he is not here to set aside the commands of the OT, rather he is here to fulfil all of it through his life and his teaching. He is here to transform the hearts of his people (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:26-27) so that they can truly love God, love their neighbour and live out God’s purpose for their lives.³⁴

READ MATTHEW 5:1-2

What do you think it means to be a disciple of Jesus (v.1)? Write your answer before reading the definition below. Be specific.

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(v.1) **What is a disciple?** People usually think that the disciples were the twelve followers of Jesus. Although it is true that the twelve were also his disciples, they were actually called “apostles” (Matthew 10:2).

The Greek word for “disciple” is “mathētēs” and means “student”, “pupil”, “follower” or “learner”. It was the term (during Jesus’ earthly ministry, and during the days of the early church) that was most frequently used to designate one

of Jesus' followers (262 times).³⁵ Master-disciple relationships were common in the land of Israel, although the terms for disciples are almost completely absent from the OT and early Jewish literature. A person became a disciple as he

sought out a teacher and followed him and his principles. Similarly, in the rabbinical tradition, a learner or student ("talmid") attached himself to a rabbi ("teacher" or "master") or to a movement.³⁶ (Also see note on Matthew 4:19).

Is the historical definition of a disciple different to your definition? If so, in what way?

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READ MATTHEW 5:3-12

(v.3) **What does "blessed" mean?** The Beatitudes, as they have traditionally been called from the Latin word for "blessings", are a common biblical type of literature in both Testaments (e.g., Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 3:13; Daniel 12:12; Matthew 11:6; Acts 20:35; Revelation 1:3). The word "Makarios" (Greek for "blessed")

refers to those who are and/or will be happy, fortunate, or as those who are "to be congratulated" because of God's response to their behaviour or situation.³⁷ God's response being, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they will be comforted, they will inherit the earth, etc.

How do you think Jesus would describe someone who is "poor in spirit" (v.3)? Why would you say so? Read Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 51:17.

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How do you think Jesus would describe someone who "hungers and thirsts for righteousness" (v.6)? Why would you say so? Give at least three examples. Read Isaiah 55:1-2.

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More lines on the next page ...

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How do you think Jesus would describe someone who is “pure in heart” (v.8)? Why would you say so? Read Psalm 24:3-4.

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What would it look like for you to personally be “poor in spirit”? Read Luke 18:9-14.

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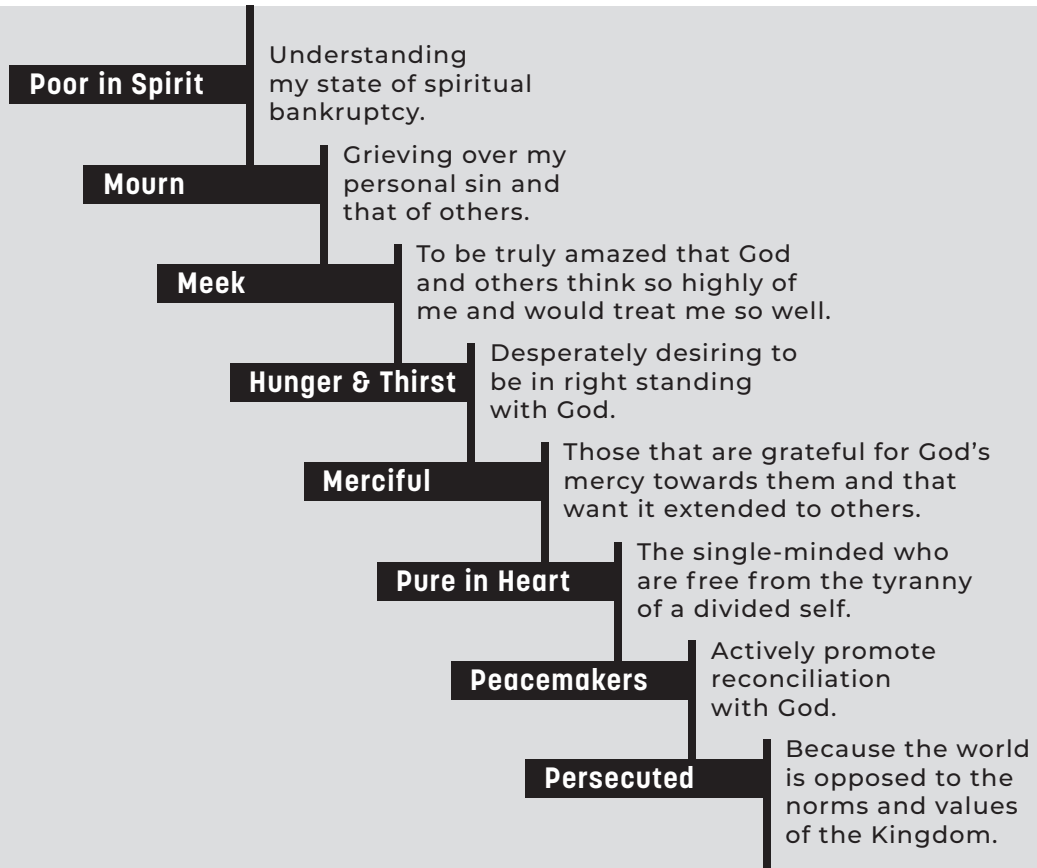
What would it look like for you to personally “hunger and thirst for righteousness”? Read Psalm 42:1-2.

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What would it look like for you to personally be “pure in heart”? Read Psalm 51:10.

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THE BEATITUDES DOMINO EFFECT:



READ MATTHEW 5:13-16

(v.13) **What was salt used for in ancient times?** Some of the most basic uses of salt in the ancient

world were to preserve food and add flavour to it.

In what way do you think Jesus would want you (personally) to “preserve” his teaching and way of life? Read 1 John 2:6. _____

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In what way do you think Jesus would want you (personally) to “add the flavour” of his new world to where you work, live and socialize? Give at least three examples. _____

In what way do you think Jesus would like you (personally) to be a light to those around you? Give at least three examples. _____

READ MATTHEW 5:17-20

<p>(v.17) What is the Law and the Prophets? It refers to two of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible. The Jews refer to their Bible (our OT) as the Tanakh. The term is an acronym for the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible: the Torah (Law), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings). In the Christian Bible (OT), we have all of these, but in a slightly</p>	<p>different order.</p> <p>(v.17) What did Jesus mean when he said, “I have not come to abolish them (the Law and the Prophets), but to fulfil them?” He came to bring about a revolution, a new way of being God’s people, to which Israel’s whole life and tradition had always pointed.</p>
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What do you think it means to be “righteous” (v.20)? Why would you say so?

READ MATTHEW 5:21-26

(v.22) **What does “Raca” mean?** It was an Aramaic term of contempt. Name-calling was highly insulting in Jewish culture.

(v.22) **What does he mean by the fires of hell?** “Fire of hell” comes from the term “geenna” (pronounced “gehenna”). It referred to the valley of the son of Hinnom, an area west and southwest of Jerusalem. Here Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons to Molech (2 Kings 16:3), which caused Josiah to defile the place (2 Kings 23:10). Later the valley was used to burn refuse from Jerusalem, so the constant burning made this reference to the fires of punishment appropriate. Jewish apocalyptic writers began to call the Valley of Hinnom the entrance to hell, later

hell itself.³⁸

(v.23) **How important is reconciliation?** The only altar at which an offering could be made, was at the temple in Jerusalem. This teaching, presumably uttered in Galilee, brings to mind a worshipper who has travelled 128km to Jerusalem with his offering (probably a sacrificial animal). When he remembers someone has something against him, he leaves the animal in the temple to make the journey of a week or more to Galilee and back again. He does this in order to be reconciled with his brother or sister, before he presents his offering. The improbability of the scenario emphasizes Jesus’ point: the importance of the right relationships demands decisive action.³⁹

Have you recently said or done something inappropriate that you think you need to go and apologize for? If so, what did you do and how would you like to go about apologizing for it? Be specific. Read Ephesians 4:29.

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Is there someone that you think God would want you to get reconciled with? If so, do you think it is possible to get reconciled from your side (Romans 12:18)? If so, what could some possible next steps be?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 5:27-32

(v.27) **“You shall not commit adultery”** By committing adultery, you are not only sinning against your spouse, but you are also sinning against God (Genesis 39:9 and Psalm 51:4).

What is a certificate of divorce?
Read Deuteronomy 24:1 and Matthew 19:1-9 for a better understanding of the context of Jesus’ comments on divorce.

What do you think it means to look at a woman lustfully? Why would you say so?

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Why do you think Jesus viewed “looking at a woman lustfully” as equal to physically sleeping with her/committing adultery?

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On a scale of 1-10, how serious do you think Jesus wants us to be about sin in our lives? Why would you say so?

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What are some things that are currently causing you to stumble? Name at least two things and be specific. Read Genesis 4:7.

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What do you think it would mean for you to “cut it off and throw it away”? Give at least two examples and be specific.

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READ MATTHEW 5:33-37

(v.33) **“Do not break your oath”** In the OT, God often guarantees the fulfillment of his promises with an oath. In the same way, the OT permitted a person to swear by the name of God to substantiate an important affirmation or promise. The Pharisees developed a complicated series of rulings regarding Shebuoth (oaths), which were of two kinds: a positive oath

was a promise to do something, while a negative oath was a promise not to do something.⁴⁰ There was a tendency among some interpreters to make this permission mean that only oaths made by invoking the name of the Lord were binding. If they weren't really serious about their oath, they would say, “I swear by heaven”, and since they didn't invoke the literal name of God,

it wasn't binding. The increasing tendency to try to find loopholes in one's oath included swearing by "less sacred" things (e.g., "earth," "Jerusalem," etc.; Matthew 23:16-22),

which in turn led to the devaluation of vows. This caused some Jewish groups to warn against using any kind of oath too often.⁴¹

On a scale of 1-10, how trustworthy would your friends, family and colleagues say you are? Why would they say so?

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If you have not been very trustworthy, how do you think you can go about rebuilding your reputation?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 5:38-42

(v.38) **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?** Read Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. Among some ancient societies, punishment was handed out without real regard for individual cases, and often the penalty greatly exceeded the crime. The law of revenge (lex talionis) was originally intended as a means of providing justice and of purging evil from among God's people. It was established as a check to inappropriate punishment and was not to be administered by individuals, but only by civil authorities and civil courts. This was done to protect the public, to punish offenders, and to deter crime.⁴²

(v.39) **“Do not resist an evil person”** It is not the disciple's personal responsibility to “resist (the) evil.” That is the responsibility of society's governing authorities. On the personal level, the disciple's first responsibility is to reverse the dynamic of the situation from taking to giving.⁴³

(v.39) **“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also”** This is not referring to someone attacking you, but rather to someone insulting you by giving you a backhand slap.

(v.40) **“If anyone wants to sue you**

and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well” In contrast to the eager litigation of his opponent, the disciple should not only willingly be deprived of his coat (the undergarment), but should add his cloak (the more valuable upper garment) as a bonus, despite the fact that the law (Exodus 22:25–27) forbade its confiscation on humanitarian grounds. The principle here is not primarily the avoidance of lawsuits, but a radically unselfish attitude to one's rights and property.⁴⁴

(v.41) **“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles”** Persian royal post officers could force a civilian to carry official correspondence, and Roman military personnel could organize bands of unpaid labourers from the common people to construct roads, fortifications, and public buildings. The most familiar NT scene is where Simon of Cyrene was forced into service by the Roman guards to carry Jesus' cross (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21).⁴⁵

(v.42) **“Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you”** Jesus is calling his followers to show a spirit of generosity towards the less fortunate, but not the lazy (2 Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 13:4).

Name four expectations that Jesus had of his followers according to this passage. _____

Which two of these things would be most difficult for you to do on a personal level? Why? _____

READ MATTHEW 5:43-48

(v.48) **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”**

Jesus’ disciples are to pursue the perfection of God himself: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). The

word “perfect” (teleios) reflects the Hebrew term “tâmîm”, which is used to describe complete commitment of a person to God, involving ethical blamelessness. ⁴⁶ Also see the note on Matthew 19:21.

What do you learn about God from this passage? _____

What do you learn about yourself from this passage? _____

What are some of the things that you are grateful for that God has blessed you with (or is blessing you with) in spite of numerous “shortcomings” in your life?

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Are there people that you currently don't get along with? Why?

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Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What do you think it would mean for you to love those whom you do not get along with? Be specific.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 6:1-4

(v.2) **Giving to the needy?** Giving to the needy was part of being a Jew (Deuteronomy 15:7-11). In other words, you couldn't be a Jew and not be generous.

(v.2) **What is a hypocrite?** The term "hypocrite" (hypokritēs) was originally used to describe actors on a Greek stage who put on various

masks to play different roles. Today, the term hypocrite describes a person who says one thing, but lives a different way. The religious leaders of the time were indicted by Jesus for a particular form of hypocrisy: They were carrying out external acts of righteousness that masked, even from themselves, their own inner corruption.⁴⁷

Have you ever done something only to be seen? If so, what was it and why did you do it?

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How do you feel about giving to those in need? Why? Be specific.

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In what ways do you think you can be more generous to those in need? Be specific.

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READ MATTHEW 6:5-15

(v.5) **"When you pray"** Although individual prayer was appropriate at any time, pious Jews prayed publicly

at set times: morning, afternoon, and evening (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Acts 3:1).⁴⁸

(v.5) **“For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men”** When the set time of prayer arrived, pious

Jews would stop what they were doing and pray. This could be done discreetly or with a great deal of display.⁴⁹

Do you currently pray? If so, what do your prayer times look like? (When do you pray? Where do you pray? What do you usually pray about? Do you pray out loud? How much time do you spend praying a day?)

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Are you currently satisfied with your prayer life? If not, what do you think could be a next step to make it more engaging?

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What do you think it means to “hallow God’s name” in (v.9)? Read Isaiah 61:10.

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What do you think he means by “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” in (v10)? Read the note on Matthew 3:2.

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What are some things that you are finding difficult to forgive others for? Why?

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What are some things that you hope God will forgive you for? Why?

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A guideline for prayer based on the “OUR FATHER” (Matthew 6:5-13).

This prayer is the centre point of the sermon in Matthew 5-7. Before and after the prayer, Jesus teaches the crowds and his disciples what a God-honouring, kingdom-focused life looks like. The prayer encapsulates the simplicity and humility required of all believers as they look to Him as the provider. This prayer is not about “me” but it is about “us” as members of the kingdom family.

“Our Father in heaven”

Like in any conversation, we start by addressing the person we are praying to (Our Father) the father of all the faithful (not just me), who currently resides in heaven. The expression “father” helps us look towards him not as a distant ruler but rather as the head of a family, someone close, who has authority to lead his family of believers.

There are seven requests in this prayer. The first three help us to give the proper respect and honour to God, with the following four focusing on our personal needs.

“Hallowed be your name”

Sacred and set apart is your name.

This is a time to praise and honour God for who he is, what he has done and what he is doing. It is also to thank him for all the blessings that you have in your life.

“Your kingdom come, you will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”

In God’s kingdom, he is the king and his domain, where he has control, is the hearts of his followers (not a geographical area). His will (kingdom life) is to be followed here on earth, as it is being followed in heaven.

This is a time that you can pray through how this can happen in your life. How you can embody his rule and reign and how you can “expand His garden” and “bear His image into it”.

What follows now are four requests, basic things that we require every day.

“Give us today our daily bread”

Here we ask our Father for enough sustenance to see this day through. Bread can stand not only for food, but all those basic requirements, like clothing and shelter, that our Father knows we need. This helps us distinguish between what we “need” and what we “want”.

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”

Here, we reflect on a number of things. Our “debts” are those sins, those actions outside of the kingdom life that may have hurt God, others or ourselves.

Then, as members of the family of believers, we ask God to forgive (clear up and forget) these “debts”. Lastly, we reflect on attitudes that we may have towards “our debtors” (those who have sinned against us) remembering that our own (much greater) “debts” have been forgiven.

“And lead us not into temptation”

We have just been forgiven our past debts and now we ask God for his help with our personal struggles today. Temptations are always around us and here we ask him for the spiritual strength to not give in to them, but rather to avoid those things that do not lead us to live a God-honouring, kingdom- focused life.

“but deliver us from the evil one”

Now we ask God to keep us safe from all those things that may happen externally, brought on by “the evil one”, Satan himself.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 6:16-18

(v.16) **When you fast?** The law (Torah) required only one fast a year – on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-43; 23:26-32). The expression used there is “deny yourselves” (NIV) and “humble your souls” (NASB). This indicates that in addition to fasting, the people were to demonstrate a humbling of their souls by wearing

sackcloth, mourning, and praying on the Day of Atonement (Psalm 35:13; Isaiah. 58:3). As time passed, fasts multiplied for legitimate purposes, such as a sign of repentance and seeking God’s mercy (e.g. Ezra 8:21–23), and certain days of the year became regular days of fasting (Nehemiah 9:1; Zechariah 8:19).⁵⁰

Have you ever fasted? Why?

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Do you think that you will ever have to fast? Why?

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READ MATTHEW 6:19-24

What do you learn about God from this passage?

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If a private investigator were hired to investigate what you store up in your life, what would they find ...

1. With regards to treasures on earth? Read 1 John 2:15-17.

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2. With regards to treasures in heaven? Read Psalm 73:25-26. _____

In what way would you like to store up more treasures in heaven? _____

(v.22-23) **The eye is the lamp of the body?** If you wanted to walk by night in the ancient world, you would have to walk with a lamp in front of you. You would shine the light in the direction you wanted to go and from there your entire body would follow the light. It seems like Jesus is saying that our eyes, our gaze, our attention, is like this light. Wherever our eyes (gaze or attention) go, our bodies follow. (v.22) **“The eye is the**

lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” This means that if your eyes are focused on good things (on what is wholesome, proper and pure), it will positively impact your whole life and set you in a great direction. He continues in (v.23) **“But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”** What does this boil down to? The things that you choose to pay attention to, direct your life.⁵¹

What are the top three things (in order) that your eyes (gaze and attention) are currently focused most on? Why would you say so? Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

What do you learn about God and Jesus from this passage? Read 1 Peter 5:7.

More lines on the next page ...

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What do you learn about yourself from this passage?

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Has worrying (v.27) ever added value to your life? If so, when and how? If not, in what way has it taken away from your life? Read Philippians 4:6-7.

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What do you think it means to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (v.33)?

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What could distract you from seeking “first his kingdom and righteousness?” Why would you say so?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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READ MATTHEW 7:1-6

“Do not judge” How would you reconcile (v.1) with 1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:1-4 and James 2:12-13?

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What do you think is the difference between being judgmental and making a judgment?

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What are some “specks” in others’ eyes that are currently irritating you? Why?

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What are some “planks” in your eye that you think God wished you paid more attention to? Why would you say so?

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Jesus does indeed want us to bring up concerns with one another (Colossians 3:16). What he is addressing in the passage, is the spirit with which we should do it (v.5). Why do you think he wants you to first attend to the “plank” in your own eye before you address the concerns that you have with your brother or sister in Christ? Be specific. _____

READ MATTHEW 7:7-12

What do you learn about God from this passage? _____

What do you think are some gifts that children would say are absolutely awesome, but parents would know to not be “good”? Why would you say so? _____

What are some “good gifts” that you have maybe asked God for that you think, from his perspective, might not be the best for you? Why would you say so? Read 1 John 5:14. _____

How do you respond when God doesn’t bless you with a positive answer to your prayers? Be specific. _____

List at least three ways that you think you can “do to others what you would have them do to you” (v.12)?

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What do you think he means by, “for this sums up the law and the prophets” (v.12)?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 7:13-14

The narrow gate (everything that Jesus has taught up to this point) is the gate that leads to God's new world. In turn, the wide gate (disobedience or neglect of Jesus' teachings) is the gate that leads away from God's new world and towards destruction. Which road would your friends, family and colleagues say you are currently on? Why would they say so?

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READ MATTHEW 7:15-28

What do you think Jesus considers as good fruit (v.16)? Read Ephesians 4:2; Romans 15:13.

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What do you think Jesus considers as bad fruit? Read Ephesians 5:3-7.

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What are some things that could potentially make your "tree" a "bad tree"? Read Psalm 66:18.

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Why did Jesus say that he never knew these people who called him Lord even though they prophesied and drove out demons in his name (v23)?

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What was the “spiritual” difference between the wise and the foolish builder (v24, 26)?

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What do you learn about God from this passage?

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What do you learn about yourself from this passage?

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What percentage of people (that you have met or know) actually live by these teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7? Why would you say so? Read Luke 13:22-30.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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Interlude

Through chapters 8 and 9, Matthew shows Jesus bringing the reality of the kingdom (rule and reign of God) into the day-to-day lives of people. Throughout this section, Matthew has arranged hree groups of three stories about Jesus bringing the power of God’s kingdom into the lives of hurting and broken people. These nine stories are about people who are sick, have broken bodies or are in danger. Jesus then heals or saves them by his acts of grace and power. Right in-between these triads, we find two parallel stories in which Jesus called people to follow him (Matthew 8:18-22; 9:9-13). Matthew is making a point here.⁵² Transformation can only take place by following Jesus and becoming his disciple (2 Corinthians 3:18).

READ MATTHEW 8:1-4

(v.4) Read Leviticus 14:2-32 for context on **“offer the gift that Moses required”**

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 8:5-13

(v.5) **Who were the centurions?**
In the Roman army at the time of

Jesus, there were about 150,000 soldiers spread throughout the

empire. They were divided in legions (6,000 men per legion), cohorts (600 men per cohort) and centuriae (100 men per centuria/century). The centurions were the principal professional officers in the armies of ancient Rome and were responsible

for a centuria/century. They formed the backbone of the legion and enforced discipline. Centurions received a higher pay (as much as fifteen times more) and a greater share of the spoils than did the common soldiers. ⁵³

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

What do you think Jesus means by (v.11-12)? _____

READ MATTHEW 8:14-17

(v.17) **“He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases”** is a quote

from what is called the fourth servant song in Isaiah 53:4.

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

READ MATTHEW 8:18-22

(v.20) **“Son of Man”** is used in Daniel’s prophecy (Daniel 7:13–14) to refer to a glorified sovereign, the apocalyptic messianic figure who rules forever with the Ancient of Days (God). With a general threefold progression, Jesus uses the expression to clarify exactly who he is and what his

ministry is. The Son of Man is the **humble Servant** who has come to forgive sins of common sinners in his earthly ministry (Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8, 32,40). The Son of Man is the **suffering Servant**, whose atoning death and resurrection will redeem his people (Matthew 16:13,

27-28; 17:9, 12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2, 24, 45). The Son of Man is the **glorious King and Judge** who will return to

bring the kingdom of heaven to earth (Matt. 10:23; 13:37, 41; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64).⁵⁴

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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What is currently preventing you from following Jesus the way that you should? What do you think Jesus would say about that? Read Luke 9:57-62.

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READ MATTHEW 8:23-27

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 8:28-34

(v.29) **“Son of God”** This is arguably the most significant title of Jesus in the NT. “Son of God” and its equivalents (“the Son”, “my Son”, etc.) occur more than 124 times in the NT. The NT characteristically describes Jesus’ relationship with

God in terms of divine sonship. The concept itself carries a variety of meanings, including commissioning of special work, obedience, intimate fellowship, knowledge, likeness and the receiving of blessings and gifts.

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 9:1-7

How do you think Jesus could “see” their faith in (v.2)? Read the parallel account in Mark 2:3-12 as well.

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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In what way do you think Jesus would be able to “see” your faith today?
Read James 2:14-26.

READ MATTHEW 9:9-13

(v.9) **Role of tax collectors:** tax collectors, also known as publicans, charged tolls and taxes on behalf of the Roman government. These private government ‘subcontractors’ would tax travellers who were carrying merchandise between properties or delivering goods along certain well-defined roads. Rome preferred to hire locals who were familiar with a region’s inhabitants, land, and roads. Some tax agents were responsible for such large territories, that they functioned as employers, hiring their own employees to collect the taxes. Zacchaeus seems to fit this category, as he is described as a “chief” tax collector (Luke 19:2–10).

Tax collectors earned a profit by demanding a higher tax from the people than they had prepaid to the Roman government. This system led to widespread greed and corruption. The tax-collecting profession was saturated with unscrupulous people who overtaxed others to maximize

their personal gain. Since the Jews considered themselves victims of Roman oppression, Jewish tax collectors, who overtaxed their fellow countrymen, were especially despised. Jews viewed such favour for Rome as betrayal and equal to treason against God. Rabbinic sources consistently align Jewish tax collectors with robbers.⁵⁶

(v.13) **“Go and learn what it means”**

This is a quote from Hosea 6:6 (as is Matthew 12:7). This verse begins with an idiom (go and learn what it means) that the rabbis used to tell their students when they wanted them to study a particular issue.⁵⁷ It is a call to reflect, for Jesus is pointing not to the surface meaning of the text, but to Hosea’s underlying concern. The concern is the danger of a religion which is only an outward display, and in which ritual demands have taken the place of love.⁵⁸ Jesus eating with sinners is at the very heart of what God desires.

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

What do you learn about Matthew from this passage?

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How would you have responded to Jesus if you were Matthew?

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READ MATTHEW 9:14-17

What does this passage possibly mean? The imagery given here, shows how impossible it is to combine the new thing Jesus is doing with the old way things were. Of course it doesn't mean that the old was bad.

Matthew insists that Jesus came, not to destroy, but to fulfil. The imagery simply communicates that morning has broken – God's new day – and the practices that were appropriate for night-time, are no longer needed.⁵⁹

What are some new things that you could be doing to take your love for God and his purposes to the next level?

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READ MATTHEW 9:18-25

(v.18) **Who were the synagogue leaders?** “Rulers of the synagogue” were the chief officials in synagogues and prominent members of their communities.⁶⁰

monthly menstrual period was unclean for seven days, and anyone who touched her would be unclean “till evening” (Leviticus 15:19–33). This woman, with her continual bleeding, would have been considered continually unclean, and was probably a social outcast.⁶¹

(v.20) **Subject to bleeding?** According to OT law, a woman having her

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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In what way do you think faithfulness TO Jesus (take note, faithfulness TO Jesus, not faith in Jesus) can bring healing to your life today?

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READ MATTHEW 9:27-34

(v.27) **“Son of David”** was the title of the Messiah (God’s anointed one), but most people expected a political or military figure rather

than a healer. These blind men however, understood a connection between healing and Jesus’ identity that was not part of Jewish tradition.

God ruled over blindness and sight (Exodus 4:11; Proverbs 20:12) and could answer prophets' prayers to

remove and restore human sight (2 Kings 6:18 -20). ⁶²

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

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READ MATTHEW 9:35-38

What do you think "the good news of the kingdom" is (v.35)? Also see the note on Matthew 3:2. _____

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

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What do you think it would look like for you to be a worker in God's harvest (v.37-38)? _____

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

Interlude

After Matthew has shown readers the power of the kingdom through Jesus, Jesus extends his reach by sending out the 12 disciples to do what he has been doing. Hereafter follows the second block of teaching in chapter 10. Jesus teaches his disciples how to announce the kingdom and what to expect once they do. In chapters 11-13, there is a grouping of stories about people’s responses to Jesus and his message - it’s a mixed bag. Some responses are positive (people love Jesus and think he is the Messiah), others are more neutral (as Jesus doesn’t seem to be what they expected) and others are entirely negative. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law all reject Jesus. They think he is a false teacher, that he is leading the people astray and that he is blasphemous because of the exalted claims he is making about himself. Jesus is not surprised by their response and actually focuses on it in chapter 13. This chapter contains a bunch of Jesus’ parables about the kingdom. These parables offer commentary on the stories of chapters 11 and 12. Some people are embracing Jesus with enthusiasm, while others are rejecting him. However, God’s kingdom is of ultimate value and it will not stop spreading, in spite of all of these obstacles.⁶³

READ MATTHEW 10:1-16

(v.1-4) Up until this moment, Jesus’ disciples have had more of a passenger role, and he’s been doing the driving. They have been astonished at what they’ve seen, but he’s made all the decisions, handled all the tricky moments,

steered them through the towns and villages, taken the criticism, and come out on top. Now, he’s telling them to go and do it themselves. It doesn’t take much to imagine how they would have felt. “You want **us** to do it? By **ourselves**?” Matthew takes

this opportunity to give us a list of the Twelve. He calls them “apostles” (people who are sent out) for the first time, as Jesus was sending them and all those who witnessed his resurrection. The number twelve itself is full of meaning, as anyone in Jesus’ time would know. At the heart of Jesus’ work was his belief in God’s renewing and restoring of Israel through him. (Which traditionally had been based on the twelve tribes.) But now the Twelve were not just to be a sign that God was restoring Israel; they were to be part of the means by which he was doing so.⁶⁴

(v.2) **What does the word “apostle” mean?** The twelve disciples chosen by the Lord for special training were also called apostles. The word “apostolos” means “one sent forth” (apo, “from,” stello, “to send”). The word is also used to describe Jesus in relation to God (Hebrews 3:1).⁶⁵

(v.5) **Who were the Gentiles?** “Gentile” was a term used by Jewish people to refer to foreigners, or any other people who were not a part of the Jewish race.⁶⁶

(v.5) **Who were the Samaritans?** They were a separatist monotheistic group with a similar theology to the Jews, although they only believed in the first five books of the Bible. The group resided north of Judea and south of Galilee, in hostile tension with its Jewish

neighbours. According to 2 Kings 17, the Samaritan sect arose from the exchange of peoples following Israel’s defeat by Assyria in 722 BC. Removing the Israelites from the land, the king of Assyria repopulated the area with conquered peoples from Babylon, Cuthah, and various other nations (2 Kings 17:24).⁶⁷

(v.6) **Why couldn’t they go to the Gentiles and Samaritans?** God’s plan, since Genesis 12, has been to bless the world through the nation of Israel (Genesis 12:1-3). God first had to get Israel back on track so that through them he could bring blessing and renewal to the nations. Then only could the world get back on track.

(v.7-8) **The healings the disciples** were to perform (important as they were for the people concerned) were signs of something more important still: God’s new life breaking into the life of Israel, beginning the new day that was dawning with Jesus.⁶⁸

(v.9-15) If people honoured that message and welcomed it, well and good. If they didn’t, solemn actions should be taken to indicate that they had chosen to stay in the night rather than welcome the new morning. There was coming a day, very soon, when those who had chosen Jesus’ way of peace would be rescued from a great cataclysm, while those who insisted on the way of violence, would wish they

had lived in Sodom and Gomorrah instead! Those towns, down by the Dead Sea, were notorious as the place where God's judgment fell in fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24–28). Jesus is warning that an even worse fate will befall those who refuse to see God's new day as it dawns, and who prefer to stick with the old ways which were leading Israel to ruin.⁶⁹

(v23) **“Truly I tell you, you will not**

finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes” The phrase echoes Daniel 7:13, where the “coming” of the Son of man is not referring to his coming from heaven to earth, to but his coming from earth to heaven. Exalted, after suffering, Jesus would be the judge and ruler of the world, and particularly of the “beasts” that have opposed “the holy people of the Most High” (Daniel 7:18).⁷⁰

In what way have you received “freely” from God (v.8) up to this point in your life? Be specific.

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What do you think it would mean for you to now freely give as you have received? Be specific. Read Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6.

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How would you have felt about this “mission” if you were one of the twelve?

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What do you think Jesus meant by (v.16)?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 10:24-31

What do you learn about God from this passage?

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What have you been trying to hide, but that will be made known on the last day (v.26-27)? Read Hebrews 4:12-13; James 5:16.

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READ MATTHEW 10:32-42

What do you think it means to acknowledge Jesus (v.32-33) before others and what does it mean to disown him? (Other than saying to friends you believe or do not believe in him.)

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Why do you think Jesus said that the message of the kingdom will bring division, even amongst families (v.34-36)?

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What do you think he means by (v.37)?

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What do you think he means by (v.38)?

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What do you think he means by (v.39)?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

Two columns of horizontal dashed lines for writing.

READ MATTHEW 11:1-6

Why do you think John doubted whether Jesus was the Messiah?

Three horizontal dashed lines for writing.

How was Jesus' reply supposed to answer John's question? Read Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 61:1.

Five horizontal dashed lines for writing.

READ MATTHEW 11:7-19

(v.11) **Greater than John the Baptist?** If the law and the prophets were looking forward to something that was yet to come, they are set aside when the new thing arrives (not because they haven't told the truth, but because they have). The point of all this is that Jesus is offering a new way of understanding God's timetable. In a few simple words, he is telling his hearers that Israel's long history (from Abraham and Moses through the prophets to the present moment) is a long period of preparation. Now the preparation was over, and the reality had dawned. John was indeed the greatest among the "preparers", but even the most insignificant

person who was accepting God's kingdom and living by it (in other words, who was hearing Jesus and following him) was "greater", simply because they were living in the time of fulfilment.⁷¹

What does (v.17-19) mean? A possible interpretation is that these children in the marketplace (complaining that others refused to play their games) would strike most ancient hearers as spoiled. These spoiled children resemble Jesus' opponents. They are dissatisfied no matter what. They piped to John and he would not dance; and they wailed to Jesus, but he refused to mourn.⁷²

READ MATTHEW 11:20-24

What do you learn about God and Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 11:25-30

What do you learn about God and Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 12:1-14

(v.1) **The Sabbath:** the term describes the seventh day of the Jewish week, a day marked by religious and ceremonial observances, and the cessation of work. All four Gospels contain instance of Jesus in conflict with his contemporaries on the matter of Sabbath observance.⁷³

(v.3) **The story of David** and his companion can be found in 1 Samuel 21:6.

(v.5) **The importance of the temple:**

The Jerusalem temple was built by Solomon in the 10th century BC and was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Many Jews believed it should and would be rebuilt – some still do. The temple was significant in the religious, social and political setting of Jesus’ life and ministry. It features prominently in Matthew 21:12-13 (Jesus’ clearing of the temple) and in Matthew 24 (where he describes its coming destruction). In many of the Gospels, the presence and significance of the temple is

assumed. In order to comprehend the meaning of the temple for Jesus and the Gospel writers, one must understand the history of the temple itself. Of particular importance is the Judaic attitude

in the first century AD.⁷⁴ The temple was not only the place of **sacrifice**; it was believed to be the unique dwelling of God on earth, and the **place where heaven and earth came together**.⁷⁵

What do you think Jesus means by “something greater than the temple is here” (v.6)?

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READ MATTHEW 12:15-21

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? Read Isaiah 42:1-4.

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READ MATTHEW 12:22-37

What do you think Jesus meant by saying, “then the kingdom has come upon you” (v.28)?

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What do you think it means to be “**for** Jesus” and what do you think it means to be “**against** Jesus” in our day (v.30)?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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(v.31-32) **What does it mean to blaspheme against the Spirit?** Nobody really knows for sure, but the general consensus is that if you are concerned about it, you most probably aren't busy doing it.

Would you say that your "tree" is currently good or bad? Why would you say so (v.33-35)?

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Are there some things that you have said (and that you have not rectified) that you would have to give account for (v.36-37)? If so, what happened and how do you think you can rectify it? Read Romans 14:19. _____

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READ MATTHEW 12:38-45

█ You can read the story about the Queen of the South in 1 Kings 10. █

What do you think Jesus meant by what he said in (v.41-42)? Read Jonah 3:1-10. _____

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What do you think Jesus wants you to learn from (v.43-45)? _____

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READ MATTHEW 12:46-50

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

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What do you think it means to do the will of his Father in our day? _____

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READ MATTHEW 13:1-17

(v.3) **What are parables?** From OT times, prophets and other teachers used various storytelling devices to communicate teachings to the nation of Israel (e.g. 2 Samuel 12:1-7). Sometimes, they came in a form of a vision with interpretations (e.g. Daniel 7). Similar techniques were used by the rabbis. Jesus used his own creative adaptation of these traditions, in order to challenge the world view of his contemporaries and invite them to share his vision of God’s kingdom instead. His stories portrayed this as

something that was *happening*, not just a timeless truth, and enabled his hearers to step inside the story and make it their own. As with some OT visions, some of Jesus’ parables have their own interpretations (e.g. the sower, Mark 4); while others are thinly disguised retellings of the prophetic story of Israel (e.g. the wicked tenants, Mark 12).⁷⁶

(v.14-15) **Read Isaiah 6:9-19.** This section likens the Israelites to the various idols that their rebellion has

led them to worship: blind, deaf, and heartless! In Isaiah chapters 1-5, the sins of the people are clear. This is not God's planning in advance

to make Israel sin. Instead, it is his confirmation of their repeated, freely made decision to reject him.⁷⁷

Without reading further (v.18-23) what do you think this parable means?

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Why were the people not able to (v.13-15) “see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn” and be healed?

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Do you think it is possible that in our day you are “seeing, but not seeing”, “hearing, but not hearing” and not understanding (v.13)? Why would you say so? Read Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 14:12.

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READ MATTHEW 13:18-23

Which of the four soils best describes you? Why would you say so? Be specific.

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From Luke 8:15, what are some things that you could do to increase the chances of God's Word having the desired effect in your life?

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READ MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

What do you learn from this parable?

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READ MATTHEW 13:31-35

What do you learn from this parable about the kingdom of heaven/God?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 13:44-46

How did the man feel about selling EVERYTHING he had in order to buy the treasure? Why do you think he felt that way (v.44)?

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The gospel of the kingdom isn't a pleasant religious idea that you might like to explore when you've got an hour or two to spare. It isn't like an attractive object in a museum that you might visit and look at admiringly the next time you're in the district. It's like a fabulous hoard of treasure

that is yours for the taking – if you'll sell everything else to buy the field where it's hidden. It's like the biggest, finest, purest pearl that any jeweller ever imagined, and it's yours for the taking – if you'll sell everything else, including all the other pearls you've ever owned, in order to purchase it.

On a scale of 1-10, how serious would you say your pursuit of God's kingdom (his rule and reign in your life) is? Why would you say so?

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What do you think are some things that you would have to give up in order to gain the treasure of God's new world? Why would you say so?

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Describe what a 10/10 pursuit of God's kingdom and his righteousness would look like for you on a personal level?

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READ MATTHEW 13:47-52

(v.52) **New treasures as well as old?**

It seems that for Jesus, the “new” things are the extraordinary, brand-new visions that the kingdom of heaven is bringing. The “old” things are the wisdom of the centuries, particularly the ancient stories and

hopes of Israel. The gospel he brings – and the gospel that Matthew is concerned to tell us about – succeeds in bringing the two together, rooting the new deep within the old, and allowing the old to come to fresh and exciting expressions in the new.⁷⁹

What do you learn about God from this parable?

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READ MATTHEW 13:53-58

Why do you think they took offense at him (v.57)?

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Have people ever noticed godly changes that you have made, and if so, what did they notice and how did they respond? Read Acts 4:13.

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What are some of the things that Jesus has said in the book of Matthew so far that have made you uncomfortable? Why?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

QUESTIONS I HAVE:

Interlude

Chapters 14-17 explore all the different expectations that people had about the Messiah. The common people thought of the coming Messiah as someone who would bring healing and help (providing food?) On the other hand, the Pharisees thought of the coming Messiah as a victor that would free them from gentile (Roman) oppression. The twelve apostles seem to hold a view that was somewhat of a mix between that of the common people and the Pharisees. In Matthew 16, Jesus brings more clarity to this by positioning himself as a Messianic king who reigns, and by becoming a servant that would lay down his life for Israel and the nations.⁸⁰

READ MATTHEW 14:1-12

(v.1) **Who was Herod the tetrarch?**

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great who, in 4 BC, inherited from his father the territory of Galilee and Perea. He governed as tetrarch

until AD 39.⁸¹

(v.3) **Who was Herodias?** The daughter of Aristobulus (son of Herod the Great) and Bernice (daughter

of Herod the Great's sister, Salome). According to Josephus (the Jewish historian), she was betrothed in about 6 BC to Herod the Great's son, Herod Philip. While Herod Antipas was visiting the residence of his half-brother Herod Philip, Herodias

became interested in Antipas and agreed to divorce Philip for Antipas. This second marriage would have been deemed as incestuous by the OT laws (Leviticus 18:13) and definitely forbidden (Leviticus 20:21; 18:16).⁸²

In what way/s (like Herod in v.6-7) has your desire to please people instead of God, caused you to compromise on your integrity? Be Specific. Read Galatians 1:10.

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Why do you think God didn't save John?

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How do you think John's disciples must have felt about the fact that God could, but didn't save John?

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How would you feel if you got into trouble for standing up for what is right in God's eyes and he doesn't bail you out? Why would you feel that way? Read Hebrews 11:32-40.

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READ MATTHEW 14:13-21

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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How do you usually feel about those that are harassed and helpless? Why do you feel that way?

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READ MATTHEW 14:22-36

Why do you think Jesus went up on a mountainside by himself to pray (v.23)? Read Luke 5:16.

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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Do you ever leave the safety of the boat (v.29) in order to do 'bold things' for God? Why do you believe that to be the case?

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What are some things that sometimes cause your faith to sink (v.30)?

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What do you think will be helpful in moments in which your trust seems low?
Read Psalm 34:5.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 15:1-9

(v.2) **“They don’t wash their hands before they eat”** Hands were a particular concern for cleanliness, as something unclean could be transmitted to oneself and others. For this reason, the priests were required

to wash their hands and feet prior to performing their ritual service (Exodus 30:18–21). The Pharisees, and later the rabbis, adapted this concern for ceremonial cleanness to common Israelites, with the purpose

that they would consume everyday food as though it were a sacrifice to God at the temple altar.⁸³

(v.2) **What were the traditions of the elders?** The Pharisees and rabbinic Jews believed that God not only gave Moses the written law on Mount Sinai, but also an oral law

that was passed on from generation to generation until it was codified in around AD 200. This was done by Rabbi Judah Hanasi in a book called the Mishnah. One of these traditions was that instead of looking after your parents, you could just give a gift to the temple, to exempt you from any responsibility towards them.

Are traditions important to you? Why or why not?

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Which traditions would you not give up for anyone or anything? Why?

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How does Jesus feel about mere lip service (v.6-9)?

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Which of YOUR practices are (or have been) worship in vain? Why would you say so? What can you do (or have you done) about these?

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READ MATTHEW 15:21-28

(v.24) **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”** God’s plan (Gen12:1-3) has always been to bless Israel, then to bless the world through Israel. You could say that this woman’s faith broke through the waiting period.

What do you learn about Jesus’ disciples from this passage?

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What do you learn about the Canaanite woman (v.25-27)?

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What do you think it would look like for you to follow Jesus with great faith? Be specific.

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Do you believe that God would change his plans based on the urgency of your prayers? Why/why not do you believe this to be the case?

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READ MATTHEW 15:29-38

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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What do you learn about Jesus' disciples from this passage? Have you ever been like them? If so, what happened?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 16:1-12

For the sign of Jonah, read
Matthew 12:39-41.

Why are we so obsessed with signs?

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How does Jesus feel about our obsession with signs? Why do you believe that to be the case?

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How do you think we are influenced today by “the yeast” of the Pharisees and Sadducees of our time?

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READ MATTHEW 16:13-20

(v.18) **What does the word “church” mean?** The Greek word for “church” is “ekklēsia”. It is derived from “ek-kaleō”, which was used to summon the army to assemble (from “kaleō” = “to call”).⁸⁴ In the Greek Jewish context, it came to mean assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:2 – Septuagint), meeting or congregation.

(v.18) **What is Hades?** The Greek word Hades (hādēs) is sometimes misleadingly translated as “hell” in English versions of the NT. However, it refers to the place of the dead, and not necessarily to a place of torment for the wicked dead. In Greek religious thought, Hades was

the god of the underworld, but more commonly the term referred to his realm, the underworld. This is where the spirits or the souls of the dead led a shadowy existence, hardly conscious and without memory of their former life. In early times it seems Hades was usually conceived of as a place of sadness and gloom (but not punishment) indiscriminately for all the dead. However, from as early as Homer* the notion existed that some individuals experienced endless punishment in Hades.⁸⁵

* He wrote two epic poems, Iliad and the Odyssey, works central to ancient Greek literature.

Why do you think people viewed Jesus as a prophet (v.13-14)? Read note on Matthew 1:22.

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How was Peter able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah (v.15-16)? Read note on Matthew 1:1. _____

What do you think it would take for you to see Jesus for all that he is and for all that God is for us, in him? Read Ephesians 1:17-21. _____

THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

QUESTIONS THAT I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 16:21-28

(v.21-22) **Why was Peter so shocked by Jesus' statement that he was going to suffer many things?**

Although the second temple Jews (Jews in the period of 515 BC – AD 70) had an expectation of some form of Messiah coming (to bring about a form of deliverance and usher in some form of new world) there was no single main belief as to how all of this would transpire. However, for them one thing was clear: it would be a victorious Messiah, certainly not a suffering Messiah. They viewed Isaiah 53 (the suffering servant) as describing the nation of Israel (not a person, let

alone a Messiah). Also see note on Matthew 1:1-17 and Matthew 8:18-22.

(v.28) **What did he mean by saying, "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom"?** Six days after saying this, only three ("some") of those who heard Jesus' words in Matthew 16:28 witnessed a vision (Matthew 17:9) of Jesus in heavenly glory. This unique experience was granted to those three alone; the rest of the Twelve would not see anything like that before they died.⁸⁶

What do you learn about God and Jesus from this passage?

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What do you learn about Peter from this passage?

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Why did Jesus call Peter "Satan"? What do you think he meant by that (v.23)?

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In which areas of your life do you think Jesus would say, “you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (v.23)? Why would he say so? Be Specific. Read Colossians 3:2. _____

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What do you think it means to “deny yourself” (v.24)? Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. _____

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What do you think it means to take up your cross (v.24)? Read Galatians 2:20. _____

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What are some areas in your life that you are trying to “save” instead of losing everything for Jesus and his purpose (v.25-27)? Why? _____

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What do you think is the implications of you trying to “save” the things mentioned above? Read John 12:24. _____

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Handwriting lines for prayer requests.

Handwriting lines for questions.

READ MATTHEW 17:1-13

(v.11) **What did he mean by saying that Elijah/John has already come to restore all things?** He is most likely referring to Malachi 4:5-6, where Malachi prophesied that God would send Elijah to “turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents” (aka restore relationships?)

What do you learn about God and Jesus from this passage? _____

How would you have responded if you were one of the three disciples who were with Jesus during his transfiguration? Why? _____

Read Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-20. Describe who Jesus is in your own words. _____

READ MATTHEW 17:14-23

What happened to (v.21)? You might have noticed that there is no (v.21) in the NIV. Why not? Although it is not in the NIV, some ancient manuscripts do have a (v.21) that says something

similar to the closing of the same story in Mark 9:14-29: “He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer’” (Mark 9:29).

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

What do you learn about the disciples from this passage? _____

READ MATTHEW 17:24-27

(v.24) **What was the temple tax?** The OT gave a directive that, at the annual census, each person over the age of twenty was to give a half-shekel offering to the Lord for the support of the tabernacle (the temporary worship tent they used before the temple – Exodus 30:11-

16). A half-shekel is the equivalent of two days’ work wages. Unlike Matthew, who had collected tax for the Roman occupying forces (Matthew 9:9), the collectors of temple tax were representatives of the Jewish religious establishment in Jerusalem overseeing the temple.

The high priest was usually in charge of collecting the temple offering. In the diaspora (the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel), it was the duty of local community leaders to collect the half-shekel tax on the 15th of Adar (March). They did this

by installing conspicuous containers in community centres, similar to those found in the temple. They were shaped like trumpets. In Palestine, representatives of the Jerusalem priesthood went throughout the land to collect the temple tax.⁸⁷

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? Read Romans 13:1-3.

What do you learn about Peter from this passage?

THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

QUESTIONS I HAVE:

Interlude

The next block of teaching (chapter 18-20) is about the upside-down nature of Jesus' Messianic kingdom. In these teachings, Jesus seems to turn everything we value on its head. In Jesus' kingdom community, you will gain honour by serving others. Furthermore, you forgive and do good to your enemies instead of getting revenge, and you gain true wealth by giving wealth away to the less fortunate. So, to follow the servant Messiah, you must become a servant yourself (1 John 2:6).

READ MATTHEW 18:1-4

What do you learn about Jesus' disciples from this passage?

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What does our society value with regards to "who is the greatest?" Why? Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

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What qualities in children do you think that Jesus desires his followers to emulate to become a part of God's new world (the kingdom of heaven)?

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What do you think are the implications of what it is that Jesus is saying in (v.3)?

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READ MATTHEW 18:6-9

Who do you think the “little ones” are that he is referring to in (v.6) Why?

Write in your own words what it is that you think Jesus is saying in this passage?

In what way is this passage speaking to you personally?

READ MATTHEW 18:10-14

(v.10) **What’s up with the angels?** Angels are found in Daniel 10 and 12:1 as the heavenly representatives of nations, and in Revelation 1:20 as representatives of churches. Here even individuals have their heavenly representatives, who always “behold the face of God”. This phrase is derived from courtly language for personal

access to the king. So even the least of the “little ones” enjoy constant personal access to God.⁸⁸

What happened to (v.11) in the NIV?

Only some ancient manuscripts have (v.11) which included the words of Luke 19:10: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”.

What do you learn about God from this passage? Read Psalm 23. _____

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READ MATTHEW 18:15-20

What do you learn about how Jesus wants us to resolve conflict in his church from (v.15-17)? Read Ephesians 4:26-27. _____

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What do you think (v.18) means? _____

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What do you learn about God from (v.19-20)? Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. _____

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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READ MATTHEW 18:21-35

(v.23) **How much is 10 000 talents of gold?** The man must have been a significant figure since he owed the king 10 000 talents. The word for “ten thousand” is “myrioi” (“countless”, Hebrews 12:22; Jude 14). Perhaps it is a governor who collected taxes for the king, but who had squandered the amount.⁸⁹ A talent was worth about 20 years of a day labourer’s wages,⁹⁰ so the amount was approximately

200 000 years of a day labourer’s wages. Some scholars estimate that today’s equivalent would be at least two and a half billion US dollars.⁹¹

(v.28) **How much is 100 silver coins?** It was equal to a hundred denarii. The denarius was the usual daily wage. So, 100 silver coins is equal to 100 days’ wages.

What are some things that you hope God would one day find it in his heart to forgive you for? Be specific. Read Proverbs 28:13. _____

What are some things that you are struggling to forgive others for? Why? Be specific. _____

More lines on the next page ...

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What do you think it would mean for you to have mercy and forgive (from the heart) those who have sinned against you? Read James 2:12-13.

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What could some next steps towards forgiveness be for you? Be specific.

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According to the passage, what would the consequences be if you do not find it in your heart to forgive them?

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It has been said that “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have someone to forgive.” Do you agree with this statement? Why/why not?

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What do you learn about God from this passage?

THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 19:1-6

How sacred do you think marriage is to God? Why do you say so?

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How does this passage influence your thinking about marriage?

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READ MATTHEW 19:7-9

Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Why did Moses allow divorce?

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Do you think Moses had the right to do so? Why would you say so?

How does this passage influence your thoughts on divorce?

READ MATTHEW 19:10-12

What does (v.11-12) mean? Starting (v.12) with the word “for”, seems to indicate that Jesus is now talking about celibacy and not divorce. In that case, the discussion on divorce was over, and the disciples’ interjection (v.10) changed the agenda by mentioning voluntary celibacy. To speak of celibacy as a gift (read 1 Corinthians 7:7) is to assume that marriage is the norm, but that God has given some people the ability (perhaps even the inclination) to stand apart from that norm. Jesus then uses the model of the eunuch to describe those who do not marry or have children. In the case of the literal eunuch, this is a matter of necessity.

Most subsequent interpretation has understood the “making oneself a eunuch” here as a metaphor for choice to remain unmarried.⁹⁴

(v.12) **“Eunuchs who were born that way”** refers to men who cannot reproduce due to a physical defect that they were born with.

“Eunuchs who have been made eunuchs” refers in this instance to castration, whether intentional or accidental. In the ancient Near East, some slaves or palace officials would have been castrated so that they could not sleep with the master’s wife (wives) or the women in his harem.⁹⁵

Why do you think the disciples responded that way in (v.10)?

READ MATTHEW 19:13-15

Why do you think the disciples rebuked (express sharp disapproval or criticism of someone because of their behaviour or actions) the people? ____

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS THAT I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 19:16-22

(v.16) **What is eternal life?** The Greek for eternal life (zoe = life; aiōnios = age) translates as “life of the age to come”. Second temple Jews divided time into the present age (Olam Hazeah = “this world”) and the age to come (Olam Haba = “the world to come”) and during the second temple period, in which they were waiting for God to bring about “the life of the age to come” or “the life of the world to come” (Olam Haba). Here, God would return as king to renew our world. So, when the rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, he is not inquiring about going to heaven after he dies. Rather, he is asking about what he must do to be a part of the “life to come” (Olam Haba) that God will bring about in due time.

What commandments is Jesus referring to in (v.17)? It seems that he is referring to “the decalogue”, i.e. the 10 statements or utterances that God gave to Moses on Sinai in Exodus 20:1-17. “Ten Commandments” does not actually appear in the Hebrew text, but traditionally became the name by which the 10 statements (or utterances) were known.

(v.21) **“If you want to be perfect”?** What does that mean? Is that even possible? Understanding the Greek word for “perfect” (teleios) might give you a better understanding as to what Jesus was actually asking of him. The word “perfect” in Greek can be understood as “finish”, “complete”, “carry out”, “end”, “accomplish”, “fulfil” or “mature”.⁹⁶

Why do you think Jesus questions him in (v.17)?

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Do you think his statement is true in (v.20)? Why would you say so?

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According to the definition of “teleios” above, what do you think Jesus was calling him to?

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In Mark's account of this story (Mark 10:17-30) Jesus said (v.21) "One thing you lack"... "Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." If you were the guy in the story today, what do you think Jesus would say to you? What would he say is your one thing (or two or three or...) and why would he say so? Or, do you think he would say you are "good to go?" Why would you say so? Be specific.

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READ MATTHEW 19:23-26

Why do you think Jesus said (v.23) "it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven" (God's new world)? Read 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

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Would you classify yourself as rich financially? Why would you say so?

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Did you know that the average income per person per month in South-Africa during 2019 according to the World Population Review was R1,450? ⁹⁷

What do you think Jesus meant by (v.26)? Read Jeremiah 32:17.

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What would make it hard for you to enter (or remain in) God's new world?

READ MATTHEW 19:27-30

What do you think Jesus meant by "the renewal of all things" (v.28)?

What do you learn about Jesus' disciples from this passage? _____

THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

QUESTIONS I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 20:1-15

What do you learn about God from this passage?

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What do you think God wants you to learn from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 20:17-19

(v.18) **Who were the chief priests?** in Jerusalem in NT times), joining
They were members of the the high priest in giving oversight to
Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish the temple activities, treasury, and
religious, political and legal counsel priestly orders.

Read the parallel account in Mark 10:32-34. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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Why do you think some people were astonished while others were afraid?

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READ MATTHEW 20:20-28

(v.22) **“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”** The “cup” throughout Scripture refers figuratively to one’s divinely appointed destiny, whether it was one of blessing and salvation (Psalm 16:5; 116:13) or of wrath and disaster (Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15–29). Jesus is referring to his forthcoming cup of suffering of the cross (Matthew 26:39), to which

he has just given his third prediction (Matthew 20:17-19).¹⁰⁰

(v.22) **“We can’, they answered”**
They most probably had no idea what Jesus was talking about, but

Jesus replied, (v.23) “You will indeed drink from my cup”. James became a martyr (Acts 12:2), and John experienced persecution and exile (Revelation 1:9), although apparently not martyrdom.¹⁰¹

What did the mother of Zebedee’s sons and the sons themselves (James and John; Matthew 4:19-20) value above all else?

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Why do you think the ten were indignant when they heard about this (v.24)?

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What do you learn from this passage as to what Jesus values most?

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What do you think your friends, family and colleagues would say you value most? Why would they say so?

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In what way do you think Jesus would want you to be a servant of him and his kingdom (v.26-28)? Be specific.

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In what way do you think Jesus would want you to be a servant of other people? Be specific. _____

READ MATTHEW 20:29-34

What stands out for you in this passage about the two blind men? _____

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

QUESTIONS I HAVE:

In chapter 21-22, we see the two kingdoms clash. Jesus' kingdom and that of the religious leaders.

READ MATTHEW 21:1-11

(v.5) **“Your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey”** The prophecy (Zechariah 9:9) indicates the nature of Jesus' arrival: he comes as the righteous one who offers salvation, not as a conquering military leader. He also comes with reconciliation, as did rulers who sometimes rode a donkey in times of peace (Judges 5:10; 1 Kings 1:33).¹⁰²

(v.8) **Why did the people spread their cloaks and branches of trees on the ground?** Throwing garments in the path of a king was a symbol of submission (2 Kings 9:13). Palms symbolized Jewish nationalism and victory.¹⁰³

(v.9) **Hosanna to the Son of David?** “Hosanna” is the transliteration of a Hebrew expression that means “O save”. This draws the crowd to make a connection to the Egyptian Hallel (a portion of the service for certain Jewish festivals consisting of Psalm 113–118) sung during the Passover season. It expresses the messianic hopes of Israel as voiced in Psalm 118:19–29. (See v. 25 specifically.) The crowd acknowledges what Jesus has already stated in his fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9: He is the Davidic Messiah, whom they call on to save them from their oppression.¹⁰⁴

Why do you think the crowd was so excited about Jesus? What did they think he was going to do?

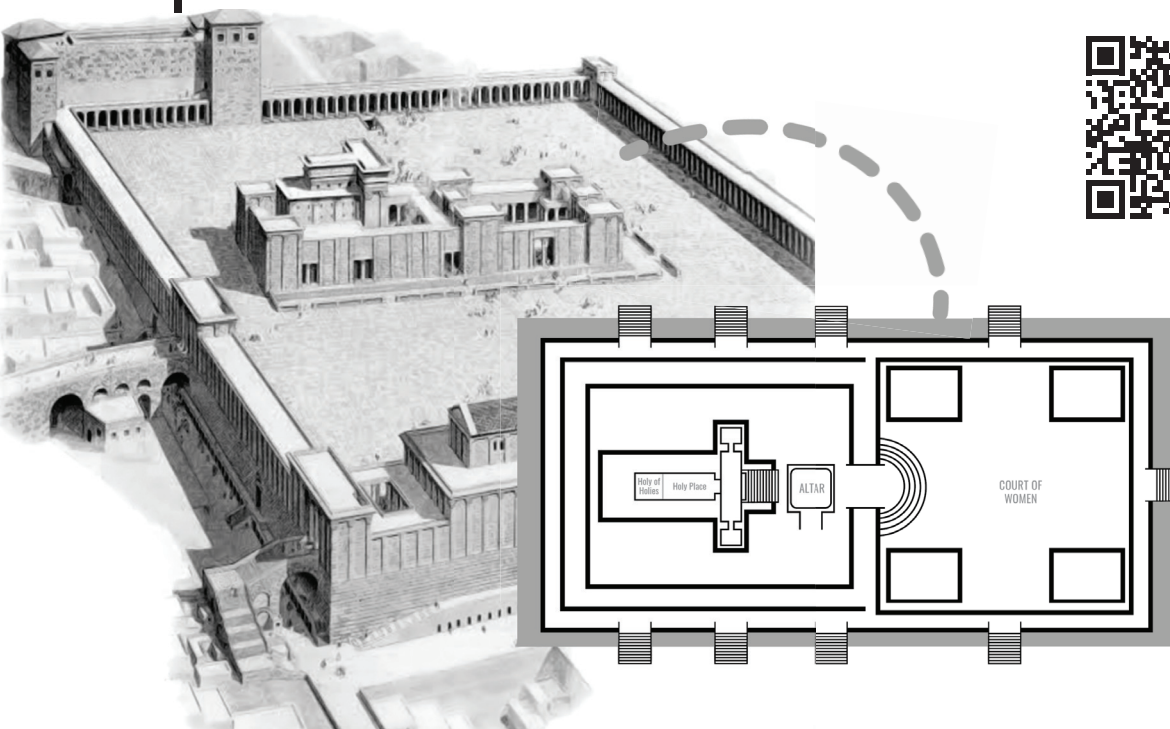
READ MATTHEW 21:12-22

(v.12) **The temple structures:** In building the temple, Herod the Great had enclosed a large area to form the various courts. The temple itself consisted of two divisions, the Holy Place (entered by the priests every

day) and the Holy of Holies (into which high priest entered alone once every year). Immediately outside the temple, there was the Court of the Priests, and in it was placed the bronze altar for burnt offerings.

Outside of this was the Court of the Sons of Israel, and beyond this the Court of the Women. The Court of the Gentiles formed the lowest and the outermost enclosure in the sanctuary. It was paved with the finest variegated marble. Its name signified that it was open to all, Jews and Gentiles alike. It was very large,

and is said to have formed 228 m². It was in this court that the oxen, sheep and doves for the sacrifices were sold, as in a market. It was also in this court where the tables of the money-changers stood, and which Christ himself overthrew when he drove out the sheep and oxen bought and sold in his Father's house.¹⁰⁵



See full colour images for Herod's Temple in the time of Jesus

(v.12-13) **Why did Jesus overturn the tables?** People often think that Jesus overturned the tables because people were selling things in the “church foyer”. It’s more likely that this was a symbolic act of judgment on the temple because of its corrupt priesthood and system. God’s house was meant to be a “house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:7) and not a “den

of robbers” (Jeremiah 7:11). This is referring to the corrupt priesthood. The temple would be destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans.

(v.15-16) **The Jewish leaders did not miss the implications of what was happening.** They saw the triumphal entry, the messianic praise of the crowd, Jesus’ authoritative cleansing

of the temple, his pronouncement of judgment, and his healing miracles. Even the children Jesus had esteemed were proclaiming praise to the Messiah, the Son of David. It was too much for the hypocrites. They became indignant (See also Matthew 20:24; 26:8). Their assumptions concerning Jesus' identity, led the chief priests and scribes to believe that pointing out the children's error would cause Jesus to be horrified at their actions. Surely, he would command the children to stop. Any Jewish teacher would have been horrified to be called the "Son of David". For anyone, other than the Messiah, to accept such acclaim was equivalent to blasphemy. But the Son of David saw no problem with the children's praise. When his attention was drawn to it, he affirmed its appropriateness, supporting it with a quote from Psalm 8:2. His, "have you never read", revealed his enemies' lack of understanding the OT Scriptures, on which they were supposed to be experts (Matthew 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31). Jesus used

the children's praise to show how obvious it should have been to the chief priests and teachers that he was the Son of David.¹⁰⁶

(v.18-20) **What's the deal with the fig tree?** In the preceding passage, the king had pronounced judgment on Israel and its leaders for their idolatrous behaviour (Matthew 21:12–13). With the fig tree, Jesus acted out a parable or "mini drama" to illustrate the reality of Israel's fruitlessness and its doom. In the same way the leaves of the fig tree advertised fruit, so the Jewish leaders claimed to be fulfilling God's purpose. However, the advertisement was a lie. Under the "leaves" of their showy religion (Matthew 6:1–18; 15:8–9) their hearts were barren and unbelieving. They had missed their opportunity to repent and to bear true fruit, and so the king pronounced their judgment. There would be no more opportunities for these hypocrites – they would never bear fruit but would die through by the judgment of God.¹⁰⁷

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 21:23-27

What do you learn about the religious leaders from this passage?

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 21:28-32

What do you learn from this passage?

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Which son are you? Why would you say so?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 21:33-45

The narrative portion of the parable of the wicked tenants ends with the execution of the son (Matthew 21:39). Jesus then addresses the crowds with the rhetorical question about what the landlord will do to his traitorous tenants (Matthew 21:40). Answering his own question, Jesus predicts a horrible fate for them and the leasing of the vineyard to new tenants (Matthew 21:41). At this point, he quotes Psalm 118, which speaks of the rejected stone that becomes a cornerstone in a building project (Matthew 21:42). As in Matthew 19:4 and 21:16, Jesus uses the characteristic rabbinic introduction and rebuke, “Have you never read ...?” to precede this particular scripture. It is not at all clear at first glance what the quotation implies in this context. Once one knows the story of the coming crucifixion of Jesus,

however, one suspects that the stone is a person, rejected by some but valued by others (or at least by God). The underlying Hebrew suggests a play on words that would link the rejected stone with the rejected son of Matthew 21:38–39: “bēn” (= son) and “’eben” (= stone). This figure apparently has something to do with the transfer of the vineyard to new tenants. In a verse unique to Matthew’s account of the parable, Matthew 21:43 proceeds to speak explicitly of the transfer of leadership in God’s kingdom from the Israel of that day to a new people (ethnos), presumably the multi-ethnic community of Jesus’ followers. That something along these lines was understood even by Jesus’ opponents, seems clear from the response of the Jewish leaders: their anger leads them to plot his arrest (Matthew 21:46).¹⁰⁸

What do you think Jesus is saying to the religious leaders of his day?

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What do you learn about the religious leaders from this passage?

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Do you think that most of the religious people of our day are producing the fruit of God's new world? Why would you say so?

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What is the fruit that you think God wants all of his people (not just leaders) to produce in the new world that he has brought about through Jesus and all those who are "in him"? Read 2 Peter 1:1-10.

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Do you think that you are currently producing the fruit that God desires for you to produce? Why would you say so?

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 22:1-14

<p>(v.11) “He noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes” This part of the parable focuses on one of the guests who has gained entrance to the wedding, but did not have the appropriate wedding garment. Although the invitation was given to all (both good and bad) proper attire is expected. Since the individual is addressed as “friend” and is left speechless when confronted by the king (Matthew 22:12), the implication is that the guest had proper clothing available,</p>	<p>but declined to wear it. This once again points to the guilt of both the privileged religious leaders, the populace in Israel, and even Jesus’ professing disciples such as Judas (called “friend” in Matthew 26:50). This is the point of all these parables. The man is bound and cast into the outer place of weeping and gnashing of teeth – language that commonly refers to eternal judgment (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:26, 30).¹⁰⁹</p>
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What do you learn about Jesus/God from this passage?

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What “clothes” are Christians to be dressed with? Why would you say so? Read Colossians 3:12-15.

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When Jesus comes to renew all things and bring about his new world (wedding banquet), do you think he would say that you are wearing the proper clothing? Why would you say so?

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READ MATTHEW 22:15-22

(v.16) **Who were the Herodians?** The Herodians were supporters of the Herodian family – most immediately Herod Antipas, the Roman client tetrarch – and they were unhappy that he had not gained control over all of his father’s former territory. Thus the Herodians joined Antipas in an attempt to regain Judea, which Pilate now governed for Rome. Although the Herodians and the Pharisees were normally at odds on many political and religious issues, here they combine to combat the

common threat to their respective power bases.¹¹⁰

(v.17) **Caesar** was the title assumed by the Roman emperors after Julius Caesar. In the NT this title is given to various emperors as sovereigns of Judaea without their accompanying distinctive proper names (John 19:15; Acts 17:7). The Jews paid tribute to Caesar (Matthew 22:17), and all Roman citizens had the right of appeal to him (Acts 25:11).¹¹¹

What do you learn about Jesus from (v.16)?

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How would you say you are doing when it comes to being like Jesus in this regard (v.16)? Why would you say so? Read Proverbs 11:13; 2 Corinthians 8:21.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 22:23-33

(v.23) **No resurrection?** The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection since they drew only on the Pentateuch (first five books of the OT) for doctrine. Resurrection as a doctrine is developed more clearly in the later books of the OT (Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2). It occurred regularly in Jewish literature (2 Maccabees 7; 1 Enoch 102; 2 Baruch 49-51) and became a central belief in later rabbinic thought (the Mishnah).¹¹²

(v.24) The Sadducees cite the OT law of **“levirate marriage”**, in which the “levir”, the surviving brother of a childless, deceased man, was required to marry his sister-in-law (also called the “rite of removing the shoe”). This law was designed to not only provide care for the widow, but also to preserve the deceased brother’s genealogical line, if they should bear children (Deuteronomy. 25:5–10).¹¹³

What do you learn about Jesus/God from this passage?

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According to (v.29), how important do you think it is for you to know the scriptures? Why would you say so? Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. _____

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What do you think you can do to increase your knowledge and understanding of the Bible? Be specific. _____

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What do you think Jesus meant by (v.32)? _____

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READ MATTHEW 22:34-40

(v.37) **The twice-daily repeated Shema** (Deuteronomy 6:5) was well-known as an overarching obligation of each individual Jew, which included the duty of obedience to

the other commandments given by God. Love for God was not understood simply as an emotion, but as the entire person – heart, soul, and mind – given over to God.¹¹⁴

What would be some obvious signs of someone who is following (v.37) today? Be specific. _____

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What would be some obvious signs of someone who is following (v.39) today? Be specific. _____

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READ MATTHEW 22:41-45

(v.41-42) **It was common knowledge that the Messiah would be a descendant of David**, so the Pharisees answered accordingly. OT passages identifying the Messiah as a descendant of David are Isaiah 9:7; 11:1, 10; Psalm 2; 89; 132; Jeremiah 23:5. ¹¹⁵

(v.43-46) **Jesus then asked a follow-up question.** He asked them to interpret Psalm 110:1 in light of the identity of the Christ (Messiah) as David's son. This verse describes Christ's posture in heaven until he comes to reign on the earth (Hebrews 10:12-13). In the psalm, David says, "The LORD/ YHWH said to my Lord" (literal translation of the Hebrew text). Jesus was careful to point out that David's psalm was written under the inspiration of God's spirit, so there was no mistake in what he had written. Jesus was drawing attention to the fact that by the phrase "**my Lord**", David was referring to someone other than himself. He was referring to the Christ or Messiah, whom the Pharisees had just said was a son of David. Jesus' final question for the Pharisees was, "How can the

Messiah be both David's Lord and David's Son?" Jesus' implication was clear: The Messiah, the Son of David, was more than a special person. He was also YHWH/GOD, the Almighty himself. It followed that Jesus himself was this Messiah. If the Pharisees answered his question they would have to acknowledge his true identity. In the NT, Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted OT chapter. The entire psalm is a declaration of the supreme authority of the Messiah. By quoting this first verse of Psalm 110, Jesus highlighted both the Messiah's position of authority at God's right hand and his defeat of his enemies ("until I put your enemies under your feet"). The Pharisees had made themselves Jesus' enemies. To acknowledge him as the Messiah by answering his question, meant they would have to acknowledge his supreme authority and their own defeat "under his feet". Therefore, the Pharisees remained silent from that day on. Jesus had brought all verbal arguments to a close. He passed all their tests; and they flunked his. But he was not yet finished. For the Pharisees, the worst was yet to come. ¹¹⁶

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 23:1-12

(v.5) **What was a phylactery?** A leather box containing four sections of the law (Exodus 10:13-21) written on parchment, and which Jewish men tied to their forehead and left arm (close to the heart) before morning prayers. The practice of wearing phylacteries arose probably after the exile, from a literal interpretation by pious Jews of passages such as Exodus 13:9.

Should other people's hypocrisy (v.3) prevent us from following what they say (if it is biblical truth)? Why would you say so?

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In what way have you allowed the hypocrisy of others to excuse your own behaviour? Be specific. _____

What are some of your religious symbols or practices (v.5-7) that do not match your conduct? Why would you say so? _____

What do you learn about what Christian leadership should look like from (v.11)? _____

READ MATTHEW 23:13-37

(v.13) **What is a “woe”?**

An exclamation denoting pain or displeasure, woe, alas. ¹¹⁸

What happened to v.14 in the NIV?

Some manuscripts have a (v.14) that

include here words similar to Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47: “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? _____

What do you think Jesus meant by (v.13)? _____

What do you think Jesus meant by (v.15)? _____

What do you think Jesus means by “the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (v.23-24)? _____

What do you learn from (v.25-28)? How do you think it can apply to you? What are some ‘unclean’ things that people would be pretty shocked to hear you have hidden in your heart (while clean on the outside)? Read Colossians 3:5-10. _____

What do you learn about Jesus from (v.37)? _____

Matthew 24 is a fairly complex chapter that has been interpreted in many different ways throughout the centuries. One of the biggest things to always remember when you are trying to interpret scripture, is what it would have most likely meant for its original audience. With that in mind, I am going to quote at length from N.T. Wright (a NT scholar and historian) as he explains this chapter (divided into five extracts). So, take a deep breath, say a prayer and tackle this chapter.

READ MATTHEW 24:1-14

One of the greatest biblical images for God's future is the approaching birth of a baby. It is a time of great hope and new possibility, and also, especially before modern medicine, a time of great danger and anxiety. The medical profession can describe and study each stage of pregnancy in detail. But every couple, and of course particularly every mother, has to face them personally and live through them, even though for some it is a traumatic, painful and upsetting time. The biblical writers draw freely from this well-known experience to speak of the new world that God intends to "birth". And one of the high water marks of this whole biblical theme is this chapter in Matthew, and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21. This, said Jesus, is just the start of the birth pangs. It's only with images like this that one can speak of God's future. We don't have an exact description of it, and we wouldn't be able to cope with it if we did. What we have are pictures: the birth of a baby, the marriage of a king's son, a tree sprouting new leaves. God's future will be like all

these, and (of course) unlike them as well. As far as Jesus is concerned, there are two central features of God's future. On the one hand, there is his own calling and destiny which he has spoken about often enough in the last few chapters. He has come to Jerusalem knowing that by continuing his dramatic mission of summoning Israel to **repentance**, he will bring about hostility, violence and his own death. And he believes that God will vindicate him after his death, by raising him from the dead.

On the other hand, there was the fate of the Jerusalem **temple**. Throughout his public career, Jesus had done and said things which implied that he, not the temple, was the real centre of God's healing and restoring work (Matthew 12:3-6). Now he had done and said things in the temple itself which implied that the whole place was under judgment and that he had the right to pronounce that judgment. And when the **disciples** pointed out to him (Matthew 24:1-2) the magnificent buildings (the temple

was generally recognized as one of the most beautiful sights in the whole world) he warned them explicitly: it was all going to come crashing down. The disciples put two and two together: the destruction of the temple on the one hand; on the other hand, the vindication of all that Jesus has said and done. Somehow, they were linked to one another. If Jesus had been right all along, then the temple will have to go. But how? And when? When will the world see that Jesus really is God's **Messiah**? If you were a Roman citizen, believing that Caesar was the rightful king of the world, but living at some distance from Rome itself, you would long for the day when he would pay you a state visit. Not only would you see him for yourself, but, of equal importance, all your neighbours would realize that he really was the world's lord and master. Much of the Roman empire was Greek-speaking; and the Greek word that they would use for such a state visit, such an "appearing" or "presence", was "**parousia**". The same word was often used to describe what happens when a god or goddess did something dramatic – a healing **miracle**, say – which was thought to reveal their power and presence. And it's this word "parousia" which the disciples use in Matthew 24:3, when they ask Jesus about what's going to happen. They speak of three things. Each is important in the long chapter that is now beginning, containing Jesus' answer to them:

(1) the destruction of the Temple, (2) Jesus' parousia or "appearance as king", and (3) "the end of the age". Throughout this chapter we have to face the questions: what did they mean, what did Jesus mean in answering them, what did Matthew understand by it all – and what's it got to say to us? This calls for a cool head and an attentive mind. For the moment we can begin to glimpse what Jesus thought it was all about. The disciples wanted to see him ruling as king (with all that that would mean, including the temple's destruction and, indeed, the ushering in of God's new age). The **present age** would come to its convulsive conclusion, and the new age would be born. Well, Jesus says, there will indeed be convulsions. The birth pangs (Matthew 24:8) of the new age would start in the form of wars, revolutions, famines and earthquakes (Matthew 24:6-7). Terrible times are going to come, and those who follow him will be tested severely. Many will give it all up as just too demanding (Matthew 24:12-13). But they shouldn't be deceived. New would-be messiahs would appear, but the vindication of Jesus himself – his royal "presence" or "appearing" – wouldn't be that sort of thing (someone else coming and leading a revolt). They must hold on, keep their nerve, and remain faithful. Between the present moment and the time when all would be revealed and Jerusalem would be destroyed, the **good news of the kingdom of God**

(which Jesus came to bring) would have to spread not just around Israel, as has been the case up to now (Matthew 24:10:5-6; 15:24), but to the whole world. There is a task for them to do in the interim period. All of this related very specifically to the time between Jesus' public career and the destruction of the temple in AD 70. We shall see how it works out in the following passages. But the echoes of meaning rumble on in every successive generation of Christian discipleship. We too are called to be faithful, to hold on

and not be alarmed. We too may be called to live through troubled times and to remain strong and fairhful to the end. We too may see the destruction of cherished and beautiful symbols. Our calling then is to hold on to Jesus himself, to continue to trust him, to believe that the one who was vindicated by God in the first century will, one day be vindicated before the whole world. We too are called to live with the birth pangs of God's new age, and to trust that in his good time the new world will be born.¹¹⁹

What are things in your life that, if not attended to, have the potential to make your love for Jesus grow cold (v.12)? Be specific.

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What do you think he means by "standing firm to the end" in (v.13)?

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What do you think he means by "will be saved" in (v.13)? Read note on Matthew 1:21.

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READ MATTHEW 24:15-28

Jesus is warning the **disciples** that people will tell them again and again that the **Messiah** has come,

and that if they look, they will find him (Matthew 24:23-25). They will be tempted to look at this leader

or that leader –someone gathering followers out in the desert, someone else plotting in a secret room off a back alley – and wonder if it's really Jesus himself, returned in some form. It won't be, he says. When the true Messiah is revealed, there will be no question. His 'royal appearing' ("**parousia**" again, in Matthew 24:27, as in the previous passage) will leave no room for doubt. You won't have to interpret any disguise. You will know. The setting for all this is the sequence of events that would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew, like Mark at this point, knows that the only way he can write of this is in the code of biblical imagery, and that the most appropriate source is the book of Daniel. Daniel was an extremely popular book in the first century. Jesus drew on it freely, as did many of his contemporaries. It describes, in a series of stories and dreams, how God's **kingdom** would triumph over the kingdoms of the world. Daniel 2 is about the stone which smashes the great statue; we looked at that when reading Matthew 21:33–46. Daniel chapter 3 and 6 are about how God delivers his faithful ones from suffering. Daniel 7, at the centre of the book, is about the monsters that wage war on the humans, and about how God vindicates the human figure (Daniel 7:13 "one like a **son of man**") and destroys the monsters – which any first-century Jew would recognize as code for Israel being vindicated over the pagan

nations. Those are perhaps the best-known parts. But there is more. Daniel 12:1-3 predicts the eventual **resurrection** of all God's people. And Daniel 9 speaks of something blasphemous, sacrilegious, some abominable object, which will be placed in the **temple** itself. This, it seems, will be part of the sequence of events through which God will redeem his true people, send his true Messiah, and bring his age-old plan to completion. That's quite a lot to comprehend, but Matthew wants you to, because only then can you begin to wrestle with what Jesus was telling the disciples. Remember, the questions that dominate the chapter are: when is the **temple** to be destroyed? When will Jesus be seen as the Messiah? And when will the **present age** be brought to its close? The answer here is: look back to Daniel, which speaks of all these things, and look out for the terrible time that's coming. In particular, look out for the pagan invasion that will end up placing blasphemous objects in the temple itself. This nearly happened within ten years of Jesus' own time. In AD 40, the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula tried to place a huge statue of himself in the temple. He deliberately wanted to do this to snub and offend the Jews. In the end he was assassinated before it happened; but, had he gone ahead, all the events described in Matthew 24 could have happened right away. In fact, it was another 30 years before Roman legions surrounded

the temple and eventually placed their blasphemous standards there. That was indeed the beginning of the end for Jerusalem, the end of the world order that Jesus and his followers (and their ancestors for many generations) had known. What should Jesus' followers do when all this happens? They should get out and run. Think about it: their natural tendency, as loyal Jews, might well have been to stay and fight, to join a new resistance movement and, yes, to sign up to fight for a new Messiah. They had, after all, come to Jerusalem with Jesus in the hope that there might be some kind of battle for the kingdom. In a couple of chapters, we will see one of them waving a sword around in the darkness, assuming that Jesus wanted them to start fighting at last (Matthew 26:50-54). But this isn't at all what Jesus had in mind. This is not how the kingdom of God will come. This is not how he will be vindicated both as a true prophet and as Messiah. They must run away because Jerusalem itself is under God's judgment, and the pagan images in the temple are the sign that the judgment is about to happen. Whatever other levels of "salvation" there are in the NT, they

must also include the very basic and physical: Jesus wants his people to be rescued from the destruction that is coming upon the city. When they see the signs, they are not to hang around, to collect up their property. They are to hurry at once, away from the city that has God's judgment hanging over it by a single thread. It will be a time of great suffering and hardship. And when it all happens, there won't be any doubt. The event will not be disguised and you won't wonder whether it is the Messiah being vindicated. He won't be standing there in person, maybe looking like somebody else. His vindication will be read in the signs of the times. Once again, the terrible times of the first century are echoed by the terrible times that the world, and the church, have had to go through many times over. But the passage is not primarily about us today. Its main significance lies in the fact that then, in the time of Jesus and the disciples, the world went through its greatest convulsion of all, through which God's new world began to be born. Living with this fact, and working out its long-term implications, have been essential parts of Christian discipleship up until this day.¹²⁰

TO PRAY ABOUT:

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READ MATTHEW 24:29-35

Often in the Bible there are passages in which several things come rushing together into one short, tight-packed chord or musical sequence. But in order to understand them, we have to take them apart and take it one step at a time. Particularly when it comes to prophecy, the biblical writers often speak of something which sounds as though it was all one event, but which they knew might well be (and we know actually was) a sequence of events, one after the other. The tune that this passage is playing, is called “the coming of the **Son of Man**”. In some parts of today’s church, it’s almost the only tune they sing, and I am concerned that they usually sing it in the wrong key. The orchestration is rich and dense. It needs looking at bit by bit. Here’s a bit from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 13:10, 43:4). “The sun will be darkened, the moon won’t shine, the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly powers will be shaken.” What does that mean? For

Isaiah (and for those who read this book in the first century) it for one didn’t have anything to do with the actual sun, moon and stars in the sky. That would make a quite different tune. This language was well known, regular code for talking about what we would call huge social and political convulsions. When we say that empires “fall”, or that kingdoms rise”, we don’t normally envisage any actual downward or upward physical movement. Matthew intends for us to understand that the coming of the Son of Man will be a time when the whole world seems to be in turmoil. But what will this “coming” itself actually *be*? What will Jesus’ “royal appearing” consist of? Matthew takes us back, in line with so much in Jesus’ teaching, to the prophet Daniel again, and this time to the crucial passage in Daniel 7:13 (Matthew 24:30 in our present passage). They will see, he says, “the son of man coming on the clouds of **heaven**”. Now in Daniel this certainly refers not to a *downward*

movement of this strange human figure, but to an upward movement. The son of man “comes” from the point of view of the heavenly world, that is, he comes **from** earth **to** heaven. His “coming” in this sense is not his return to earth after a sojourn in heaven. It is his ascension, his vindication, the thing which demonstrates that his suffering has not been in vain. What is it, then, that will demonstrate that Jesus has been vindicated by God? Three things. First, his **resurrection** and ascension. These great, dramatic and earth-shattering events will reverse the verdicts of the Jewish court and the pagan executioners. They will show that he is indeed “the Son of Man” who has suffered at the hands of the beasts or monsters – who now, it seems, include the **temple** and those who run it! – and is nevertheless then declared by God to be his true spokesman.

Second, the destruction of the temple. Jesus, speaking as a prophet, predicted that it would fall, not as an arbitrary exercise of his prophetic powers but because the temple had come to symbolize all that was wrong with the Israel of his day. And he had predicted the terrible suffering that would precede it. That’s why, in Matthew 24:25, he underlines the fact that he has told them about it beforehand. They are to trust that he is a true prophet. They must not be deceived by the odd things that others may do to

lead them astray. And when the temple finally falls, that will be the sign that he was speaking the truth. That will be his real vindication. His exaltation over the world, and over the temple, will be written in large letters into the pages of history; or, as they would put it, “they will see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven” (Matthew 24:30).

Thirdly, the news of his victory will spread rapidly throughout the world. What people will see are strange messengers, alone or in small groups, travelling around from country to country and telling people that a recently executed Jewish prophet had been vindicated by God, that he is the **Messiah** and the Lord of the world. But that’s just the surface event. The deeper dimension of these happenings is that the one true God is announcing to his whole creation that Jesus is his appointed Lord of the world. Or, as they would put it, “he will send off his messengers” (or “angels”), “and collect his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31). If we are to understand the biblical writers, we have to learn, once again, to read their language in their way. All this is spoken to Jesus’ **disciples** so they will know when the cataclysmic events are going to happen. Watch for the leaves on the tree, and you can tell it’s nearly summer (Matthew 24:32). Watch for these events, and you’ll know that the great event,

(the destruction of the temple and Jesus' complete vindication) are just around the corner (Matthew 24:33). And be sure of this, says Jesus (and Matthew wants to underline this): it will happen within a generation (Matthew 24:34). That is an extra important reason why everything that has been said in the passage so far must be taken to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the events that surround it.

Only when we appreciate how significant that moment was for everything Jesus had said and done, will we understand what Jesus himself stood for. But remember in the long purposes of God, we who read passages like this many

centuries later may find that what was said as a single statement, one short piece of music, can then be played as a string of separate parts, one after the other. I see no reason why (once we are quite clear about its original meaning) we should not then see the chapter as a pointer to other events, to the time we still await when God will complete what he began in the first century. To time that will bring the whole created order, as Paul promised in Romans 8, to share the liberty of the glory of God's children. As we look back to the first century, we should also look forward to God's still-promised future, and thank him that Jesus is already enthroned as Lord of all time and history (Philippians 2:9-11).¹²¹

READ MATTHEW 24:36-44

It is vital, therefore, to read the passage as it would have been heard by Matthew's first audience. And there, it seems, we are back to the great crisis that was going to sweep over Jerusalem and its surrounding countryside at a date that was, to them, in the unknown future – though we now know it happened in AD 70, at the climax of the war between Rome and Judea. Something was going to happen which would devastate lives, families and whole communities: something that was both a terrible, frightening event and also, at the same time, the event that was to be seen as

“the coming of the son of man” or the **parousia**, the “royal appearing” of Jesus himself. And the whole passage indicates what this will be. It will be the swift and sudden sequence of events that will end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the **temple**. The point this passage makes comes in three stages: First, nobody knows exactly when this will be; only that it will be within a generation (Matthew 24:34). Second, life will go on as normal right up to the last minute. That's the point of the parallel with the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39). Until the flood came to sweep everything

away (is Matthew remembering Matthew 7:26–27?), ordinary life was carrying on with nothing unusual. Third, it will divide families and work colleagues down the middle. “One will be taken and one left” (Matthew 24:40). This doesn’t mean (as some have suggested) that one person will be taken away by God in some kind of supernatural salvation, while the other is left to face destruction. If anything, it’s the opposite: when invading forces sweep through a town or village, they will take some off to their deaths, and leave others untouched.

The result – and this is the point Jesus is most anxious to get across to his **disciples** (who by this stage must

have been quite puzzled as to where it was all going) is that his followers must stay awake (Matthew 24:42), like people who know surprise visitors coming sooner or later, but who don’t know exactly when. What this means in detail, the next passage will explain. The warning was primarily directed to the situation of dire emergency in the first century, after Jesus’ death and resurrection and before his words about the temple came true. But they ring true through subsequent centuries, and into our own day. We too live in turbulent and dangerous times. Who knows what will happen next week, next year? It’s up to each church, and each individual Christian, to answer the question: are you ready? Are you awake? ¹²²

Are you currently ready for Jesus’ return (v.44)? Why would you say so?
Read John 12:28.

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READ MATTHEW 24:45-51

The scene changes once again, as it has done throughout Matthew 24, and will again in Matthew 25. But the underlying drama is the same. This time we are told of a householder going away on business and coming back suddenly: will he find the workers (in that world, the slaves) doing what they should, or not? As we’ve seen several times, a story about a master and servants

should most certainly be understood as a story about God and Israel. God has left Israel with tasks to perform; when he comes back, what will his verdict be on how they have accomplished them? At the same time, there may be a further twist to this plot, from the point of view of Jesus speaking to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. He is going to leave them with work to do: the

gospel must be announced to all the nations (Matthew 24:14). Some of them will have responsibilities within the young and struggling Christian community. How will they discharge them? The options presented here are stark. The slave in charge of the household has duties, and must do them. If he thinks to himself that his master won't be back for a long while yet, and decides to live it up, have a

good time, and (for good measure) ill-treat his fellow-slaves—he will be in deep trouble. He will be a play-actor, a hypocrite. He will be pretending to be one thing, while being another. And, once again the familiar and terrifying refrain: such people will find themselves outside, in the dark, where people weep and grind their teeth (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; and, still to come, 25:30).¹²³

What are some of the responsibilities that Jesus has entrusted to you, that you would have to give an account for once he returns (Matthew 24:46)? Be specific.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

Interlude

Taking chapter 24 into account, Matthew now shares three parables that Jesus told to call his audience to an account.

READ MATTHEW 25:1-13

What do you learn from this passage?

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Would you say that you are currently like the wise virgins or foolish virgins in the parable? Why would you say so? Be specific.

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READ MATTHEW 25:14-30

What are your top three talents (abilities) that you think God has blessed you with? Why would you say so?

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In what ways have you been using these three talents (abilities) to build God's kingdom (his new world)? Be specific.

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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How does Jesus describe the one who didn't put the talents to work in (v.26 & 30)? Why do you think he described him that way? Read Proverbs 6:6-11.

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READ MATTHEW 25:31-46

What do you learn from this passage?

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In which camp (sheep or goat) do you think Jesus would put you today? Why would you say so? Be specific.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 26:1-5

(v.2) **What was the Passover?** The Passover Feast was celebrated annually to commemorate Israel's escape from Egypt under Moses' leadership (Exodus 12). The month of Passover (Abib/Nisan) was to be the first month of the religious year for the Israelites (Exodus 12:2), which corresponds to the current calendar of late March to the beginning of April. The Passover lamb was selected on the tenth day of the month and sacrificed at twilight on the fourteenth day. "Twilight" was interpreted by the Pharisees to be between the decline of the sun (3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.) and sunset. By NT times, the time was made slightly earlier so that the Levites could help the large crowds assembled at the temple with their sacrifices. After dark (on the 15th of Nisan)

the Passover meal itself was eaten (Exodus 12:2–11), which commenced the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹²⁴

(v.3) **Who was Caiaphas?** Caiaphas was appointed high priest in AD 18 by the Roman prefect Valerius Gratus, Pontius Pilate's predecessor. Because the Roman governor appointed and deposed the high priest, he made the office into a political office, which apparently Caiaphas knew how to manipulate well. He reigned as high priest for around eighteen years, whereas from the time he was deposed until the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Josephus (the first century historian) counts no less than twenty-five high priests appointed and removed from office.¹²⁵

READ MATTHEW 26:6-13

Why do you think Jesus viewed this act (v.10) as "a beautiful thing"?

What do you think it would look like for you to do "a beautiful thing" for Jesus in our day? Be specific.

READ MATTHEW 26:14-30

(v.17) **What was the Feast of Unleavened Bread?** Passover commemorated the departure from Egypt in haste. Unleavened bread was used in the celebration because this showed that the people had no time to put leaven in their bread, and that they ate their final meal as slaves in Egypt.¹²⁶

(v.20) **Reclining at the table?** The

Passover was to be eaten at night. Table fellowship was intimate at the feast; only one or two families normally shared the meal (a minimum of ten persons was required). Here, Jesus and his closest disciples make up this family unit. The usual posture at meals was sitting, but reclining on a couch (originally a Greek practice) was customary for feasts.¹²⁷

How would you have felt (and what would you have done or said) about Judas if you were Jesus (v.20-25)? Why?

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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What do you think is the purpose of the Lord's supper? Why would you say so (v.27-30)? Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

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TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 26:31-35

What do you think are the chances that you would one day betray Jesus?
Why would you say so?

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READ MATTHEW 26:36-46

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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What do you learn about Jesus' disciples from this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 26:47-56

How would you have felt if you were Jesus at this time? Why?

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READ MATTHEW 26:57-68

In what way do you sometimes follow Jesus at a distance (v.58)? Why do you do it?

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What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

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What do you learn about the people surrounding Jesus in this passage?

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READ MATTHEW 26:69-75

What do you learn about Peter from this passage?

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In what ways do you think it is “easy” for you to “deny Jesus” today?

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 27:1-10

Why do you think Judas hanged himself?

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Have you ever felt sorry for yourself when you sin? If so, what happened?
Be Specific.

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Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 with regards to the different types of sorrow we can have about our sin. What do you learn about godly sorrow from (v.10)?

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Where does worldly sorrow lead to?

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What do you think is the difference between having godly sorrow and worldly sorrow about your own sin? Why would you say so?

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What are some characteristics of godly sorrow (v.11)?

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How would you describe (in your own words) to someone else what it means to have a godly sorrow for your sins (according to v.11)? Be specific.

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READ MATTHEW 27:11-26

(v11) **Who was Pilate?** Pilate carried the title procurator, which in Roman imperial administration, indicated the financial officer of a province. It was also used as the title of the governor of a Roman province of the third class, such as in Judea. A governor was a legate (a high-ranking Roman military officer) with control over the military legions. Pilate originally also carried the title

of prefect, which is used to designate various high officials or magistrates of differing functions and ranks in ancient Rome. It carried with it administrative, financial, military, and judicial functions. It included responsibilities as final judge in a region, under the emperor, with the power to pronounce death sentences. Tiberius had created a hybrid of responsibilities in Judea

in Jesus' time, so that Pilate had a combination of responsibilities as prefect and procurator/governor.¹²⁸

(v.16) **Who was Barabbas?** Barabbas is called "one of those among the rebels who had committed murder in the insurrection" (Luke 23:19) a "notorious prisoner" (Matt. 27:16), and a "bandit" (John 18:40 NRSV).¹²⁹ These terms closely resemble the characteristics of social banditry common in first-century Palestine. As a **bandit (lēstēs)**, Barabbas may have belonged to one of the rural brigands who instigated social unrest. The two criminals, between whom Jesus was crucified, are also called by this same term (Matthew 27:38, 44). These bandits were popular with the common people because they preyed on the wealthy establishment of Israel and created havoc for the Roman government. Barabbas was being held prisoner by the Roman authorities at the time of Jesus' trial and is released by Pontius Pilate. This was done to carry out the customary paschal pardon (Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15). The reason given for the crowd's choosing Barabbas over Jesus is said to be the instigation of the chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:20; Mark 15:11). Likely the Jerusalem crowds also have come to recognize that Jesus is not going to be the military and political liberator that they want, preferring Barabbas's active methods of Roman resistance to Jesus' way of non-resistance.¹³⁰

(v.26) **What did it mean to be flogged?** Flogging or scourging was a beating administered with a whip or rod, usually on the person's back. It was a common method of punishing criminals and preserving discipline. In the OT, flogging was a punishment for crime (Deuteronomy 25:1–3), and later rabbinic tradition gave extensive prescriptions for flogging (mastigoō) offenders in the synagogue (Matthew. 10:17; 23:34). But the Roman form of flogging (phragelloō) mentioned here is quite different. "Phragelloō" is a Latin loan word used to designate the Roman "verberatio", a horrific form of flogging. Roman law required that the verberatio always accompany a capital sentence, preceding the execution. Flogging in the Jewish synagogue was limited to forty lashes by the law (Deuteronomy. 25:3), but no such restrictions limited Roman flogging. In many cases the flogging itself was fatal. When the condemned man (women were not flogged) was tied to a post, he was flogged with the cruel flagellum (a leather strap interwoven with pieces of bone and metal that cut through the skin) that left the skin hanging in shreds. The repeated flaying often left the bones and intestines showing, and the person was often near the point of death when he was taken to be executed.¹³¹ (Also see notes on Matthew 20:17-19).

What did it mean to be crucified?
Read notes on Matthew 20:17-19.

Among the torturous penalties noted in the literature of antiquity, crucifixion was particularly heinous. The act itself damaged no vital organs, nor did it result in excessive bleeding. Hence, death came slowly for the victim, sometimes only after several days. It was either through shock or a painful process of suffocation, since the muscles used to breathe, became increasingly fatigued. Often, as a further disgrace, the person was denied burial and the body was left on the cross to serve as carcass for the birds, or to rot. Crucifixion was typically a public affair. Naked and affixed to a stake, cross or tree, the victim was subjected to savage ridicule by

passers-by. Furthermore, it gave the general populace a grim reminder of the fate of those who assert themselves against the authority of the state. Descriptions of the act of crucifixion are rare in the surviving literature of antiquity. This is not due to the infrequency of the practice, but rather to literary considerations. Members of the cultured literary elite were hesitant to dwell long on this horrific and brutal act. Indeed, even the passion narratives of our Gospels are remarkably brief in their recounting of the actual act of crucifixion. Avoiding all details, they simply report, "They crucified him" (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:25; Luke 23:33; John 19:18).¹³²

What do you learn about Pilate from this passage?

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Have you ever been like Pilate? If so, in what way? Read Genesis 3:8-13.

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In (v.24) Pilate claims innocence. Would you say that he was innocent? Why (or why not) would you say so?

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What would it look like for you to take responsibility for sin in your life?
Be specific. Read Luke 19:7-8.

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THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

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QUESTIONS I HAVE:

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READ MATTHEW 27:32-44

(v 32) **“a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.”** Criminals condemned to die were customarily required to carry to the scene of crucifixion the heavy wooden crosspiece (patibulum), on which they were to be nailed. Plutarch (the Greek biographer and essayist) writes, “Every criminal condemned

to death bears his own cross on his back.”¹³⁵ The crosspiece was then secured to the vertical beam, and the entire cross was hoisted into the air with the victim attached to it. The “patibulum” usually weighed fifteen to twenty kilograms and was strapped across the shoulders. The scourging and loss of blood had

so weakened Jesus that he could hardly walk and carry the patibulum, because the skin and muscles of his back had been lacerated. Apparently at random, the Roman soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene into service to carry Jesus' cross. Cyrene was a town in North Africa that had a large Jewish population. Simon is likely a Jew who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover.¹³⁶

(v.33) **“place of the skull”** The Latin word for skull is “calvaria”, from which the English word Calvary is derived.¹³⁷

(v.35) **How did crucifixions work?** Crucifixion was used both as a means of execution and exposing an executed body to shame and humiliation.¹³⁸ The Romans practiced a variety of forms. The main stake or “palus” generally remained at the place of execution, while the victim would be forced to carry the crossbeam or “patibulum” (see Matthew 23:26). The crossbeam was placed either on top

of the palus (like a “T”) or in the more traditional cross shape (†). The victim would be affixed to the cross with ropes or, as in the case of Jesus, with nails (John 20:25). Various positions were used to maximize torture and humiliation. Seneca (the Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman and dramatist) wrote that “some hang their victims with head toward the ground, some impale their private parts, others stretch out their arms on fork-shaped gibbet.”¹³⁹ Death was caused by loss of blood, exposure, exhaustion, and/or suffocation, as the victim tried to lift himself to breathe. Victims sometimes lingered in agony for days. Crucifixion was viewed by ancient writers as the cruellest and most barbaric of punishments.¹⁴⁰ The bones of a crucified man named Yehohanan were discovered in 1968 at Giv'at ha Mivtar in the Kidron Valley, northeast of the Old City, dated between AD 7 and AD 70.¹⁴¹ He was probably a victim of one of the various insurrectionist movements of the first century.¹⁴²

The heel bone and nail from the ossuary of Yehohanan, discovered in Jerusalem in 1968. (Photo credit: Courtesy of the Israel Museum. Photographer: Ilan Shtulman.)



View the full colour image and read the article in 'The Times of Israel'

READ MATTHEW 27:45-66

(v.47) **“He is calling Elijah”** Jesus’ citation of Psalm 22:1 is misunderstood by the bystanders to imply that he is calling Elijah. According to a tradition in later Judaism, since Elijah did not die but was taken by God in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1–12), he would return in an equally instantaneous way to help those in distress. ^{143; 144}

(v.51) **“The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”** The word for curtain (*katapetasma*) is used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, also called LXX). It was sometimes used to describe the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:31–35; 27:21; 30:6; 2 Chronicles 3:14; Hebrews 6:19; 9:3; 10:20), and sometimes the curtain over the entrance to the Holy Place (Exodus 27:37; Numbers 3:26). The former is more likely meant here. The curtain was an elaborately woven

fabric of seventy-two twisted plaits of twenty-four threads each and the veil was 18 meters long and 9 meters wide. ¹⁴⁵ Being split from top to bottom is a sign that God had done this, signifying that the new and living way is now open to the presence of God, through the sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 2:11–22; Hebrews 10:20). ¹⁴⁶

(v.57) **“As evening approached”** Jewish custom dictated that bodies should be taken down before evening, especially with the Sabbath beginning at sundown (approximately 6:00 p.m.). ^{147; 148}

(v.59) **“Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth”** The Jews did not practice cremation or embalming (Joseph and Jacob were embalmed using Egyptian practice in Genesis 50:2, 26). Coffins were not used; rather, the body was dressed in linen cloths. ¹⁴⁹ Contact with corpses caused ritual impurity, so tombs were marked with whitewash (Matthew 23:27) to warn passers-by.

Corpses were left in tombs until the flesh decayed (between one to three years). After this, the bones were collected and placed in ossuaries. ^{150; 151}

Scan for the full
colour version



Ossuary of the high priest, Joseph Caiaphas, was found in Jerusalem in 1990. *The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.*

(v.60) **“Placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock”** Burial was generally in a cave, to which the body was carried on a bier (a movable frame on which a coffin or a corpse is placed) in a funeral procession. ¹⁵² Family tombs predominated in first-century Judaism, and could be reused for several generations. The tomb was a rectangular underground chamber cut into rock, sometimes in abandoned quarries. It was accessed through a low entry chamber, normally closed with a stone. The dead were laid out on benches cut

parallel into the rock and/or placed in vertical burial slots or recesses cut into the sides of the tomb chambers. Large family tombs were quite expensive, sometimes with several chambers connected together with tunnels. ¹⁵³

(v.62) **“The next day, the one after Preparation Day”** The expression “Preparation Day” was a common expression for the day preceding the Sabbath (Mark 15:42), that is, Friday, when the people made their preparations for the Sabbath. ¹⁵⁴

THINGS TO PRAY ABOUT:

QUESTIONS THAT I HAVE:

READ MATTHEW 28:1-15

Resurrection: The expectation of a resurrection of the righteous to new life and the wicked to punishment is well attested in the OT and Second Temple Jewish literature.¹⁵⁵ Resurrection, in rabbinic Judaism, refers to the concept of all the dead being brought back to life by God on the Day of Judgment, giving eternal life - the world to come - (see note on Matthew 19:16) to the righteous and

consigning the wicked to Gehenna (see note on Matthew 5:22). This was a central part of rabbinic belief from the first century after the destruction of the temple in AD 70, with the decline of the Sadducees (who rejected the notion of resurrection, Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:8) and the ascendancy of Pharisaism, (which viewed resurrection as a central blessed hope).^{156; 157}

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20 & 23; Romans 1:2-6. What do you think is the importance of Jesus' resurrection? Why would you say so? Be specific.

READ MATTHEW 28:16-20

(v.18) **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”** In his earthly ministry, Jesus had declared his authority as the Son of Man to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6) and to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27). Now, as the risen Messiah, he has

been given all authority, glory, and power. He is rightly worshipped by all peoples and all nations, and his dominion and his kingdom will last for all eternity. (Also read Daniel 7:13-14; Ephesians 1:20-23; Romans 1:1-4).¹⁵⁸

Why do you think some of them doubted (v.16-17)? Read James 1:6-8.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations” (v.19). What do you think Jesus meant by this? How do you think we should be living this out today?

Read Acts 2:36-41; Romans 6:1-6; Colossians 2:11-12. What do you think is the purpose of baptism? Why would you say so?

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(v.20) **“And teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you”** Jesus didn’t command them to merely teach people (or to teach people to believe). He commanded them to “teach them to obey” (in other words, hold them to account)

and to make sure they live in line with God’s new world. A world that he has brought about through Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. The NT is filled with “one another” scriptures that help us towards this end (see below).

ONE ANOTHER SCRIPTURES:

Love one another (John 13:34). This command occurs at least 16 times.

Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10).

Honour one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10).

Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16).

Build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Accept one another (Romans 15:7).

Greet one another (Romans 16:16).

Care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25).

Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).

Carry each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).

Forgive one another (Colossians 3:13).

Be patient bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).

Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15, 25).

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32).

Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).

In humility value others above yourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Look to the interests of one another (Philippians 2:4).

Bear with one another (Colossians 3:13).

Teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14).

Encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13; Ephesians 5:19).

Spur one another on to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another (1 Peter 5:5).

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other (James 5:16).

In what way do you think you can live out these one another scriptures today? Be specific. _____

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¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (Vol. 1, p. 184).

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¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (Vol. 1, p. 189).



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