



**THRU** the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McGee*

# MATTHEW

BIBLE COMPANION



GOSPEL

# READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the Gospel of Matthew heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



**Begin with prayer.** Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



**As you study, read the Bible passage first.** Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



**If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to [TTB.org/Matthew](http://TTB.org/Matthew)** (or any book of the Bible).

The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



**After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion.** Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

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LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU  
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING...

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COLOSSIANS 3:16<sup>A</sup>

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LESSON 1</b>	STANDING IN THE GAP OF HISTORY: LIFE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS... 1
<b>LESSON 2</b>	JESUS: GOD WITH US ..... 7
<b>LESSON 3</b>	WHAT WAS THAT STAR? ..... 12
<b>LESSON 4</b>	A KING WHO CAN STAND THE TEST ..... 17
<b>LESSON 5</b>	WHY PEOPLE FOLLOWED JESUS ..... 24
<b>LESSON 6</b>	WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE WHEN JESUS IS KING ..... 28
<b>LESSON 7</b>	FIVE THINGS BETWEEN YOU AND GOD ..... 35
<b>LESSON 8</b>	GOD GIVES US A NEW HEART ..... 41
<b>LESSON 9</b>	MIRACLES, MIRACLES, MIRACLES ..... 46
<b>LESSON 10</b>	THE MOST BEAUTIFUL INVITATION IN THE WORLD ..... 54

<b>LESSON 11</b>	THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE ... ..	61
<b>LESSON 12</b>	DO YOU BELIEVE HIM? .....	67
<b>LESSON 13</b>	WHO DO YOU THINK HE IS?.....	73
<b>LESSON 14</b>	ON HIS WAY TO JERUSALEM .....	78
<b>LESSON 15</b>	HEAVEN IS FOR THE ASKING.....	84
<b>LESSON 16</b>	A SURPRISING TURN OF EVENTS.....	90
<b>LESSON 17</b>	A VIEW OF THE FUTURE.....	96
<b>LESSON 18</b>	SCENES OF THE FUTURE.....	102
<b>LESSON 19</b>	PASSOVER, GETHSEMANE, THE TRIALS, THE CROSS .....	108
<b>LESSON 20</b>	FROM DEATH TO LIFE AGAIN .....	116

## LESSON 1

# STANDING IN THE GAP OF HISTORY

## LIFE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 1:1-15**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to *Matthew Introduction* and *Matthew 1:1-15*

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As we begin our study of the book of Matthew, we stand at the end of a huge gap in history—a chasm of 400 years. Behind us is the Old Testament and stretching out in front of us like a scroll is the New Testament.

It's been 400 years since Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, had spoken, and after that heaven went silent. Station G-O-D went off the air, and there was no broadcasting for four centuries.

Then one day, a priest named Zechariah was standing at the altar in the temple's Holy Place in Jerusalem and an angel appeared out of nowhere and announced the birth of John the Baptist, who was to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. History was turning.

In those 400 years, Scripture is silent. We know from history that it's a thrilling period—in many ways both terrific and tragic for God's people.

World politics turned and transformed in this 400-year gap. When the Old Testament closed, the Medo-Persian Empire dominated the earth. Egypt also stood tall. Now as the New Testament opens, both had faded from the scene. A new power, Rome, now rules the world.

As we bring the land of Israel into laser focus, let's specifically concentrate on what the religious landscape looked like as the setting for the Gospel of Matthew. We meet four different religious parties, never heard of in the Old Testament, that now shape the mindset and practices of the Jewish faith.

First there were the Pharisees, the dominant party. They were politically and religiously the most conservative. They defended the Jewish way of life against all foreign influences. Strict legalists, they alone remained fundamentally true to the Old Testament in their theological beliefs. They wanted to restore the kingdom to the line of David.

Then, there were the Sadducees, made up of the wealthy and the socially minded who wanted to be done with tradition. They opposed the Pharisees. They were theologically liberal, rejecting anything supernatural. Like Greek Epicureans, they believed "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die." They were in search of the good life and gave their bodies unbridled rein. They tried it then; didn't work. Doesn't work now, either.

The Scribes, the third group, were professional interpreters of the Law, carried over from the days of Ezra. But what began as honorable had become ridiculous. They split hairs, concerned more with the letter of the Law than with its spirit. When Herod asked the scribes where Jesus was born, they knew the answer—Bethlehem—but you'd think they would have hopped on a camel and gone down to Bethlehem to see Him. But they weren't interested. They lost their love for the Word, fighting instead for its knowledge.

The last group, the Herodians, were strictly political opportunists. They wanted their party in power and a Herod on the throne.

This is the religious landscape on which Jesus will travel in the book of Matthew.

The Gospel of Matthew is remarkable. It swings back in the Old Testament and gathers up more prophecies than any other book. It also reaches farther into the New Testament than any other Gospel. Matthew is the only book that mentions the church by name (16:18). It's also interesting to note that God used Matthew, a former publican (hated by Jews), to get this Gospel to us.

The Lord Jesus put His hand upon Matthew in a very definite way. Matthew was His follower, His apostle. He wrote the Gospel in Hebrew for the nation Israel, a religious people. God had prepared this whole nation for the coming of Christ into the world (John 4:22), and now the time was here.

One of the major themes of the Gospel of Matthew is the program of God, called “the kingdom of heaven.” It’s critical to understand that “kingdom” and “church” are not the same. The church is *in* the kingdom of God just like Los Angeles is in California, but Los Angeles is not California. The kingdom of heaven is the reign of the heavens over the earth. It doesn’t have to be complicated like some make it out to be. In this Gospel, we see how Jesus is establishing God’s kingdom on earth.

## JESUS CHRIST’S GENEALOGY

This very important beginning—the genealogy which opens the Gospel of Matthew and the New Testament—is in many respects the most important document in the Scriptures.

We learned earlier in Genesis how important families are. And now we see it again in this genealogy that opens the New Testament. Matthew 1:1-17 lists the family names, beginning with Abraham to David, then from Solomon through the Babylonian captivity, all the way to Joseph the carpenter.

The entire New Testament rests upon the accuracy of this genealogy. It establishes the Lord Jesus Christ is of the line of Abraham, which puts Jesus in the nation and the line of David, which puts Jesus on the throne. This genealogy was so important, it was on display for public inspection, likely in the temple.

Jesus has been challenged down through the years in practically every phase and feature, but this genealogy was never challenged. Likely many checked it out and found it was accurate. Jesus was born in the line of David and in the line of Abraham. Matthew lays before us the truth that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that had been previously mentioned and promised in the Old Testament.

Now, let’s admit that the long list of names is difficult to read and hard to be excited about. But let’s also agree since the Spirit of God used so much printer’s ink in giving us this list that there must be something important here. This one in Matthew 1:1-17 is Jesus’ genealogy from Joseph’s side. We’ll read another one, from Mary’s side, when we get over to Luke.

***The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*** –Matthew 1:1

Why did Matthew say Jesus was the son of David, the son of Abraham? Didn't he know Abraham came before David? Yes, he makes that clear in the rest of the genealogy.

Instead of in chronological order, Matthew describes Jesus as "Son of David" first because he's presenting the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, as the One who is the King, and who is the One to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth, and that comes first. And He must be in the line of David in fulfillment of the prophecies that God made to David.

Jesus is also the son of Abraham. God had said to Abraham, "*All nations on Earth will be blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me*" (Genesis 22:18) and Paul says, "*That seed was one and that seed was Christ*" (Galatians 3:16). So Jesus is the son of Abraham.

A closer look at Jesus' genealogy and you'll notice four names that stand out in neon lights. First, because the names are of Gentiles. Gentiles just didn't get into these genealogies, yet there they are. Secondly, they are names of women. In that day, women were not counted, yet there they are. Each name holds a special significance in the story of Jesus' family line.

Tamar is the first woman mentioned. Her story in the book of Genesis is horrific and sad, yet God used her to preserve Jesus' line.

Rahab is the next woman mentioned. She was a desperate character when we meet her in Exodus but became a wonderful person when she met the living and true God (Hebrews 11:31). She's listed here for the very simple reason that she believed; she had faith in God, standing out against the backdrop of a wicked people.

Ruth is the next one mentioned. Now the Law kept Ruth out because she was a Moabite. But when Boaz (Rahab's son) saw her, it was love at first sight. He extended grace to her, put his coat around her, and brought her, a Gentile, into Jesus' family line.

The final woman in the genealogy isn't mentioned by name, but instead as the wife of Uriah. We know who it is: Bathsheba. She's in the genealogy of Christ because God does not throw overboard one of His own who sins. He brought David back, and that is the whole story of salvation right there.

Four women are mentioned, but many other people have been left out. In this first chapter of Matthew, we can trace Jesus' family all the way from Adam in the garden to Joseph, who married the young virgin, Mary. Joseph stands in this line, the line that has the title to the throne of David.

Matthew shows us a remarkable thing in the Scripture. Even though Joseph could not be Jesus' natural father, Joseph gave Jesus the legal title to the throne of David. By marrying Mary, the source of Jesus' true humanity, Joseph passed along the legal right to Jesus. Both Mary and Joseph were in the line of David, so when it came time for them to pay their tax, they both went to Bethlehem, the town of David.

When you dig into them, these genealogies bring fascinating and interesting truths to light.

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**NEXT: We'll visit with the people whom God chose to be Jesus' earthly parents.**

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## LESSON 2

# JESUS

## GOD WITH US



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 1:16–2:11**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 1:16-25** and **Matthew 2:1-11**

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As we finished our last lesson, we came to a long list of “begats,” all building to this triumphal moment: “And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ” (1:16).

Look closely at that verse. In keeping with the pattern, shouldn’t it say, “And Joseph begot Jesus”? But it doesn’t. Matthew clearly says Joseph is the husband of Mary, but he’s not the father of Jesus.

Why is this critical? Matthew will show us why, along with how Jesus’ virgin birth fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

### JESUS’ VIRGIN BIRTH

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both make it clear Jesus was born of a virgin, a woman who had not yet had an intimate relationship with a man. Those who deny Jesus’ virgin birth have argued the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son...” could also be translated “a young woman” shall conceive. Yet, all seven times *almah*, the original Hebrew word, was used in the Old Testament, the context meant “virgin.” When this verse was translated into Greek, the word was translated, *parthenos*—virgin.

While it's possible for people to deny the virgin birth, it's on historical record that the Bible teaches Jesus' virgin birth.

## HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

If Joseph was not Jesus' father, who was? Matthew 1:18 tells us the birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

Those last three words explain how Mary came to be pregnant with Jesus. Dr. Luke tells us in more detail in his Gospel, but this is what we need to know now: Mary was not unfaithful to Joseph. Jesus is not illegitimate.

Yet that's how it seemed in the moment. Joseph could have accused Mary of adultery and had her stoned to death. But he loved her and didn't want her to be hurt. As Joseph agonized over this situation, God did a very kind thing—He sent an angel to visit Joseph in a dream and make it clear to him that what was happening to Mary was of God. The angel's instruction to Joseph was to take Mary as his wife.

The angel even said they should name the baby, Jesus, “for He will save His people from their sins” (1:21). As a God-fearing Jewish man, Joseph understood that reference to Jesus as a Savior was saying Jesus is the Messiah.

Matthew reminded his Jewish readers that this announcement fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. (He quoted the Old Testament more than the other three Gospels put together.) More than 300 prophecies concerning Jesus' first coming were literally fulfilled. Matthew very intentionally tells us about Jesus' life only as it relates to proving prophecies fulfilled.

Now here's a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. The angel explained to Joseph:

***So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”*** –Matthew 1:22-23

But when was Jesus ever called Emmanuel? Emmanuel means “God with us.” Think of it this way: Jesus can't be called God unless He's virgin born (notice the angel confirmed Mary was a virgin). The only way we can call Him “Jesus, the Savior” is because He's God with us.

God with us: Is there a more wonderful thing said in the entire Word of God?

In the suffering sacrifice of Jesus, He tasted death for every man. But He had to be an *acceptable* sacrifice. We couldn't die for the sins of the world; we can't even die for the forgiveness of our own sin. We need a savior who is *able* to save us. If he's just another man, he's not going to be able to help us very much. Jesus must be Emmanuel, God with us, or He can't be the Savior of the world. Jesus took our humanity upon Himself so He might die a redemptive death for us on the cross. That's how important the virgin birth is.

## FULFILLED PROPHECY

Behind the backdrop of history, God is at work fulfilling His purposes. In Matthew 2, we read of several historical events. Behind them, Matthew points out how God fulfills His prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah in the context of Jesus' birth.

The Gospel of Matthew was written to the religious people of Israel. The sincere Bible scholars of Jesus' day must have scratched their heads, wondering how these four specific, seemingly unrelated prophecies could be answered together in fulfillment of the Messiah's coming.

Matthew shows how literally, accurately, and easily all four prophecies were fulfilled without any strain on history. It came about as God said it would.

**Prophecy #1: Micah 5:2 says the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.**

Because of Caesar Augustus' census, Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

**Prophecy #2: Hosea 11:1 refers to the Messiah being called out of Egypt.**

Because Joseph and Mary had to run from Herod's murderous plot, they hid for a time in Egypt.

**Prophecy #3: Jeremiah 31:15 prophesied that there was to be weeping in Ramah.**

Because Herod ordered the murder of all baby boys under two years old around Bethlehem, families in nearby Ramah would mourn this great loss.

**Prophecy #4: Isaiah 11:1 said the Messiah would be called a Nazarene.**

Once Herod died, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Israel and settled in Nazareth, their home area.

No matter how it seems from our limited earth-view, God today is weaving His beautiful plan throughout history—working all things together for our good and for His glory. His greatest glory? The praise and honor of His Son, Jesus Christ. Do you know Him?

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**NEXT: We'll find out about those “wise men”  
and the stir they caused in Jerusalem.**

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## LESSON 3

# WHAT WAS THAT STAR?



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 1:16–2:11**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 1:16-25** and **Matthew 2:1-11**

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If there was one thing Herod the Great would not tolerate, it was competition. When these wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, Herod took notice.

For many years, the wise men had been studying the stars and had seen something remarkable in them about a coming king which pointed them to Jerusalem. We don't know why they associated a star with a king, nor how they identified it with Israel. The only related prophecy we know of is Numbers 24:17 when Balaam said about the nation Israel, "A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." The star and the scepter go together—these wise men came out of the mysterious east in their search.

The wise men's arrival in Jerusalem disturbed King Herod and the whole city. We don't know how many magi there were, but only three wise men (as the song goes) wouldn't have caused a ruckus. More than likely, there were 300 or more. Now Herod the Great was a very superstitious and violent man—a real first century Mafia. He had bought his leadership position from the Roman government and would do anything necessary to protect it.

So, first Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes together and demanded to know where the Messiah would be born. Surprisingly, they knew—Bethlehem (only five miles or so from Jerusalem).

Then he shared that information with the wise men and asked them to go and search for the child. *“Let me know when you’ve found Him,”* Herod cooed, *“so I can worship Him, too”* (2:8). Herod, the old serpent, let these wise men find Jesus for him. Of course, what he really wanted to do was kill Jesus.

The wise men didn’t have to search long; the star stood over the house where Jesus lived. They were overjoyed! What a special star! This supernatural star can’t be explained by modern astronomy. When Jesus came, heaven and earth both responded to His presence in this world.

By the time the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, the tax enrollment was over and the crowds had gone home. In the meantime, Joseph had moved his family into a house and that’s where they found Mary and the toddler, Jesus.

If there ever was a time when Mary could have been worshipped, this was it. But the wise men didn’t worship her—they worshipped Jesus and brought Him gifts suitable for Jesus’ mission.

Gold speaks of Jesus’ birth as a king.

Frankincense speaks of the fragrance of His life, a pleasing offering of worship.

Myrrh speaks of Jesus’ death, since He came to die. The Cross was always Jesus’ purpose for coming.

By the way, a prophecy regarding Jesus’ second coming in Isaiah 60:6 speaks of gold and incense—but no myrrh. Why didn’t they bring myrrh? Because His death already accomplished our salvation, and when He comes again it will be in victory.

When it was time for the wise men to return home, God warned them in a dream not to tell Herod where Jesus was. God also warned Joseph that Herod would be seeking them out to kill Jesus and that they should hide in Egypt for a while. So Joseph obeyed. That night, he and Mary got out of town and lived in Egypt until Herod’s death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea 11:1 had preached: *“Out of Egypt I called my son.”*

As you would guess, Herod was angry the wise men didn't tell him where Jesus was. In a rage, he killed all the baby boys under two years old in the vicinity of Bethlehem, hoping one of them was Jesus. Sadly, this too, fulfilled prophecy from Jeremiah 31:15, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."

It must have been a time of great weeping when whole towns lost their little ones as this prophecy was literally fulfilled.

## **BACK TO NAZARETH**

We're not told how long Joseph, Mary, and Jesus lived in Egypt, but God faithfully kept them informed through a dream when Herod was dead and it was safe to return to Israel. But when Joseph learned that Herod's son, Archelaus (a brutal man like his father), reigned in Judea, he was afraid to go back there. Once again, God directed their steps. He directed them to Galilee, where they settled in the city of Nazareth.

Another prophecy fulfilled: First that Jesus is a "Rod from the stem of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1, He was in David's family line) and that He was brought up in Nazareth and called a Nazarene.

All four scriptural prophecies were fulfilled in a very normal way. The Gospel of Matthew shows how literally, accurately, and easily Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled without any strain on history. It came about as God said it would.

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**NEXT: Meet the man God appointed  
as the forerunner to Jesus Christ.**

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*God with us*

IS THERE A MORE WONDERFUL  
THING SAID IN THE  
ENTIRE WORD OF GOD?



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 4

# A KING WHO CAN STAND THE TEST



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 2:12–4:16**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 2:12–3:9**, **Matthew 3:10–4:11**,  
and **Matthew 4:12-25**

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...Then onto the pages of Scripture walks John the Baptist.

If we only had Matthew's Gospel, we'd never know where John came from. But more important than the messenger is John's message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2).

Let's break that message down to its important parts:

Repent means "to change your mind." If you're headed in one direction, you repent when you turn around and go the opposite direction. Primarily, repentance is for *saved* people—God's people in any age.

To the unsaved person, the important thing is first to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31). The word "believe" includes repentance—in believing, you turn to Christ and away from your own way.

The expression "kingdom of heaven" is when the Lord Jesus Christ rules as king over heaven and earth. John said this kingdom is "at hand," since the King was now present.

Today, the kingdom of heaven is a present reality when pictured in the relationship of those who come to Him as Savior and acknowledge Him as Lord. In that beautiful moment, we are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. We belong to Him now.

The kingdom of heaven does not rule on earth today—sin and rebellion do. But someday, Jesus will establish His kingdom on earth and put down the rebellion sin has caused that defines the current state of our world.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

The first time we meet John the Baptist, we see right away he's a curious person. Because of his Levite vow, he never shaved or cut his hair. He ate the oddest things and wore clothes made of camel's hair. He looked like the last of the Old Testament prophets. All John ever claimed to be was a voice crying in the wilderness, *"Get ready for the Lord!"*

John had a mission, and people from every region went to the wilderness to hear about it. The Spirit of God was on this man and prompted dramatic change in people's lives. John baptized people who confessed their sins, who left their old lives and turned to a new one.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees came out to hear him, John greeted them with a fiery warning, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance" (3:7-8).

John called the dignified religious leaders to demonstrate their faith and present proof in their lives of what they believed. How can you see proof? By the fruit of your lives.

The New Testament talks a lot about fruit bearing, beginning with having the right kind of tree. The root and the fruit go together—an apple tree will bear apples. A plum tree will bear plums. The right kind of root bears the right kind of fruit. To the religious leaders, John said that if a tree isn't bearing fruit then you put an axe to its root.

Matthew 3:11 summarized John's mission: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Here John describes one of Scripture's great truths: John baptized a repentant person with water. Today, when a person is saved, the Holy Spirit baptizes them. That's how every saved person becomes part of the Body of Christ.

Some ask, "*Didn't the Holy Spirit come on the day of Pentecost with tongues of fire?*" Great question. Read Acts 2 and you'll see it says "as of fire." It was a sign, not a fulfillment. When the baptism of fire takes place at Jesus' second coming, it's for judgment.

Now Matthew gives us a glimpse into two significant events in Jesus' life before His public ministry begins.

## JESUS IS BAPTIZED

Out of crowds who came to hear John preach walks Jesus Himself, asking John to baptize Him. John objected, saying Jesus needed to baptize him instead. So why did Jesus insist on being baptized?

The Lord Jesus said it is "fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). He identifies Himself *completely* with sinful mankind. Like Isaiah 53:12 said of Him, "He was numbered with the transgressors." Here is a king who comes down and identifies with His subjects. Jesus was not baptized as an example—He is holy and separate from sinners. He did not need to repent, but He wanted to identify with us.

Jesus' baptism also pictured His death. When His disciples James and John wanted a place next to Him, Jesus asked, "Are you able to...be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matthew 20:22). He entered into death for us.

Jesus' baptism also established His office as priest. Remember the dove that descended on Him as He came out of the water? That's the picture of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him for the ministry as our priest. Everything He did, He did it by the power of the Holy Spirit. He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus identified Himself with us in baptism and now we are saved by being identified with Him (see 1 Peter 3:21). That's what it means to be "in Christ." We declare we are identified with Christ. The Holy Spirit accomplishes that at our salvation.

By the way, did you recognize the Trinity in this scene? The *Spirit of God* descends upon *Jesus, the Son*, like a dove and then *the Father's* voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3:17).

Jesus, the king, totally undefiled and separate from sin, identifies with His people. Oh, what a king He is!

## JESUS IS TEMPTED

Immediately after this, the Spirit draws Him to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus was born as king and baptized as a king. Now the question: Is this king able to withstand a test? Is He able to overcome temptation?

The word "temptation" has a two-fold meaning. First, it can mean "to incite or entice to evil; to seduce." Something in us causes us to yield. But that wasn't true of Jesus. We yield to sin because we are sinners, but the temptation had to be different and much greater for Him.

Temptation also means "to test." We're told throughout the Bible God doesn't tempt man with evil (Genesis 22:1, James 1:13), but instead, He tests our faith. Here in the wilderness, Jesus endures a test that proves He is qualified to be our Savior. His temptation was greater than we have ever endured in order to demonstrate He's exactly who He claims to be. He had to prove He could not be broken down. There's a limit to what we can bear. But even when the pressure increased, He never gave in.

1. **The first temptation the devil hit Jesus with was physical.** It's important to see the devil is a person. Jesus engages with Him as a physical person—not as an influence or a spirit.

Now Jesus had fasted for 40 days and nights, and He was hungry. The devil said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (4:3).

Did you catch the devil's very subtle insinuation? First, he says, "*If You are the Son of God ...*" In other words, *prove* it in a way which is not God's way. It wouldn't be a real temptation for the devil to tempt Jesus to commit a crime—but what's the harm in doing a good thing, to make bread? The inherent evil of this temptation was to get Jesus to go outside of the will of God for His life.

But Jesus doesn't budge. Instead, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (4:4).

2. **The second temptation was spiritual.** “Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone”’” (4:6). Now Satan quotes Scripture back to Jesus (Psalm 91:11-12), and Jesus counters with Deuteronomy 6:16.

Satan wanted to get Jesus to become a religious leader through a miracle rather than by the Cross. But the Cross was God’s will.

It’s not always God’s will to work a miracle in your life. Some think you can force God to do something you want Him to do, but you can’t! God is sovereign. He is the potter; we are the clay. It’s His will that must be done for our good and for His glory.

3. **Satan’s third temptation is psychological,** attempting to appeal to a lust for power and all the shiny things in the world today. Satan promises to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world—and don’t miss this—and the glory of them. On one condition: If Jesus will worship him.

Note the Lord Jesus never said, *“Don’t offer me the kingdoms; you don’t have them to give.”* Perhaps the devil does have them to give.

That certainly casts a different viewpoint on the trouble we’re having today. The devil is running everything. Behind all the world’s chaos and confusion is Satan. He’s our real enemy, and he wants to become God. He said, *“If you’ll just fall down and worship me.”*

Again, Jesus combats the temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20: *“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’”* (4:10).

The Lord answered Satan from the Word of God every time. He very intentionally combatted temptation with *“the Word of God says this ....”* Every time, He used the sword of the Spirit to meet the enemy of God. And for the child of God, that’s enough for us to do, too.

Why do many of us have trouble living the Christian life? We need to be better at using the sword of the Spirit to find the answer to our problems. It’s still a very excellent weapon today.

Satan can’t counter Jesus’ response, so he leaves Him to return the next day. The victory is the Lord’s!

The 40 days of temptation in the wilderness reveal Jesus is a king who can stand the tests. He can meet the devil on his turf and can overcome, using the Word of God as His weapon. In Christ, so can you.

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**NEXT: And the people saw a great light ...**

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## LESSON 5

# WHY PEOPLE FOLLOWED JESUS



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 4:12-25**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 4:12-25**

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As Jesus' public ministry begins, John the Baptist's ministry takes a dramatic turn. when Herod puts him in prison.

Jesus moves His home base from Nazareth, His hometown in the south, to Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum remained His base until the time He left for Jerusalem to be crucified. Why did Jesus make Capernaum His home base? It wasn't because so many believed Him there. Capernaum saw many of Jesus' miracles, yet they never believed—which is why, as we'll study later, Jesus judged, "*Woe to you, Capernaum*" (11:23).

So why Capernaum? Matthew is the only book to give us a reason. Everything the Gospel of Matthew says is to show us everything Jesus did was to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Matthew 4:15-16 says, quoting Isaiah 9:1-2; 42:6-7:

***"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."***

The people of Capernaum saw a great Light. Jesus' actual presence among them made them responsible to respond to the Lord. Later, He judged them for their unwillingness to see Him as Messiah.

Jesus' invitation was always, "Come to Me." Now as He begins His ministry, He picked up John the Baptist's message: "Repent."

But why should they turn around? Because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus' presence tells us that. He is the king, and you can't have a kingdom without Him. Simply stated, the kingdom is the reign of heaven over the earth. It's a marvelous hope—the hope of what Jesus will bring to this earth someday.

As Jesus continues to establish His ministry, He next calls His first four disciples.

One day as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and Andrew. They were fishermen, busy at their craft. Jesus called to them and said, *"If you follow Me, I'll make you fishers of men"* (4:18-19).

If you look at the Gospels as a whole, you see the Lord called these men on three different occasions. First, they met Jesus in Jerusalem (we read in John's Gospel). Here in Matthew is the second time they've met. Jesus invites them to follow Him for the first time here alongside the Sea of Galilee. Jesus reaffirms His call a third time after His resurrection when the disciples went back to fishing; Mark and Luke both tell us that detail. Jesus calls them again to apostleship.

The wonder of it all is that Jesus called men like this—people prone to all kinds of failure. If this is Jesus' pattern, then He may be able to use us, too. How wonderful it is to know He doesn't call perfect people to follow Him.

Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, and also to James and John, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." His call to us may not be the same. He may not make you fishers of men because you're not in the fishing business. But you are in some other business. He'll use you and whatever your talent might be if you'd turn it over to Him—that's the important thing! He won't have us all doing the same thing, because we all don't have the same gifts. The Body of Christ has many members, unique and gifted to serve the body.

Together with His disciples, Jesus went all over Galilee, preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" (4:23), which is centered in the person of the King whom they are to accept and receive. Jesus also healed all kinds of diseases among thousands of people. This Gospel of Matthew specializes in letting us know that. Pay attention to it and you'll be amazed by how many. This is why people never questioned Jesus' miracles—there were just too many miracles walking around!

Not only did Jesus heal those who were sick, but He also delivered people who were demon-possessed. When word got out what Jesus was doing, people came from all over the northern regions of Israel. They also traveled from distant Jerusalem and beyond the Jordan.

In addition to His miracles, Jesus also taught everyone who came to Him—either one on one or in big crowds. Matthew tells us of three major sermons Jesus preached:

- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), which delivers a King's manifesto.
- The Mystery Parable Discourse (Matthew 13) describes the direction the kingdom of heaven will take after Jesus is rejected as Messiah.
- And nearing the end of His time on earth, the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 and 25) when He looks to the prophetic future.

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**NEXT: Jesus delivers one of His most important sermons—  
what's it really about?**

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## LESSON 6

# WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE WHEN JESUS IS KING



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 5**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 5:1-5** and **Matthew 5:5-48**

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One of Jesus' most repeated sermons, captured in part in Matthew 5-7, is often called "The Sermon on the Mount." This sermon includes great truth given for us today, even though people have a wide range of opinions about what Jesus meant.

Some favor it as an important part of Scripture. They call it the mini gospel. (Trouble is, nothing is said about Jesus' death and resurrection here, the core message of the Good News.) Others want nothing to do with the Sermon on the Mount. They rule out the Lord's Prayer and the beatitudes, saying "it's not for us today."

However, as we can see in these three chapters, some things are *for* us, even when they were not said *to* us.

What we learn from the Sermon on the Mount is that we can't live up to it. We don't have the power to follow the high moral, ethical standards of conduct Jesus describes.

So what did Jesus intend when He shared His mind and heart with the disciples, well within earshot of the crowds? He shows us how far we come short even when we're our best selves and gives us a high goal to shoot for.

The primary purpose Jesus taught these principles is to describe what this world will look like in the future during the Millennium. These are the laws of the kingdom. The Gospel of Matthew talks about when Jesus will be King. Now He explains the Manifesto of the King, the platform of the Prince of Peace. These principles set down the laws of the kingdom, when Jesus Christ will be here in person to enforce every word. Jesus has every right to rule by these laws.

As Christians today we hope to do the things He commands, but we can obey only in the power of the Holy Spirit. These great principles are helpful for the Christian to learn and to study today, but you can never attain them in your own strength—you'll have to go elsewhere to look for the power. You have a marvelous electric light bulb here, but you do not have the generator to produce the power to make the light. And it's the light, not the bulb, that is important.

Only the gospel of the grace of God can make us obedient to Jesus' rules. It's futile and frustrating to force the Sermon on the Mount on someone who doesn't have the power to do them. This sermon gives them religious jargon that keeps them from Christ when in reality the Sermon on the Mount ought to bring us closer to Him.

This sermon invites us to come and be obedient to God, but truthfully it also shows us how far we come short of Jesus in His glory. If you look at it and are honest, it will bring you to a Savior who died for you on the cross.

The Sermon on the Mount divides into three sections:

- How does the kingdom relate to me and God's rules? (Matthew 5)
- How does the kingdom relate to God? (Matthew 6)
- How does the kingdom relate to others? (Matthew 7)

## ME AND GOD'S RULES

Chapter 5 opens with the Beatitudes. (Note: They are *be*-attitudes, not *do*-attitudes.)

Jesus says, "Blessed are the" nine times, each describing a character attribute He alone can bring to our lives. When Jesus reigns as King someday, these will describe the people who reign with Him. Only in God's timing do these things become true in our lives.

***Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they shall be comforted.***

***Blessed are the meek,  
for they shall inherit the earth.***

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be filled.***

***Blessed are the merciful,  
for they shall obtain mercy.***

***Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they shall see God.***

***Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called sons of God.***

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you,  
and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.***

-Matthew 5:3-11

These beatitudes present goals the child of God wants to see in their lives, but we can't do it on our own. This list describes what the citizens of the kingdom of heaven act like; it doesn't tell you how to become one. These attributes are developed not by self-effort, but by Spirit-effort. Only the Holy Spirit can produce these "blessed" characteristics in the heart of a yielded Christian.

Even as the Spirit is developing His character in us, the Lord Jesus says we should be salt and also light, good influences in the world today (vs. 13-14). God's people in any age, under any condition, are both salt and light in the world. We bring a life-saving savor to other's lives and we bring light to our neighborhoods, workplaces, or wherever we move. We haven't any light within ourselves—it's to give out the Word of God in some way. There are many ways you can be light in the world. Ask God to show you opportunities to shine for Him.

Of course, we can do nothing in our own strength. We need help; we need a Savior. We need mercy, and we get mercy when we come to Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is wonderful, but let's interpret it accurately.

Jesus then went on about several topics relevant even today: His laws concerning adultery and marriage, and His instructions on how to relate to those who have set themselves against you as your enemies.

God's law is a standard in our lives—but it reveals we don't measure up to God. The law is wonderful, therefore, because it brings us to the Cross of Christ. When we come to Him for salvation and power and strength, we find them in Jesus.

You think you keep God's law today? My friend, you need a Savior. The Sermon on the Mount shows us this. Just try any of those beatitudes on the list and you know you'll break every bit of it. If you can't measure up, you're going to need a Savior.

God tells us all have sinned and fall short of God's standards (Romans 3:23). If you can't meet those standards, you need a Savior. Don't kid yourself and act as if you're keeping it. You're doing nothing in the world but being a hypocrite. We're all a pack of low-down, dirty, rotten sinners, not fit for heaven.

Oh, but here's the good news. You need a Savior, and Jesus Christ has opened the way for you to go to Him for mercy and help. This Sermon on the Mount drives us to the Cross of Christ to cry out for mercy.

Do you already know Him? Are you already crying out to Him for help? Then get this good news out to others. That's how we can express love for God today. Give people the only message that can save them and bring them to heaven. Help those in need.

Believers can perform so many kind Christian acts today. The Bible never calls those "charities"—He calls them acts of love. Acts of love always come before the preaching of the gospel. The fruit is the important thing.

Jesus tells us we are to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect (v. 48). How can we be perfect? If you are "accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6), in Christ—then there's no condemnation on you. God sees us in Christ. That's the only way we can be perfect. You get there by faith in Him, and that begins the slow process of sanctification in our lives over a lifetime.

This sanctification is our goal. We will never automatically, or in our own strength, be able to say to God, *“Look what I’ve done! Look how wonderful I am!”* Accept His grace for your sins and weakness and come to Him in humility. You need a Savior today. And He’s glad to save you—and keep on saving you.

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**NEXT: How to make our motives match our good works.**

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ASK GOD TO SHOW  
YOU OPPORTUNITIES  
TO SHINE FOR HIM.

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THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 7

# FIVE THINGS BETWEEN YOU AND GOD



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 6:1–7:29**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 5:42–6:34** and **Matthew 6:26–7:29**

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What drives us to do good works? In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He talks about our relationship with God and the kingdom of heaven.

- Matthew 5 tells us about what makes a child of God righteous.
- Matthew 6 deals with how we can express that righteousness.
- Matthew 7 shows us specifically how to treat others.

Doing good works makes someone look very religious, but many have never come to Jesus by faith. Nicodemus had that religious righteousness, but when he came to Jesus, our Lord said, *"You have to be born again."* True righteousness only comes through trusting Christ. Only then does our motive match our practice.

Now, let's explore five things Matthew 6 says are between our souls and God. These righteous acts are meaningless unless they're done in the right way. But when we see them in relationship to God, they reveal our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

## **GIVING ALMS:**

### WHEN YOU GIVE MONEY

Your giving is between you and God, and you should not give in order to be noticed by people. The minute you get a third party involved, then you don't get any credit for it at all. The Lord describes a scene in a crowded synagogue where a hypocrite drops his gift to the poor in the offering and then blows a trumpet to announce their gift. "They have their reward," Jesus said (6:2). They were after the applause of men, and they got it. Their generosity wasn't between them and God and is worth nothing before God. Instead, Jesus said, do your giving in secret. The Father sees it and will reward openly.

## **GENUINE PRAYER:**

### WHEN YOU TALK TO GOD

Some of the same principles apply when you pray. Don't do it so others will see and praise you. Jesus called those who prayed in public hypocrites. In Jesus' day, the men wore prayer shawls when they prayed. Some men wore them all the time. Jesus says if they boast like that, they have their reward. They may get other's praise, but their own prayers aren't answered. Their fancy words never get above the rafters.

Look closely at Jesus' sermon and you'll see something revolutionary. He uses the term "Father." (See John 1:12 to learn how to be a child of God.) In the Old Testament, people never called God, "Father." No one had a personal relationship with God like a son and a father. Jesus describes a brand-new relationship people can have with God.

The mark of genuine prayer is sincerity. You go in and close the door; it's between you and the Lord. Then simplicity: You don't need to keep repeating. Just get right down to the point. Tell the Lord what's on your mind. Ask Him for help. He hears you. In fact, before you even ask, He already knows what you need, but we're to ask Him anyway.

Then Jesus gives us a sample of how to pray. It's called "the Lord's prayer." Now this is not our Lord's own prayer, you can read that in John 17. His relationship to God is different from ours. We can call Him "Father" when we come to Him through faith in Christ; Jesus called Him "Father" because of His place in the Godhead. Jesus carefully used the terms "My Father" and "your Father," never "our Father." Also, Luke records, "Forgive us our sins"

(Luke 11:4). The Lord Jesus had no sins to confess. He was the sinless One (John 8:46). So strictly speaking, this example Jesus gives us should be called, “The Disciples’ Prayer,” and it is a wonderful model prayer.

- Jesus instructs us to pray so God’s kingdom can come.
- He tells us to be dependent on God for our daily needs.
- He prompts us to ask forgiveness for our sins.
- He guides us in asking for help when we’re tempted to sin; *“Don’t leave us in the testing.”*

This is a marvelous prayer for us to learn how to pray. We can begin with these words until we learn to pray with our own words.

## **GENUINE FASTING:** WHEN YOU REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

Some of the same principles we’ve learned about giving and praying now apply to fasting. If you’re going to fast, don’t tell anybody about it, but do it on your own. There’s value in fasting when you do it between you and God.

## **HEAVENLY STUFF:** WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR THINGS

Some people doubt money is a spiritual topic, but Jesus talks a lot about it. He says your “treasure” can be gathered up in heaven. You can do that by putting it in the Lord’s work. Don’t just give to anything—investigate how your treasure will be used. Make sure you’re giving to something that’s going with you to heaven. You’ll think more about heaven that way, too.

## **GOD’S PROVISION:** HOW GOD PROVIDES FOR YOU

*If I give to God, who will take care of me?* God will. Jesus points our attention to the birds. The little birds trust God to take care of them, and we ought to do that, too. Sure, we should exercise judgment, but Jesus said don’t live in such a way that provisions like food and dress and housing are a burden on us. Our Lord said, *“Just look at the flower. Look what God does for it”* (6:28-29). As God takes care of the flowers and the birds, He takes care of you. Just as He did yesterday, He’ll do today and tomorrow. Put Him first and let Him care for you.

In Matthew 7, we come to how these acts of righteousness apply to how, as a child of the King, we treat other children of the King.

Jesus warns us first not to judge each other (7:1). Often misunderstood, this instruction means we are not to condemn another's inward motive, because we don't know why someone acted as they did. When you judge harshly, you will be known by your critical attitude. Instead, Jesus said, *"Consider your own faults. Don't judge that piece of sawdust in your brother's eye, when you've got a whole log in your own. You're in no position to do that"* (7:2-5).

The warning is good: Be careful of harsh judgment. But then Jesus clarifies the way we are to discern other's motives and character—by their fruits (7:16). By the results of their lives. Someone has aptly said we're not to be a judge, but a fruit inspector. Look at their lives and it will be clear whether a Christian is producing fruit or not.

Jesus also calls us to be discerning of how to entrust spiritual things to others. He shows us what to judge (comparing foolish people to dogs and pigs). It won't do any good to talk to certain people. You're wasting your time. How do you determine when to judge and not to judge?

Jesus' answer is to ask for the Father's help. Ask, seek, and knock. This counsel is helpful in other situations, but this is the first application. When you meet a person, ask God to show you how to act. Some people will need your help, and you can help them. But you'd be wise to let others be. Make it a matter of prayer. God wants to help you.

Jesus concludes this section with what some have called the golden rule, "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (7:12). This is a great principle to operate with, but remember it's part of a more complete package.

## **TWO ENTRYWAYS; TWO FOUNDATIONS**

Finally, Jesus compares our path to eternity to, first, two roads and then to two buildings.

First, He describes two ways—a wide way and a narrow way. Think of a funnel. You enter the funnel at the broad way, but it keeps narrowing down until you come to death and destruction and hell.

On the other road you begin at the narrow part, and that's where Jesus Christ is. He's the Way, the Truth, and the Light. When you enter through Him you have life, even "more abundantly" (John 10:10). The more you walk with Him, the wider it gets. When you are a child of God, life gets better every day.

Jesus then warns us of false teachers—but look at the fruit of their lives, He says. The kind of people who heed what Jesus says are like wise men who build their house on a rock foundation that withstands all weather.

When you come to Jesus Christ and rest in Him, you can build a life of fruitfulness. If you build a house based on your human goodness and effort, that's like building on sand. You need something better than what you have to offer. The fruit that endures is produced by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught His Sermon on the Mount with authority rather than familiar, empty sayings. People recognized the difference right away. The Sermon on the Mount is a glorious passage of Scripture. Don't bypass it, but read it correctly and it will bring you to the person of Jesus Christ.

You can say, "Lord, you told us how to live and I don't measure up to it. I can't do what You describe in my own strength, and I'm guilty before you. I've fallen short, and I need Your mercy. I need You as a Savior!" When you turn to Him like that, He gives you the Holy Spirit to produce these things in your life!

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**NEXT: Which is better:  
The Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount?**

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## LESSON 7



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

In your own words, describe how each of these situations relates to you and God:

1. When you give money
2. When you talk to Him
3. When you remove distractions
4. What you do with your things
5. How He provides for you

## LESSON 8

# GOD GIVES US A NEW HEART



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 5–7**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to ***Matthew 5–7 Summary***

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Many people think the Sermon on the Mount is a guidebook for the way the church is to live today. Let's look at it one more time from a higher perspective. God's Word gives us three great systems by which God has governed and rules mankind today.

The first is the Law He gave to Moses which includes the Ten Commandments. The Law was given to a select people whom He called out to be a great nation. God wanted to make this people a blessing to the world and, through them, reach the world. He gave them a system through Moses to have a relationship with Him. At the heart of it was a sacrificial system—a burnt altar on which sacrifices were made. That altar speaks of the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. God never forgave sin apart from a sacrifice.

But the Law didn't save people, it just revealed they were sinners. Constantly through the Old Testament, the sacrificial system pointed to the coming of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But when Jesus came and offered Himself as a King in order to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, His people rejected Him.

As a radical departure from the Old Testament and the Mosaic system, Jesus explained another way to live in the Sermon on the Mount. We have the abridged edition in Matthew 5-7.

The Sermon on the Mount takes the Law to another level. Jesus says if you're angry with a brother, you're guilty of murder. He says if you so much as look at a woman to commit adultery in your thoughts, then you're guilty of it. These were never explained this way in the Old Testament.

Some ask, "Isn't the Sermon on the Mount the way we're to live today?" No. This is for the kingdom yet to come on the earth. When Jesus reigns as king, we will have the *unabridged* edition of the Sermon on the Mount, and it will be the law of the kingdom. Today, Jesus calls us to a different system.

We live today in the age of grace or, actually, the age of the Holy Spirit. Today, God saves us by grace, not by following a law or making sacrifices. You are not saved by anything you do. You are not a Christian until you believe the gospel, "...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). That's what saves you.

You can't lift your little finger for your salvation. Now, after you're saved, God has a way for you to live. It's not by the Law. Even if you kept all the Ten Commandments, which you can't, that wouldn't save you! Only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can save you.

The Sermon on the Mount is not the Christian way of life. You can't keep the standards presented in the Sermon on the Mount. It's made more hypocrites in the church today than anything else. You can't live by it.

The Sermon on the Mount has also given people a veneer of religion even when their hearts are not changed. As a result, people talk about how we should all be brothers and how God is everyone's father, but the Lord Jesus never said that. In fact, He told the religious rulers of His day that their father was the devil (John 8:44).

And no matter how hard the world tries to live in a spirit of brotherly love and in peace, it is in turmoil. Why? Because we can't apply the principles in the Sermon on the Mount yet. People try, but the heart of man is the problem!

There's nothing wrong with the Ten Commandments. God gave them to reveal His mind and His will. The Sermon on the Mount also reveals His mind and will. But there's something radically wrong with man. You can have a religion where you do double somersaults and go through all kinds of ritual or liturgy, but the heart is the problem. We have a desperate case of heart trouble today and exercise and diet just won't help. We need Jesus, not jogging! Only He can give us new hearts.

That happens by a miracle known as regeneration. Jesus told a very nice, respectable Pharisee named Nicodemus, *"You must be born again."* Regeneration—being born again—is a marvelous, wonderful, miraculous truth.

Friends, we've got this old nature. Our hearts are broken and we don't know how to fix them. We've thrown overboard the so-called Judeo-Christian ethics, and adopted a "do as you please" ethic. We call anything right if it makes you feel good. When we throw off God's restrictions, we get farther from God. We're never able to measure up.

Galatians 5:19-21 talks about all the despicable things that naturally come out of our hearts. If we live by our own efforts, we can't make it. But read the next verses, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). A law can't produce these things. It's not in you or me to love naturally—on our own, we don't have a real concern for others or a real love for God and for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someday, the principles Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount will be reality. The poor in spirit will have the kingdom of heaven. The meek will inherit the earth. That's for a future day when a king comes who was the meekest man who ever walked this earth. But then He will come with great power and glory, and He's going to put down unrighteousness on this earth and establish His kingdom. When He does, we'll live under the law of the kingdom.

But today, how are we to live? By the power of the Holy Spirit! He will give you the fruit of His Spirit. Can you love today? How about peace in your own heart? Do you have peace with God? Only the Spirit of God can give that to you. And joy and meekness? They come by the Holy Spirit in control of our lives.

Friends, this is a new way of living. It's not the Sermon on the Mount. It's not the Ten Commandments. Jesus says He's left us with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly place" (Ephesians 1:3) today. And now we ought to walk in this world in meekness and lowliness of mind and heart by the power

of the Spirit of God. Today we're to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and He will enable us to live for God. He will produce fruit in our lives. He will enable us to love and serve God with our renewed heart.

When Jesus came and offered Himself as a King in order to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, His people rejected Him. Jesus was born as a King, He lived as King, He died as King, He rose again from the dead as King, and He's coming again to this earth as King! But today, we will please Him as we let the Holy Spirit direct our lives.

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**NEXT: Which of Jesus' miracles had the most impact?**

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## LESSON 8



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What does it mean to “live in the age of grace”?  
How would you respond to people saying we are supposed to keep the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount?
  
2. “Our hearts are broken, and we don’t know how to fix them.”  
If we’re not able to live the Christian life on our own and living by the Law doesn’t work, either, how do we please God?
  
3. What does it mean to “be filled with the Spirit”?  
**(SEE ALSO EPHESIANS 5:18.)**

## LESSON 9

# MIRACLES, MIRACLES, MIRACLES



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 8:1–10:8**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 8:1-17**, **Matthew 8:18–9:14**,  
and **Matthew 9:14–10:8**

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Our study in Matthew 8-10 explores the gamut of Jesus' power—over nature when He stills the Sea of Galilee, and over the demonic realm when He commands demons out of people. But perhaps the greatest power reaches us today when Jesus heals broken people and forgives their sins. That's a miracle He's still doing today.

The Gospel of Matthew brings together now a series of miracles that demonstrate the power of the One who just called us to higher living (Matthew 5-7). Jesus made it clear (in John 15) that without Him, we can do nothing. Not the Sermon on the Mount, not miracles. Not life-change. By ourselves we can't accomplish anything. Only as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit can we do anything that pleases God.

Matthew wasn't writing Jesus' biography, instead his goal was to show us the movement that revealed a King. First, Jesus delivered His manifesto, and now we see how He accomplishes it through the citizens of the kingdom. We'll see Jesus do 12 miracles in the coming section, demonstrating His power over human disease, across distance, over the spiritual/demonic realm, and over natural forces.

## JESUS CURES THE INCURABLE

When the crowds followed Him down from the mountain where He taught, Jesus moved among them, talking and touching and healing them. Isn't that a beautiful picture? A man with an incurable disease, leprosy, approached and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" (8:2). The leper said with faith, "*I know you can, but will You?*" He let Jesus decide. Then Jesus touched him and the man was healed.

The man who had not touched another person since his leprosy was diagnosed and who was kept at a distance from everyone he had ever loved, now was clean. That touch was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened to the man—it not only cleansed his leprosy, but it brought him back into the family of mankind and the family of God. "*Immediately his leprosy was cleansed*" (8:3).

## JESUS HEALS AT A DISTANCE

Of course, word of Jesus' healing power likely spread around Galilee, and a Roman centurion heard about it and approached Jesus. "*My servant is in a very terrible condition—would You heal him?*" Jesus agreed to go to him and heal him but the centurion, who recognized authority, objected, "*You have the kind of power to just make it so*" (8:8). Jesus, amazed by his faith, said, "'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.' And his servant was healed that same hour" (8:13).

## JESUS HEALS MANY

During those days we learn from Matthew that Jesus continued to heal many, many people, including His disciple Peter's mother-in-law. The crowds also brought to Him people who were demon-possessed. And with just a word, the demons were gone.

Jesus also healed all who were sick. Thousands of blind people had their eyes opened, thousands of paralyzed walked, thousands of deaf people now heard. After all, the apostle John said Jesus did many other signs which are not written in Scripture (John 20:30). But the ones recorded are written for a very definite purpose. No one, including demonic enemies, ever questioned whether Jesus performed miracles. People only asked how.

But Jesus did not heal everyone. It's not always His will to heal even today. If you have a need for healing, go to the Great Physician and find out if it's His will. Put your case before Him and, like the leper, say: "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." And if He is, He'll never send you a bill, and He'll get all the glory/credit for it.

## TWO MEN ASK TO FOLLOW

In the middle of this survey of Jesus' miracles, we stop to eavesdrop on two conversations Jesus has with men who wanted to follow Him as disciples. The first was likely in the big crowd watching Jesus. He fell on his face before Jesus and said, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go" (8:19).

Jesus responded honestly to him, and said in effect, "*Have you counted the cost?*" Jesus opened His heart the way He always does and revealed His poverty, part of the burden of humanity He bore.

The second man also wanted to follow Jesus, but said, "Let me first go and bury my father" (8:21). The man had family and cultural responsibilities to attend to, but the Lord Jesus said to him, "*You follow me, and let someone else take care of him.*" We don't fully understand all this means except to say Jesus was bringing both these men to a decision. Will they put Christ first?

## JESUS HUSHES THE STORM

After telling us about miracles of healing, now Matthew turns to accounts of Jesus' power over nature.

Picture yourself in the middle of the Sea of Galilee when a storm blows in (8:24). This is no ordinary storm. After Jesus' wilderness temptation, we read the devil left Him for a season. Now he's back. Satan may have been trying to destroy Jesus, covering the boat and the sleeping Savior with waves. Jesus was so weary He could sleep even in a storm, but the disciples were frantic. They woke Jesus and accused Him of not caring if they all died. To the storm, Jesus said (literally), "*Be muzzled!*" and the waves flattened out.

The disciples marveled, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (8:27).

## JESUS ORDERS THE DEMONS OUT

The sixth miracle, casting out demons, was perhaps the greatest. Familiarity with the account and phenomenal ignorance of the demonic world cause us to take this story in stride, but this is an amazing event.

Jesus and His men meet two dangerous, demon-possessed men, exceedingly fierce, who blocked the way. The demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God, the One who was stronger than them. They knew He wanted to rescue the men whose bodies they controlled, so they suggested Jesus cast them out into a herd of pigs. Jesus drove them out of the men and into the swine. Then the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and they all drowned (8:32). The pigs would rather die than to have the demons possess them.

## JESUS HEALS AND FORGIVES SIN

*“For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’?”* –Matthew 9:5

Jesus answered the challenge of people who didn’t believe He could do either for a paralyzed man. “One is as great as the other,” they said. So then the Lord Jesus said, *“You can get up and walk”* (9:6). The One who can make a man walk is the One who can forgive his sins. Only the Lord Jesus can miraculously heal and gloriously forgive us. Let’s never get in the way of what only Jesus can do.

## JESUS INVITES MATTHEW TO BE HIS DISCIPLE

Much to many people’s confusion, Jesus loved to fellowship with sinners. Matthew, the tax collector, had Jesus over for dinner and invited his work friends. The religious disapproved, but Jesus is the Great Physician, come to heal people of sin. *“You don’t invite a doctor in for people who are well,”* Jesus said. *“Instead, you call sinners to repentance”* (9:12-13).

Jesus’ ministry flipped paradigms, and the people observing Him noticed. John the Baptist’s disciples asked Jesus, *“You do things differently and we wonder why.”*

John the Baptist was essentially the last Old Testament prophet. He walks out of the Old Testament and into the New Testament to say, *“All I’m doing is getting the highway ready. The Messiah will be along in a few minutes.”*

But Jesus did not follow John's pattern, and it confused people. Instead, Jesus explains the change of house rules when Old Testament law changed to New Testament grace. It's like when you take off an old coat and put on a new one, He said. This new coat, given by Jesus, is a robe of righteousness given to us who don't do any more than to trust Jesus. He said, "*I haven't come to sew patches on an old garment. I've come now with something altogether new*" (9:16, 17). This is very, very radical. John described this as "the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

## **JESUS HEALS A WOMAN AND RAISES A GIRL BACK TO LIFE**

Jesus' eighth and ninth miracles in Matthew walk together. It happened on a busy street. A desperate man comes to Jesus with news that his sick daughter is close to death. Would Jesus come and heal her? Jesus agreed, but was delayed by a sick woman who touched the end of His coat. While Jesus talks with the woman, the man's servant approaches with news that the little girl had died.

Notice this: The little girl was 12 years old. And for 12 years, the life had been draining out of the woman in the crowd. Life hung in the balance for them both. Up to now, Jesus healed by touching people, but here this woman was healed by touching Him.

When Jesus and the man got to his house, the mourners had already arrived. They scoffed when Jesus said the little girl was only asleep. He and her parents went to her body, took her by the hand, and whispered to her, "*Little Lamb, wake up!*" It's a lovely thing!

## **JESUS OPENS BLIND EYES**

By now, Jesus is famous for His miracles. Crowds wouldn't leave Him alone. Two blind men called out to Jesus, "Son of David, have mercy on us" (9:27). Jesus asked them if they believed and because of their faith, He healed them and they could see again. Jesus told them not to tell anyone, but they couldn't keep it to themselves.

## JESUS RESCUES ANOTHER FROM DEMONS

For the third time in this section, Jesus confronts demons controlling a person. When He rescued the demon-possessed man, the people marveled but the Pharisees accused Jesus of working with the devil.

But that accusation and misunderstanding didn't stop Jesus. His compassion for people moved Him into the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people that came to Him. He told His disciples to go out and call people to repentance, saying, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Jesus is a king on the way to the cross—to rescue and heal people of the greatest disease of all.

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**NEXT: Jesus invites you to come with Him.**

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ONLY AS WE ARE  
EMPOWERED BY THE

# *Holy Spirit*

CAN WE DO ANYTHING  
THAT PLEASURES GOD.



THRUtheBIBLE

## LESSON 10

# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL INVITATION IN THE WORLD



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 10:9–13:2**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.ttb.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 10:9–11:6**, **Matthew 11:7–12:2**, and **Matthew 12:3–13:2**

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The gospel movement that began when Jesus was born the King, that He preached about in a Sermon on the Mount, that demonstrated with His power to perform miracles—this movement is what Jesus now entrusts to His disciples.

Jesus commissions His twelve disciples, whom He now calls “apostles,” to go to the nation Israel and preach the gospel of the kingdom. This is a definite turning point in Jesus’ ministry. He gave the apostles power over demons, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and disease. This commission was specifically for them (ours is in Acts 1:8). Jesus told them, “*As you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’*” (10:7).

How was the kingdom at hand? It was present in the person of the King—He was in their midst! Today that kingdom begins on the inside. When we talk about building a kingdom here and now, it must come from within. That is where it must begin.

When Jesus sent the apostles out, He told them not to bring gold or silver or brass with them. We learn in Luke 22:35-36 the apostles never lacked for any needs—not food or clothing or lodging. They were to expect God to provide for them through people.

He told them also to expect rejection and trouble. *“You’re going to be like sheep running through a wolf pack, so don’t call attention to yourselves. Be as cunning as a snake, inoffensive as a dove”* (10:16).

He then gives them certain great principles by which they should go as His witnesses. These principles are good for time and eternity, though the direct application was to these disciples. Here are marching orders for everyone who follows Jesus:

- The child of God today should be wise as a serpent, but inoffensive as a dove, and it’s dangerous to be one and not the other.
- The coming of Christ into the world didn’t bring unity; it divided mankind (see 1 Corinthians 1:18). It may divide a family.
- Jesus told the apostles they would be hated for Jesus’ own name’s sake.
- “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (10:24). We represent the Lord Jesus Christ, and He must come first.
- Don’t worry about what people say about you if you’re being faithful to Jesus—they didn’t say nice things about Him, either (10:25).
- Our lives will be turned wrong-side-out someday, so we better make sure our insides look as good as the outside.
- Fear God. You don’t have anything to fear if you fear God first. God loves you! He takes care of little sparrows and He counts the hair on your head. You are precious to Him, and He’ll never lose sight of you.
- Jesus didn’t come to bring peace this time. Sin’s still in the world, and as long as it’s here, God says there will be no peace.
- Unless you have really committed your life to Jesus, He said He’s not going to use us unless we’re completely surrendered to Him.
- One of the great paradoxes of following the Lord Jesus is we don’t have control over our lives but *“he who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”* (10:39).

After Jesus sent His disciples to get the Word out, they were rejected. Even John the Baptist was puzzled. From prison, John heard about Jesus from his disciples. John expects Jesus to deliver him any day now because he thinks Jesus will immediately take the throne. He sent two disciples to ask Jesus to confirm or deny He was Messiah. Jesus answered John's honest question with His credentials from Isaiah 35 and 61.

Was He Messiah?

***Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."*** –Matthew 11:4-5

Jesus said He wasn't going to establish the kingdom when He came the first time, but He was the King, and He had the credentials of the Messiah. And then Jesus defended John in case anyone wanted to criticize him. John gave out the message entrusted to him with power—he was the wind shaking the reed, a rugged prophet who had walked out of the Old Testament. He was the messenger preparing the way for Messiah (11:10). Jesus called John, the greatest of any person in the past. The Lord Jesus said there'd been none greater than John the Baptist, not Abraham or Moses or David. None of them topped John the Baptist. But then He said, ""Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (11:11). That is, those who Jesus calls out of the world today are the least. Why? Because we are in Him, clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

These changes all marked a big transition in Jesus' ministry. Jesus has declared Himself King. He presented His credentials. He performed miracles. He's clarified the kingdom's ethic. He declared "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But the cities in Galilee rejected Him. Therefore, their decision caused Him to make a decision—He now rejects them. The King always has the last word.

He rebuked the cities where He had done His miracles and where He had taught—yet where people refused to repent. He pronounced judgment on the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (His headquarters). Light creates responsibility. They had the glorious privilege and opportunity to witness Light Himself, yet turned their backs on Him. What will God do with the person today who hears the gospel preached Sunday after Sunday, who sits with an open Bible and who has never accepted Christ as his Savior? Jesus makes it very clear here.

Then Jesus turns and changes His message. Before it had been, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” But now that He’s been rejected as the Messiah by these cities in Galilee and in Jerusalem, He turns from the nation and no longer presents the kingdom. He’s now on the way to the cross, and He invites individual people to come to Him. He says no one can know the Father except through Him and so, in one of the most beautiful invitations of the Bible, Jesus invites all who would, to come:

***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*** –Matthew 11:28-30

Are you “heavy laden?” This burden is the weight of sin (Isaiah 1:4, Psalm 38:4), and you were never intended to carry it. It’s too heavy! The only place in the world to put your burden is at the Cross of Christ. He bore it for you. He invites you to come. Bring your burden of sin to Him, and He’ll forgive you. He bore it for us on the cross. We can make the commitment to “take His yoke”—which means to be connected to Him so you can learn Him. He’s meek and lowly in heart. The “rest” comes by being committed to Jesus Christ. Lay down those worries of position or achievement or provision. You don’t have to run after those things anymore. If you’re yoked to Him, He’ll put you right where He wants you.

Another transition in Jesus’ ministry occurred in response to the religious leaders stirring conflict with Jesus. They intentionally looked for things to call Him out doing that ran against Jewish traditions. Two of the initial conflicts related to the Sabbath.

On one Sabbath, Jesus and His men walked through a cornfield. They were hungry, so as they walked, they plucked ears of corn and kernels of wheat and barley and ate them. Jewish tradition allowed poor people to do this—but the plucking was considered work, forbidden on the Sabbath. But the Lord defended them, referring to how David had done this for his men. Jesus is in the kingly line of David and asserts His kingship here. He takes care of His own. Then Jesus takes it a step further and says, “Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple” (12:6). This One shows mercy instead of sacrifice and is called “Lord even of the Sabbath” (12:8). Jesus put His hand on the most sacred things they had—the Sabbath and the temple—and said He was the Lord of them. In the eyes of the Pharisee, there was no greater claim. This now stirred up their bitterness and hatred for Jesus.

When Jesus turned to leave, He encountered a man with a disfigured hand. Likely the leaders planted this man as a trap. Would Jesus heal on the Sabbath? This trap was actually a compliment with two important admissions. They admitted Jesus had power to heal. (No one ever questioned if Jesus could perform miracles.) And they acknowledged that when a helpless man was placed in His pathway, Jesus was moved by compassion to heal him, even on the Sabbath.

As expected, Jesus healed the man and defended His actions from Scripture, saying that according to Moses' Law, even a sheep in a ditch should be rescued on the Sabbath.

This was the tipping point for the Pharisees. They called a meeting and began to plan how to destroy Jesus (14:14). From here on, these bloodhounds of hate got on Jesus' trail and never let up until they folded their arms beneath His cross.

Jesus knew this, of course. He withdrew from the city, but a huge crowd followed Him, so He healed them all. What an amazing impression He must have made. The contrast is striking. The same is true today—you will either be His friend or His enemy, and He'll be your Savior or your Judge. You need to accept or reject Him. What will you do with Jesus Christ?

The Pharisees acknowledged Jesus' healing power but said He did it with Satan's power. Jesus called them out on this—saying they would not be forgiven of sin against the Holy Spirit because they were rejecting the witness of Himself and of the Holy Spirit (12:31-32).

That “unpardonable sin” could only be committed when Jesus was here on the earth. There's no sin today that can't be forgiven by God. But you must yield yourself to His Holy Spirit. To resist the Holy Spirit is like a man dying of a disease and refusing the remedy for it. The man dies not from the disease but because he refused the cure. There's a remedy for sin—the Holy Spirit applies it today—but when you resist that, you refuse to be forgiven.

The leaders tried to trap Jesus, but He saw through their motives to their hearts. He brilliantly argued with them, but they refused to believe. Others also rejected Jesus' claim that He was Messiah and King.

The strongest relationship in the world is between Jesus Christ and a believer. This new relationship is precious—even stronger and sweeter than between blood relatives. Do you know Him? If you believe and receive the Lord Jesus Christ, you hear Him, trust Him, and turn to Him—unlike the many who reject Him and walk away.

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**NEXT: What will the “kingdom of heaven” be like?**

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## LESSON 11

# THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE ...



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 13:3–14:1**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 13:3-23**, **Matthew 13:24-43**,  
and **Matthew 13:44–14:1**

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Matthew 13 is one of the great chapters of the Bible. If the Gospel of Matthew is an open door to both the Old and New Testaments—then Matthew 13 is the key to that open door. Matthew helps us understand the kingdom of heaven more than any other book.

We know Jesus said in His first coming He would not establish the kingdom of heaven on the earth—that was still yet to come. So what happens to it? That’s what Matthew 13 describes in seven “mystery parables” that explain the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is the same original phrase as “the kingdom of God.” It is not, however, the same as the church. The church is just a small part of the vast kingdom of God, and it’s God’s program for today. The church is a “called-out body,” meaning He’s calling out a people to His name—a kingdom of heaven condition.

Jesus describes the entire period of the kingdom of heaven/God with these seven mystery parables, all drawn from common, everyday things everyone knew about, to teach them great spiritual truths. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

We get our word “ball” from the same word as “parable.” Literally, you throw something down by the side of something. It’s like putting a ruler down by the side of a table to measure it. That ruler is the parable, put down to measure. Jesus gives us these parables to measure heavenly truths He set down before us.

## **THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER**

(13:3-9)

This first parable is the key to the other parables that follow. The sower is Jesus Himself, the Son of Man. If people ask, “What is the Lord Jesus doing today in the world?” He’s sowing seed, the Word of God. He’s still the King, but He laid aside His royal robes and He works as a farmer today, sowing seed. The seed is the Word of God (13:19). The field is the world (13:38).

The Lord Jesus has charge of this great program of sowing seeds, but He’s given us a little corner, and our business is to sow seeds where He tells us to go. There’s a day of harvest yet future after these seeds have been sown; it’s not yet today. On that day, the harvest will be judged.

When we sow seeds, they fall on four kinds of ground, and three-fourths of the seed will not grow at all. The seeds carry life, but it’s the condition of the soil that’s all important. This parable challenges us to examine our own hearts.

Some seed is cast by the wayside. These people hear the Word but Satan snatches away what was received. The people did not receive the Word by faith or take it to heart, and they fell by the wayside.

Some seed fell on rocky ground. In the beginning they may have had great zeal and energy for things of God, but at the first hint of trouble, they burn out.

Some seed falls among thorns. These people allow the cares of the world to crowd out the Word of God. For some it’s poverty; for others it’s the deceitfulness of wealth.

The devil gets the seeds from the wayside. Our flesh takes out those on rocky ground. And the world snuffs out those on thorny ground. It’s wise for all of us to examine ourselves and see whether or not we truly believe in Jesus Christ.

Thank God, though, some seed falls in good ground. These are the hearers who receive and bring forth fruit to varying degrees.

The picture to remember would be something like this: Here is the church in the world, and outside there are these millions of people who do not yet know Jesus Christ. We give the Word to as many as will listen. Some will believe; others will not. Our business is to sow seeds. Won't it be wonderful to learn someday some of the seeds we fling out land on good ground and grows great big fruit?

After Jesus told this first parable, the disciples asked why He was using parables. Why not just explain it clearly to people? Jesus said not everyone wants to hear the truth. Some shut their ears to the Word of God. If they don't want to hear it, they wouldn't understand it even if they tried. Your inner ear must want to hear the Word of God. But for those who want to know the truth and know a little, He'll add to it. The Lord will never shut the door to one who wants to hear. He'll help them understand.

## WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN LIKE?

**The kingdom of heaven is like ... a field of wheat and tares (13:24-30).** Satan sows weeds, false teaching, with the wheat. The Lord says, *"Don't try to pull the weeds. Let them both grow together."* At harvest, His sickle will separate them out.

In this parable, Jesus picks up the same picture as the parable of the sower. He tells us only a quarter of the seed sown got into good ground. The other three-fourths never produced anything, because people didn't respond to the Word of God. But then the Lord introduces a new situation. He said a man sowed good seed in his field, but his enemy came while he slept and planted thistles among his wheat. In other words, Satan sows weeds, false teaching, with the wheat. When the wheat and weeds grow up together, it's hard to tell them apart.

Frankly, much false teaching sounds good at first. You cannot tell truth from error until later when false doctrine blooms. Some false teachers preach the gospel every now and then, but then they add in error. They sow tares among the wheat.

What's growing in the world today? The answer: Both. The wheat is growing and the weeds are growing. Never has there been so much Bible teaching as there is today. Praise God for that. That wheat is growing! But the weeds are also getting worse. Our responsibility is to preach the Word. If we make it our mission to pull up weeds, we'll pull up some wheat with them.

True believers are those who have trusted Christ as Savior, are resting in Him, and love His Word—this is the real test. Don't be disturbed that the wheat and weeds grow together. One day the Lord will put in His sickle and separate them out.

**The kingdom of heaven is like ... a grain of mustard seed** (13:31-32). This least-of-all seed doesn't grow into a mighty oak, but it gets big enough for birds to rest in its branches. Such is the *outward* growth of God's kingdom where the gospel is received. The church doesn't transform the world, but it has tremendous influence.

**The kingdom of heaven is like leaven** (13:33)—but don't stop there—"which a woman took, and hid in three measures of grain." Into the grain (the Word of God), leaven rises. The mustard seed described outward growth; the leaven describes what happens on the inside. Leaven causes the bread to rise.

This parable teaches that the invasion of wrong doctrine and evil by cults into the church will finally lead to total apostasy. False teachers of every kind put leaven in the meal, the Word of God. Even the devil uses the Bible.

**The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field** (13:44). The "treasure" is Israel hidden in the "field," the world. The "man" is Jesus who gave Himself to redeem the nation Israel. Israel, the treasure, is buried in the world today. Jewish people are scattered throughout the world, but God is not through with them as a nation. (See Romans 11:1-2). Israel won't have peace in their land until they receive it from the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who gave Himself with joy to buy back Israel with His blood, just as He bought our salvation.

**The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant, in search of fine pearls** (13:45-46). Some suggest we are the seekers in this parable and the pearl of great price is Jesus. But sinners don't look for salvation and, if we did, we would have nothing with which to buy it. Salvation is not for sale—it's a gift (see John 3:16, Romans 6:23). The true picture is this: Jesus is the merchant. He left heaven for earth to find a pearl of great price. He found lost sinners and died for them by shedding His precious blood. He gave up all He had to buy us and redeem us back to God. (Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.)

Now let's look at the pearl, which represents the church. A pearl is not a stone like the diamond, but formed from a living organism. A grain of sand intrudes itself into the shell of a small sea creature and hurts it. The

creature's response is to send out a secretion that coats over the foreign matter. That fluid builds up until a pearl is formed—not a ruby or a diamond, but a beautiful white pearl.

Christ came to this earth as the merchantman. He saw man in sin, and He took man's sin and bore it in His own body. Our sin was an intrusion upon Him. He was *made* sin for us. He wraps His own righteousness around us and recreated us, so we are beautiful, holy, and without blemish.

In the book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem, our future home, has around it gates of pearls. This is by Jesus Christ's design—a reminder of a precious purchase.

**The kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea** (13:47-51). We've heard about how someday time will be no more, when eternity begins, but no one can describe the end of this world. Some people reject Jesus' warning of hell. "I'll take my chances," they say. How tragic and foolish. Jesus reminds us here of what a terrible thing it is to be lost.

**The kingdom of heaven is like a householder** (13:52). Those who teach and preach God's Word are encouraged here to share the old gospel story, along with a few new thoughts, too.

After teaching these parables, the Lord heads back home to His hometown, Nazareth. But when He teaches there, people don't believe Him. "*Isn't He the carpenter's son?*" They didn't recognize who He really was. Many people today think Jesus was a great teacher, a great man, a wonderful person, but nothing more. In Nazareth, they couldn't accept Him because they wondered where He got His wisdom and on what authority He worked His miracles. So, because of their refusal to believe, Jesus did very few miracles there. When we lack faith to believe Jesus will save, He chooses to limit His work in our world, too. We must believe He will work in our communities, churches, families, and in our own lives before we can watch Him do it.

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**NEXT: Why the urgency kicks up ...**

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## LESSON 12

# DO YOU BELIEVE HIM?



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 14–15**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 14** and **Matthew 15**

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Have you noticed the urgency picking up in our story of Jesus' life? Tragic deaths and amazing miracles continue, and now building is the conflict surrounding Jesus' rejection as King and His struggle with the religious rulers.

Superstitious Herod sat on the throne in Galilee, out of his mind with paranoia. Jesus' ministry couldn't escape Herod's notice. Herod was a rascal of the very darkest hue—the mafia of the first century. Herod was a drunken, depraved, debased, weak man, and a killer. He had already murdered John, Jesus' forerunner, and he was prepared to murder the Lord Jesus Himself. Herod believed John had risen from the dead, and his fear changed to frenzy because he wanted to eliminate John altogether.

Jesus knew Herod's fear would break out into a frenzy and cause him to do something rash. So for now, Jesus withdrew from public. His hour had not yet come. But the crowds followed Him. When Jesus went out on the lake by boat, the crowd walked around the shore of Galilee and met Him on the other side. They followed Him with no thought how they were going to eat.

The disciples noticed the problem and told Jesus. They suggested they disperse the crowds and send them into the towns to eat. But Jesus told them to feed them.

## JESUS FEEDS THE CROWD

What follows, of course, is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus gave the disciples an impossible command—feed the crowd.

All they had was a boy's lunch—five hamburger buns and two sardines. But Jesus said, *"Bring what you have to Me"* (14:18). Amazing things happen when we willingly release what we have and let God be the One to use it.

Jesus looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave it to His disciples, who in turn gave it to the crowds, sitting on the grass in small groups. Everyone ate till they were full and the disciples picked up the extra. Twelve baskets of bread and fish were never touched. The Lord fed more than 5000 men—and including their families, likely closer to 15,000 people.

## JESUS WALKS ON WATER

After the crowds ate, Jesus sent them home and sent His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He wanted to be alone to pray.

The Lord is in the mountains, praying, and the disciples are down on the Sea of Galilee in a frightening storm. (What a picture this is of us today. Our Lord has gone on to the Father, and we are being tossed about in a stormy sea.)

Around three o'clock in the morning, Jesus went out to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the water, they thought He was a ghost and cried out in fear.

*"It's Me—don't be afraid,"* He said. *"I'm not a ghost!"*

Then Peter said, *"If it's You—tell me to come to You on the water."*

And the Lord said, *"Come"* (14:27-29).

Peter asked a tremendous thing of God—and God said yes. Peter walked on the water! Only when he took his eyes off the Lord Jesus did he sink. He prayed the shortest prayer in the Bible, "Lord, save me" (14:30). (We need to pray like this!)

Peter's problem? He took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the rolling waves. When we see the waves rolling, we need to learn from his lesson and keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus and Peter got to the boat, the wind stopped. Wonder washed over the disciples and they worshipped Jesus as the Son of God. Our Lord performed this miracle for His own, so they would *know* He was the Son of God.

After the storm, Jesus continued to minister to the needs of the people. We can read a detailed record of a few healings, but thousands were made whole by the Lord.

As Jesus continues to minister, we see the movement of the King, now moving toward the cross. His conflict with the scribes and Pharisees advances to the very breaking point. We're still in Galilee, but the religious rulers from Jerusalem came all the way north. On the surface it may seem like a wonderful thing they came almost 100 miles to listen to Him, but their motive was to criticize and catch Him. This was not a friendly visit.

The religious leaders didn't accuse Jesus of breaking the Scriptures (He never would!), but instead accused Him of violating Jewish traditions which they considered on par with Scripture. *"Why don't Your disciples wash their hands?"* referring to a ceremonial cleansing. Like these leaders, many people even today see some outward ceremony as more important than your heart.

Jesus was wise to their tactics and accuses them of breaking God's commandment with their tradition. Their tradition cleverly allowed a man to get around his God-given responsibility of financially supporting his parents. If you give your gift to God, you don't have to honor your parents... This gave a pious way out of obeying the Ten Commandments. It's still true today—the barometer of godliness often shows up in how we handle our money. The religious rulers of Jesus' day were helping men escape their responsibility—even more important than giving to Him.

Much to the shock of the crowds and His disciples, Jesus isn't shy about calling the Pharisees out. He even said, *"If a religious system isn't from God it will be pulled up by its roots"* (15:13). The Pharisees had set up system upon system, yet Jesus said those systems won't last. In addition, a person is not godly or ungodly by what goes into his mouth but by what comes out of his mouth. What's in our hearts eventually comes out. So be careful what you set your heart on.

## A SURPRISING TWIST AND A TRIP NORTH

After the growing conflict with religious rulers, Jesus surprises everyone with another great principle. Jesus came as king of the Jews, but now He invites the Gentiles into His marvelous plan when He steps over the northern boundaries of Israel.

Jesus took His disciples to Gentile country and was soon recognized by a Syrophenician woman. She had no claim on Jesus as the Son of David, but He was her only hope to heal her daughter. She comes to Jesus and worships Him, calling Him “Lord,” and asks for His help. The disciples want to send her away, but she persists. Jesus sees her faith, praises her, and heals her daughter that exact hour.

Back in Israel, Jesus continues to heal. In fact, He healed so many that nobody denied He performed miracles. His disciples, eyewitnesses to these miracles, didn't deny them either, but something wasn't clicking for them.

Soon after their return to Israel, the crowds again followed Jesus and needed something to eat. A few days ago, Jesus fed thousands with a boy's lunch. Now, this situation felt like a re-run. But the disciples were slow to recognize who Jesus is and raised the same old objections. *“Where will we get enough bread to fill up such a crowd?”* (15:33).

Their reluctance to believe is really a form of rejection. This unbelief is *sin*. Don't you wish you believed Him more? Jesus is worthy to be believed; the problem is with us.

So like He had done before, the Lord Jesus fed the crowd. Did the disciples recognize Him then? They are slow to believe and slow to understand, but Jesus is patient with them, as He is patient with us. Many of us need to catch up in our faith. Oh, that we might believe Him more.

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**NEXT: Who is that on the mountaintop with Jesus?  
That's wild!**

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WHEN YOU  
COME TO HIM  
WITH EMPTY HANDS  
AND A *willing heart,*  
HE CAN SAVE YOU.

WITH GOD  
*all things*  
ARE POSSIBLE.



THRUtheBIBLE

## LESSON 13

# WHO DO YOU THINK HE IS?



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 16–17**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 16:1-28** and **Matthew 16:28–17:27**

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Before Jesus moves forward in His ministry, He wants to make two things really clear for His disciples: (1) Who He is, and (2) what He is going to do. That's no different for us. In order for us to exercise faith and be saved, we have to know who Jesus Christ is, and we have to know what He did.

The Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus for a sign from heaven, but they were merely trying to trap Him. Boldly, Jesus calls them hypocrites. *"You're so good at predicting the weather,"* He says, *"but you don't recognize the signs of the times"* (16:2-3).

The Lord gave them many signs, but they wouldn't accept them. They called Jesus an imposter Messiah. The crowds thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. But His disciples, finally, believed Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of the living God.

It happened when Jesus took the disciples on a retreat—away from the crowds. The Lord first asked: *"Who do people say I am?"* (16:13). He still asks this question today. Jesus is the most controversial person who has ever lived. Some will answer, "Yes, Jesus was a great person and a great teacher." Some will call Him a respected prophet. *He was history's finest!*

But Simon Peter summed it up for all of us: “You are the Christ” (16:16), which meant Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One who was predicted in the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus fulfilled it all. He is “the Son of the living God”—the highest, best confession and tribute that could be said up till now. Jesus is all this—He confirmed it Himself.

Jesus is right—only the Holy Spirit can show us who He really is. Only the Holy Spirit leads us to the truth to call Jesus “Lord.”

And then, for the first time, Jesus introduces the idea of “His church.” Look carefully at Matthew 16:18—on what rock did Jesus build His church? Not on Simon Peter (Jesus called him “a pebble.”) Jesus will build His church on this *petra*. That is, upon the bedrock truth of who Jesus really is. (Read what Peter wrote later, referring to Jesus, in 1 Peter 2:4-6. Also read 1 Corinthians 3:11.)

Jesus said He will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to those who make the same confession made by Peter, those who know Christ as Savior. If you are a child of God, you have the keys, this badge of authority, to give out the gospel because it is the only thing that can save people. It’s not enough to know about Jesus; we must tell people they must accept by faith who Jesus really is and what He has done for them. What a tremendous revelation and an awesome responsibility.

This is what the Lord Jesus did for you: He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and raised again. You must know who He is. You must know what He did for you. If you know these two things, and by faith believe and receive them, you are saved.

With His mission established, Jesus tells His disciples for the first time (16:21) He was headed for Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world. He’ll tell them again four more times (Matthew 17:12, 22-23; 20:18-19, 28) in the next six months. But in spite of this intensive instruction, the disciples failed to grasp it all until after His resurrection.

Peter couldn’t handle Jesus’ announcement. He blurted out, “*But You are the Messiah; You are the Son of God. You must not, cannot, go to the cross!*” (16:22).

Jesus knew Satan was behind this. In fact, it’s satanic for anyone to deny Jesus died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again from the dead. Jesus Christ’s substitutionary death is what saves us. Later, a transformed Peter wrote: “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Jesus invites any who will follow Him to “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (16:24). He didn’t say, “Let him deny himself ice cream” or some other luxury, but “let him deny *himself*.” This means to put yourself out of the picture and to put Christ in the place of self. “And take up his cross, and follow Me.” We are not to take up Jesus’ cross but our own—and we will have one. If we lose our life for His sake, we will find it (see 10:39). We assume the risks of becoming His disciple or, in the long run, we lose our life eternally. The opposite is also true. At Jesus’ second coming all accounts will be settled and everyone will receive his proper rewards.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

Jesus wants us to set our eyes on the future kingdom, to see Him as He is. As a miniature picture of that day, we get a momentary glimpse of Jesus in full glory.

This Transfiguration does not prove, nor set forth, the *deity* of Christ, but emphasizes instead His *humanity*. It’s not only the proof of His humanity but the *hope* of humanity. The Man we see glorified there, transfigured like a metamorphosis, is the kind of person every child of God will be someday (read 1 John 3:2). This glorious prospect of being like Jesus Christ is the future for every one of His own.

It happened on a mountaintop as Jesus and His disciples returned to Galilee after their Caesarea Philippi retreat. With His closest disciples, Jesus appears with Elijah and Moses and is transfigured with light. “His face shone like the sun” (17:2). The light shone from within Him rather than like a spotlight. Perhaps it was this sort of light that clothed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before their fall. Only after they sinned, did they discover they were naked. It was the perfect *humanity* of Jesus that was transfigured.

Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the prophets) discussed with Jesus His upcoming death in Jerusalem. Then Peter, who could never resist an opportunity to make a speech, offered the idea to build a monument to each of these three. God Himself rebukes him. With a voice out of a bright cloud, God the Father’s testimony was to Jesus as His Son and the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, the final Word (17:5).

Have you ever heard a voice out of heaven commending you and saying God was well pleased with you? He has only said it to His Son. The Lord Jesus is the only One who ever has been well pleasing to God. When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, then we are placed in the body of believers and accepted in His Beloved.

When the bright cloud dissipated, the disciples looked up, and they saw “no one except Jesus only” (17:8). Looking for a good motto for your life? What about these two words: *Jesus only*.

Jesus told the disciples to wait until after the Resurrection to tell what happened there. This is part of the gospel story; it explains who Jesus is. God required a lamb without blemish, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who could die a substitutionary death for mankind, because He was sinless. In His perfect humanity He was transfigured. He is the *hope* of mankind. He is your only hope.

When Jesus and His disciples came down from the mountain, they were met by a horrible sight: A demon-possessed young man, the worst case the disciples had ever seen. The boy’s father asked Jesus for mercy and healing for his son. “*I brought him to Your disciples, but they couldn’t heal him*” (17:16).

Grieving the sin people live under, Jesus asks then to see the boy. He rebuked the devil and it left and the boy was cured. Why couldn’t the disciples cast the devil out? “*Because you didn’t believe,*” Jesus said. “*Nothing that is according to God’s will is impossible, but you must have faith—faith even as small as the smallest seed*” (17:20). Take your cares to the Great Physician, friend.

When Jesus and His team got back to their home base in Capernaum, they were asked if they had paid tribute, an annual temple tax. Jesus tells Peter to go out to the sea (remember he was a fisherman in his former life), cast a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. “And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you” (17:27), Jesus said.

What a creative way to get tax money! In this miracle, Jesus demonstrates creatures obeyed Him—the fish followed His command.

Who is this, that even creation obeys Him? He is Jesus—Creator, Master, Messiah.

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**NEXT: Follow Jesus on an “ordinary” day.**

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## LESSON 14

# ON HIS WAY TO JERUSALEM



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 18:1–20:23**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 18**, **Matthew 19:1-15**,  
and **Matthew 19:14–20:23**

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In the middle of major events and miracles in Jesus' life, He invites us to follow Him in the “ordinary” days as He teaches anyone who will listen, interacts with His disciples, and, of all things, enjoys the company of children.

If we could eavesdrop on the disciples, they are no doubt thinking too much of themselves. Jesus heard it, too. Perhaps that's why He called a little child to sit with them. “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me” (18:4-5). *That's who enters the kingdom*, He says.

Being born again means you start out spiritually as a child. Should a little child immediately get up and chatter out their testimony? Should a little child be an officer in the church or lead a Bible study? Wait until you grow a bit.

The Lord loves children. He warns against any who causes them to stumble or leads them into sin. He gives top priority to sharing the gospel with them.

He is still thinking in terms of the “little ones” when He told the wonderful parable of the lost sheep. Tenderly He explains His primary purpose in coming to us was to save the lost.

No doubt as Jesus traveled and taught, people came to Him with their problems. Now, most problems are people problems. Conflict. Sin. *What do we do when our brothers hurt us?* Some people like to smother trouble, cover it up. But the Lord says if two believers have a problem, it should be worked out in a peaceful way. If they can't work it out, take it to a group. If the group can't work it out, take the problem to the church as the final authority.

He promises "where two or three are gathered together in My name," He will hear any request (18:20). It's the simplest form of church government. As Matthew 18:19 is a new basis for prayer, Matthew 18:20 is the new basis for the local church.

## 70 X 7

Of course, most people problems revolve around the issue of forgiveness. No doubt Peter heard the Lord teach that and asked, "How often should I forgive a brother?" The local rabbis said two or three times. Peter suggests seven times.

The Lord answered Peter, "70 x 7" times (see 18:22). Then He tells a parable about a man who had been forgiven a huge debt but refused to forgive someone else a tiny debt. (In the story, the servant had been forgiven a \$12 million debt and refused to forgive someone else a \$17 debt.)

The moral of this story illustrates the *principle* of forgiveness. This was a new thought for everyone. They had never heard Ephesians 4:32. Because God has forgiven us, we are to forgive each other. Since we have become children of God, and because we have been forgiven, we are to forgive. And what God requires, He shows us how to do.

## MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

There was no better time than this to talk about marriage and divorce. It was as much an issue then as it is today. The religious rulers came to Him with a question regarding divorce (although their real motive was to test Him if He would oppose Moses' Law).

The Lord Jesus took them back to the very beginning, back to God's ideal of marriage. A man and a woman became one flesh. This was God's original plan for marriage before sin entered the human family. Divorce wasn't in God's original plan. Why? Because *sin* was not in God's original plan, and divorce is always a result of sin. When divorce is considered, sin is somewhere in the relationship.

*But didn't Moses allow for divorce?*, they asked. (Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 for background.) Yes, God permitted divorce because of the hardness of their hearts. Marriage was given to mankind as a gift; it is the tenderest and sweetest of human relationships. Marriage was to represent the relationship between Christ and the church.

However, when people fail and bitterness and hardness of heart enter in, then that marriage becomes a hollow sham, just a mockery. Friends, marriage is made either in heaven or in hell. When marriage is made in the wrong place, it is in trouble from the start.

God's ideal is never divorce, but He is merciful to us. God forgives us, but we need to recognize sin as the root cause of divorce.

What about when adultery breaks up the marriage? In this case for the Christian, divorce is granted for the purpose of permitting the innocent partner to remarry. This only applies to believers; God doesn't regulate the lives of unbelievers, but wants them to respond to the message of the Cross first. They are lost whether they are married, divorced, or single. It makes no difference until they accept Christ as Savior.

Jesus ties together the subject of divorce and His loving concern for little children. Having spoken about the issue of divorce, Jesus immediately begins to talk about children. The children are all-important in any divorce. The fact that our Lord said, "Let the little children come to Me," ought to make any couple, especially a Christian couple, make every effort to hold their marriage together.

## **WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM JESUS?**

So as we continue going about an ordinary day with Jesus, an accomplished young man approaches Him with a question. "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (19:16).

The young man was as honest in his question as he was sincere. He was looking for salvation the same way he got everything else. Wisely, the Lord Jesus asked him first about the commandments regarding a person's relationship to his fellow man.

*"Murder? Adultery? Theft? Lying? Honor your parents? Love your neighbor?"*

*“Check, check, check,”* said the young man. He had kept all these commandments, yet still recognized a lack in his life. Now the Lord directs his thinking to his relationship to God. *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”* (19:21).

The Lord Jesus was on His way to the cross. If this man followed Jesus, it would be to the foot of a cross. Something, however, prevented him from going with the Lord. His riches were his stumbling block. It might be something entirely different for you. Many things keep us away from the Lord Jesus. Today, is there something separating you from following Him with your whole heart? Ask Him to show you what is in the way. What keeps you from Him?

Many people think they will be saved by who they are or by what they have. You are truly saved when you find out you are a beggar with empty hands with nothing to offer Him for your salvation. As long as a person feels he can *do* something or *pay* God for salvation, he can no more be saved than a camel can be put through the eye of a needle. But when you come to Him with empty hands and a willing heart, He can save you. With *God* all things are possible.

Maybe the Lord’s encounter with the rich young ruler made Peter think. *“Lord, we have left everything to follow You. What will we get?”* (19:27-30).

Did the Lord rebuke Peter for being selfish? No. Instead, He told him what a great reward he would get. God is preparing a reward for His followers who have sacrificed for Jesus’ sake. Many an unknown saint will be given first place in God’s presence someday. Many outstanding Christian leaders who receive wide acclaim in this life may be ignored while many unknown godly saints will be rewarded. What a day that will be!

God turns this world’s priorities upside down. Faithfulness to the task, rather than the amount of work done or the spectacular nature of the work, governs how rewards are given out in heaven.

This is painfully clear in Jesus’ parable about workers in the vineyard. All agree to work for a certain amount, but some work from dawn to dusk. Others work from noon to dusk. Still others work from mid-afternoon to dusk. And they all get paid the same. How could this be fair?

Fairness isn't the issue. Jesus is teaching your reward is not based on how much you serve or how important your position, but on your faithfulness to the task God has given you to do.

Speaking of faithfulness to the task, Jesus and the disciples are now nearing Jerusalem. He reminds them once again of His intention to die there—deliberately to give His life for us. The disciples just couldn't believe it.

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**NEXT: Why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.**

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## LESSON 15

# HEAVEN IS FOR THE ASKING



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 20:24–22:14**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](http://TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 20:24–21:17** and **Matthew 21:18–22:14**

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Note this very carefully: Heaven is for the asking. You do nothing, *nothing*, for salvation. You are saved by faith in Jesus Christ through His marvelous grace. However, your reward in heaven is determined by what you do down here on earth. This is important, and we seem to have lost sight of it. What kind of a place are you preparing for yourself?

When Jesus was preparing Himself and His disciples for the cross, the mother of James and John asked Him a favor. *“In Your kingdom, may my two sons sit on Your right and left hand?”* (20:21).

At any other time, you might excuse a mother such an ambitious request. But Jesus let her know she didn’t know what she was asking. Those places of honor were for His Father to assign according to their reward. The Lord makes it clear by example that the way to be great is to take the lowest place. He said this, of course, as He headed to Jerusalem “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

As they neared Jericho, they couldn’t help but notice two blind men crying out to Jesus, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David” (20:30). (They acknowledged Jesus as rightful king.) The crowd told them to quiet down, but they couldn’t—Jesus was near!

“*What can I do for you?*” Jesus asked them. My friend, when you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, you must tell Him your need. If you are coming to Him for salvation, you must tell Him you are a sinner and need His salvation. We haven’t any goodness at all, none whatsoever, to present to God. We must come to Him as sinners and receive Him as our Savior. The blind men came to Jesus with their need, “*Lord, please open our eyes*” (20:33). Out of compassion, the Lord healed them, and they followed Him on His way to the cross.

## THE “TRIUMPHAL ENTRY”

When the Lord entered Jerusalem the week before He died, He came in a new role. Previously, He entered the city unobtrusively. Now He presses His claims as King. Nothing could be more forward or daring than riding on a little donkey into town, a practice reserved for kings. The donkey was the animal of peace while the horse was the animal of war. As Jesus came into Jerusalem riding a donkey, He offered Himself as King—a humble King, fulfilling Zechariah 9:9. He is never more kingly than when He approaches the Cross.

Likely, Jesus had never come into Jerusalem by this route before—normally He came in quietly by the sheep gate through which the animals for sacrifice were brought. But not this time! Here He rides in as a King, and those who are with Him recognize the statement He is making. Our Lord forces Jerusalem to consider His claims one last time and accept or reject Him.

Many call Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem at the beginning of this holy week His “triumphal entry.” But it was a far cry from triumphant. When you consider the four Gospel records together, they present a composite picture of entering the city on three separate days.

He entered Jerusalem the first time on Saturday, the Sabbath. There were no money changers on that day, and He looked around and left (Mark 11:11). Jesus entered Saturday as *Priest*.

Jesus entered Jerusalem the second time on Sunday, the first day of the week. The money changers were there, and He cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12-13). On this day, Jesus came as *King*.

Finally, He entered Jerusalem the third time on Monday. This is when He wept over Jerusalem, then entered the temple and taught and healed (Luke 19:41-44, 47-48). He entered as a *Prophet* that day.

He came as Priest, as King, and as Prophet. These are not triumphal entries because He is on His way to the cross to die for our sins. When He enters Jerusalem again in the future, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. This will be the real triumphal entry!

## THE WITHERED FIG TREE

One morning on His way into Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. He reached up to pick fruit off a fig tree but found it empty. He cursed the tree to never produce fruit again. The next time Jesus and His men passed by the tree, it had withered away and the disciples marveled.

The cursing of the fig tree is symbolic of Israel in Matthew 24. They had only the outward leaves of a ritualistic, powerless religion, but no fruit. They had turned what God had given them into a dead, lifeless ritual without vitality and virility which no longer was accomplishing God's purpose. God will likely deal the same way with the organized church which has turned its back on the person of Jesus Christ.

But the Lord is also giving the disciples a lesson about faith in prayer. They marvel that the fig tree withered, but He tells them their problem is they don't have faith to believe God can move in such a miraculous way.

## TOE TO TOE WITH THE RELIGIOUS RULERS

Meanwhile, the religious rulers were becoming ugly and hateful towards Jesus. They no longer question *what* the Lord Jesus is doing; they can't deny the miracles. They can only question His authority.

But Jesus meets their challenge in a decisive and deliberate tone. In fact, He forces the issue, making them act when and how He chooses. Jesus is in full control of the situation, and they couldn't ignore how intentionally Jesus moved against them.

Once again, the rulers question Jesus and hope to trip Him up, but Jesus turns it right around on them. Adding to the growing tension, He teaches several parables that deliver a scathing condemnation of them.

His first parable likens the rulers to a son who said he would work for his father but then does not. They have a religious exterior with nothing real inside, Jesus implies.

The second parable describes a householder (God the Father) who sent his son (the Lord Jesus) to check on a field. The husbandmen (Israel) kills the son in order to get his inheritance. The religious rulers can't miss His implication. They were livid at such a comparison. Jesus then compared Himself to the Old Testament "stone which the builders rejected" (Psalm 118:22) and warned them the kingdom of God will be taken from the Jews and given to the church. (See 1 Peter 2:9. The church is that "holy nation.")

The religious rulers knew exactly what Jesus was saying and determined then and there that He must die. The only question was when.

But Jesus wasn't finished telling parables—and this next one relates directly to us today. Jesus tells of a wedding feast "a certain king" (God the Father) hosts for "his son" (the Lord Jesus). He invites the guests (the lost sheep of the house of Israel through the Old Testament prophets). But the guests (Israel) reject God's invitation. They kill His messengers, including the Lord Jesus Himself. When the king hears this, he destroys their cities and tells his servants to go into the highways and byways and gather whoever they find as wedding guests.

When the king came to see the guests, there was one who did not have on a wedding garment. Although God's invitation is for everyone, you must come within the expectations of the King. That wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ, essential for salvation and given to all who believe. (See Romans 3:21-22). *All* must wear it. When the one without the garment is asked why he isn't clothed, he has nothing to say. Some people say they don't need to receive Christ, but will take their chances before God; they'll argue their case. But our Lord said this person without the wedding garment was speechless, and he was thrown out into darkness (22:12-13).

Jesus Christ has provided His righteousness like a robe for you. Whether or not you accept it is up to you. The invitation has been extended to everyone, but you will have to come on the King's terms individually. Next: Watch how the most brilliant person who has ever lived debates His enemies.

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**NEXT: Watch how the most brilliant person  
who has ever lived debates His enemies.**

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# The Good Shepherd

—IN ALL AGES—

WILL BRING HIS SHEEP THROUGH  
TO THE END.

WHEN HE STARTS WITH A HUNDRED SHEEP,

*He comes through*

WITH A HUNDRED SHEEP.

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THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 16

# A SURPRISING TURN OF EVENTS



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 22:15–24:3**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.ttb.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 22:15–23:22** and **Matthew 23:23–24:3**

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If you've ever tried to stand up for your faith in a hostile setting, you know all about the subtle ways people can twist your words. Jesus—the most brilliant person who ever walked the earth—faced this same kind of intellectual attack. Those who think Jesus is “meek and mild” are in for a surprise with a closer look at how He interacted with the “religious” rulers of His day.

The Herodians come first to Jesus with a question of paying tribute to Caesar. They were a political party which favored the house of Herod and wanted more than anything to be free from Roman yoke. They weren't considered a religious party but strongly political. However, many Pharisees were also Herodians and apparently used their power to attack Jesus.

### ENEMY #1

## **HERODIANS** (22:15-22)

Matthew tells us some Herodians went to the Pharisees to see “how they might entangle Him in His talk.” They wanted to lay a trap for Jesus. They asked coyly, “*Should we pay tax to Caesar?*”

Obviously, they didn't want Jesus' opinion. It was a trick question. If He had said, "*No, you are not to pay tribute to Caesar,*" He could be accused of being a traitor to Rome (the ruling government over Israel at the time). If He said, "*Yes, you are to pay tribute to Caesar,*" He could not be the true Messiah. They thought they had Him; but Jesus called them out, saying, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?"

Jesus asked for a coin. They gave it to Him. Note He used *their* coin, a Roman coin. This is an amazing answer because it answered more than just their question. In addition, He said they owed something to Caesar. They were using Caesar's coins, they walked down Roman roads, and Rome did provide them with a measure of peace. So, give to Caesar what he is due. But also, Jesus said, give "to God the things that are God's." The Lord didn't fall into their trap and they left, amazed by His answer.

## ENEMY #2

### **SADDUCEES** (22:23-33)

Next came the Sadducees. This religious group didn't believe in the resurrection of saints. They tried to trap Jesus with a ridiculous illustration. Imagine a woman who had had seven brothers for her husbands. One by one, they all died. Their question was, "*Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?*" Now the Sadducees' story had two problems. They didn't know Scripture and they didn't know God's power.

Marriage between a man and a woman is only for life on earth. We won't be married in heaven, just like the angels. Jesus then took the opportunity to school them about heaven.

In heaven, we are just as much ourselves as we are now (only without sin). Jesus quoted, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

What about those who have gone before? What about Abraham today? He is just as much Abraham today as he ever was. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been simply transferred from earth to another place. They are not dead; they are alive. This is true of your loved ones who are in Christ and are waiting in heaven for you. This is a glorious truth—and it shut everyone's mouths.

ENEMY #3

**THE PHARISEES** (22:34-40)

The Herodians and the Sadducees have now been silenced. The Pharisees have been watching Jesus handle these two groups. The Pharisees were a religious-political party. They wanted to see the kingdom of David brought back into power and evict Rome. In restoring the kingdom, they could join the Herodians, but as a religious party they opposed the Sadducees.

Like the other two groups, the Pharisees were out to trap the Lord, and so they enlisted a clever lawyer (a scribe, an expert in the Mosaic Law) to pose an interesting, strategic question: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

Jesus didn't pick any of the Ten Commandments. He is very straightforward with this lawyer. He says, *"You want to know which is the greatest commandment? To love God, and to love your neighbor is the next greatest."*

These two commandments summarize the entire Mosaic Law. Jesus' answer was so obviously accurate that if the Pharisees had been honest (and later some were), they would have said, *We have fallen short. We cannot be saved by the Law; we do need a Savior.*

The Lord masterfully answers each sect with consistent, biblical arguments. His enemies could not escape the Word Himself. But rather than submitting to His authority, as they should have, they now plot His death. The Lord Jesus, the Savior, knew this and sat securely under the shadow of the Cross.

Now it's time for Jesus to turn the tables on the Pharisees. He asks, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (22:42). It was His own version of a trick question. "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" (22:45). Jesus was quoting Psalm 110 and said David wrote it about the Messiah—*about Him*. The Lord Jesus was forcing the Pharisees to acknowledge Him as David's son and as David's Lord, and they wouldn't do it.

They also see they cannot debate Him. "And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore" (22:46). This ended the verbal clash with the religious rulers. This is one of the great proofs of Jesus' deity.

Also within His right as deity, Jesus warns the crowds about them and, in unmistakable terms, condemns them. No words that ever fell from the lips of our Lord were more scathing. If you read this chapter carefully, it will blanch your own soul.

## WOE

Jesus' debate with the three groups who tried to trap Him took place at the temple, the stronghold of His enemies. These leaders controlled the Old Testament Scriptures and usurped a place of authority by interpreting the truth for their own interests.

Jesus warned the people to do as the Scriptures teach, and not to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees. They are not following the Word of God. These men liked to have titles, He said. They liked to be recognized. They liked to wear religious clothes and do religious things that drew attention to their high position. They liked to be in authority, called "father." Our Lord condemns all of this.

A "father" is a life-giver. To call a man a "father" in spiritual matters is to put him in the place of God as the one who gives spiritual life. Only God the Father gives life. A "master" is one in a position of authority. But if you want to be the greatest, Jesus said, then become the servant of all (23:11).

Here is the gentle Jesus using the harshest language in the entire Bible. No Old Testament prophet denounced sin as the Lord Jesus denounces it here.

In our day people misunderstand who the Lord Jesus really is. Some think all Jesus ever talked about was love. Certainly it is true He loves sinners and died for sinners, but also He is going to *judge* sinners. We need to have a correct perspective of Him.

Listen to Him now as He pronounces woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, eight times in the Bible's strongest language. He accuses them of blocking the way to heaven by their false leadership.

In essence He says, *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees:*

- You pray long but are heartless and crooked in your business dealings.
- You're great at witnessing, but you're not bringing anyone to God.
- You value material things rather than the spiritual purpose for which they were meant to be used.

- You make much of little things but have forgotten about the weightier matters of the law (which would bring people to God).
- You put value on externals—talking nice and looking pious on the outside—but inside you don't deal with sin. You don't even like the word *sin*. You substitute ritual for reality, formality for faith, and liturgy for God. The place to start with God is on the inside.
- You are like beautiful coffins on the outside, but are full of rotting dead men's bones.
- You have a form of godliness, but you deny the power of it to be new creations in Christ.

Our Lord knew human nature, and it has not changed. He holds them to full accountability. *How can you escape hell's damnation?*

Of course, the only way to escape hell stood right in front of them, but they rejected Him. Then in ominous detail, He predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. What does He do next? The One who made this strong denunciation now *weeps* over Jerusalem.

Jerusalem rejected Jesus in His so-called triumphal entry, and He has rejected Jerusalem. But now He weeps over this precious city. Yes, He denounced them, but He loves them. And knowing the judgment which must come, He weeps. He pronounces these woes with a broken heart. Some people thought Jesus was Jeremiah because, like Jesus here, he condemned Israel and then wept over it.

Not only did the religious rulers stand there in shock, but so did Jesus' disciples. This seemed like a strange turn of events. They expected Him to establish the kingdom, with Jerusalem as the capital. But now He says the temple will be destroyed and He was going away.

... But He would come back, He said. And when He does, He will reign as King.

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**NEXT: How will we know when the end of the age is near?**

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## LESSON 17

# A VIEW OF THE FUTURE



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 24:3-32**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 24:3-14** and **Matthew 24:14-32**

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Many true followers of Jesus expected Him to set up His kingdom on earth right away. Perhaps if Israel had accepted Him as King, He would have. Nevertheless, now in a series of discussions known as “the Olivet Discourse” (because they were sitting on the Mount of Olives), Jesus talks with His disciples about His kingdom, the signs of His coming, and about the end of the age.

The Lord Jesus tells them His kingdom is now postponed and the large and beautiful temple Herod was building will be destroyed. The disciples, disturbed at what Jesus says, show Him around the buildings.

But Jesus insists, “Not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (24:2). If His first statement put them in shock, this must have traumatized them.

They talked it over, then came to Him with three questions (24:3):

1. “When will this happen?”
2. “What shall be the sign of Your coming?” (Answered in vs. 23-51.)
3. “What shall be the sign of the end of the world [completion of the age]?” (Answered in vs. 9-22.)

We find the answer to the first question not in the Gospel of Matthew but in Luke. Not more than 40 years in the future, Jerusalem will be destroyed in 70 A.D.. Archeologists have proven that the very stones the disciples showed Jesus were tumbled from the heights of the temple walls.

Undoubtedly, many who heard Jesus say these things were present in 70 A.D. when the Roman armies surrounded the city, laid siege to it, and finally breached the wall. When they got in, they demolished the city. And the first part of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled.

Jesus answers the disciples' next two questions chronologically and logically. First, Jesus assures them the world will never come to an end, but there will be an end to an age. This old world will pass away and a new earth will be brought on the scene (like you trade in an old car for a new one).

In this Olivet Discourse, when Christ speaks of His coming, He means His return to the earth to establish His kingdom. The church is not in this picture at all. In fact, by the end of the age, the church will have been removed, and it will be the last days of the nation Israel.

Deception will characterize this age. "Take heed that no one deceives you" (24:4), the Lord cautions, especially during the Tribulation period when the Antichrist sets himself up as the only authority. Beware of false teachers, too. Test what they say against Scripture. Near the end of the age, many people will claim to be Christ.

The Lord, sitting up there on the Mount of Olives, looked down to the end of the age and to the Great Tribulation period, but He also bridged the gap by giving us a picture of the present church age of the church. Matthew 24:3-9 all lead up to the Great Tribulation.

False teachers will say wars and rumors of wars signal the end of the age. But there will always be wars. There will be no peace until the Prince of Peace comes. False christs, rumors of wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes characterize the entire church season, but they will apparently intensify as we draw near to the end of the age.

## SIGNS MARKING THE BEGINNING OF THE TRIBULATION (24:9-14)

Today we live in the “age of the church” or the “age of the Holy Spirit.” The Bible divides the world today into three people groups: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (see 1 Corinthians 10:32). In our age, God calls out a people to His name from both Jews and Gentiles to compose the third group, the church. It is this third group which will be taken out of the world at the time of the Rapture. Then the Great Tribulation will begin, Matthew 24:9 says, when “they will deliver you [Israel] up to tribulation.” He describes a worldwide anti-Semitism.

As long as the true church is in the world, they would resist this worldwide anti-Semitism. No genuine believer in the Lord Jesus could hate the Jews. This will break out after the church has been removed at the Rapture.

The Lord says some Jews will endure to the end and some will be saved. In Revelation, we learn God will stop all the forces of evil while He seals a certain number of Jews from destruction. The Good Shepherd—in all ages—will bring His sheep through to the end. When He starts with a hundred sheep, He comes through with a hundred sheep.

During the Tribulation, the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached like it was by John the Baptist. Today we preach the gospel of the grace of God, but the gospel of the kingdom (also one of grace) has a different emphasis. We can't say the kingdom of heaven is at hand because we don't know. But when the Great Tribulation period begins, people will know they are close to the end. Therefore, the urgent message will be, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!”

The Cross of Christ has always been the only basis on which God saves men. Every offering before Jesus came to earth looked forward to His sacrifice, and every remembrance since looks back to His cross. Before Jesus died and rose again, everyone who came to God on *His* terms was saved on *credit*. They were forgiven on the basis of the death of Christ. No one was saved by the Law. We are all lawbreakers; we are sinners needing a Savior. Receive Jesus Christ as your *Savior* before He comes as the Sovereign of this universe when He will be your *Judge*.

## THE GREAT TRIBULATION (24:15-22)

So what will happen to signal the Great Tribulation? Jesus said the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy—the abomination of desolation. The Old Testament prophet, Daniel, tells us about two of them: One past and one yet future.

The first happened in 170 B.C. when the Syrian, Antiochus Epiphanes, destroyed Jerusalem (again!). Over 100,000 Jews were butchered. In the temple, he took away the daily sacrifice, offered the blood of a pig on the altar, and set up an image of Jupiter to be worshiped in the holy place.

The abomination of desolation in the future will be when an image of Antichrist will be set up in the temple. During the Tribulation the temple will be rebuilt and the nation of Israel will be back in Israel. We're not certain what else will characterize it, because we're told instead to look for "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13) rather than the Antichrist and his abominations. But the people in the last days will understand because it will be the sign to prove they are in the Great Tribulation.

This will be a time like no other. Nothing before or after will compare to it in the history of the world. The Lord labels it as the end of the age.

In Revelation, we learn that during the Tribulation one-third of earth's population will be destroyed. On another occasion, another quarter of the population will be annihilated. Using the simile in Revelation 6, the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, and then the pale horse of death will ride during that period, and the population of the earth will be decimated. There was a time when this seemed like an exaggeration; not so much anymore when weapons of mass destruction fill the news.

However, God is still in control of the events and the timetable. The Great Tribulation will be shortened "for the elect's sake" (24:22). God will not let mankind commit suicide.

## JESUS ASSURES US HE'S COMING BACK (24:23-31)

Jesus won't be announced by John the Baptist the way He was the first time. But when He comes, the whole world will know and it will be as public as lightning. Everyone will know Jesus is coming (unlike the Rapture of the church previously, when no one knows the hour). This time when the Lord comes, He comes in judgment.

The disciples asked for a sign of Jesus' return. When Jesus comes again, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (24:29). Everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

This will be a glorious sight. Consider this—back in the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to Israel in His shekinah glory when it rested over the tabernacle and later the temple at Jerusalem. No other nation or people has ever had that, not even the church. But because of Israel's sin, the shekinah glory left them. When Jesus came the first time, He laid His glory aside—not His deity, although they saw it sometimes when it broke through (see John 1:14). However, at His second coming, His shekinah glory may hover over the earth before He breaks through, as a sign of His coming to set up His kingdom.

So this is how the age closes, with Jesus will be His church (that's us). By this time, He has already come in person to receive us with the sound of a trumpet, and His voice will be like that of an archangel. At His second coming, "angels ... will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (24:31). Here He is talking about the elect nation Israel.

This view Jesus gives us of the future from the perspective of the Mount of Olives is staggering and awe-filled and sobering. Do you see why it's imperative to turn to Him today? Can you understand why it's important to trust Him with every detail of your future—and the world's future? He's the Sovereign of the universe and He will either be your Savior or your judge.

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**NEXT: An awesome view of future events when  
Jesus reigns as King.**

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## LESSON 18

# SCENES OF THE FUTURE



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 24:32–26:22**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 24:32–25:30** and **Matthew 25:31–26:22**

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Heaven and earth will pass away; there will be a new heaven and a new earth, but God's Word will not change. It will stand throughout the eternal ages. That's the message of Scripture itself.

As Jesus' last week hastens on, He takes every opportunity to teach His disciples about the future. As they passed a fig tree, He told them about Israel's future. As they looked over the city, He told them about the mystery of His return—"as the days of Noah were ..." (24:37). He highlighted the importance of watching.

Today, we watch and wait for the Rapture. We have the comforting hope of His promised coming. He makes sure they understand that when the Rapture takes place, every believer is going out. It won't be on the basis of merit we are caught up with Jesus, but by God's grace alone. He saves us by grace; He keeps us by grace; He will take us out of this world by grace; and when we have been there for ten million years, it will be by the grace of God.

Yet on the future day when the world will be judged, watching for Jesus' second coming will stir fear and anxiety.

In these last teachings from the Olivet Discourse, Jesus illustrates the different attitudes of people related to His second coming and what will happen to them when He comes. Some are faithful servants, others live carelessly, not really believing He will return. The Lord will judge them all.

What a great principle to apply to every age. We ought to live in the reality of standing in Jesus' presence—which we all will do one day. If you are saved, you will give Him an account of your life to see if you receive a reward. If you are lost, you will stand there to be judged. He is Lord of all.

When it all comes down it, we learn in Matthew 24 that what's important is our personal attitude and our relationship to Jesus Christ. Jesus illustrates that with a series of parables.

First, He tells of ten virgins who are either ready or not for the bride and the bridegroom going to the marriage supper. In the parable, Jesus, pictured as the bridegroom, is bringing the bride with Him, and the believers on earth are waiting for Him to come. While the Great Tribulation happens on earth, Christ has been in heaven with His bride, the church. Then at the conclusion of the seven years of Tribulation, He comes back to earth with the church.

In the parable, half of the virgins are ready for the bridegroom, having filled their lamps with oil, which pictures the Holy Spirit. The other virgins were not ready (no oil), because they were not genuine believers.

Jesus tells another parable about the tests faithful servants pass. He describes a man who equips his servants with talents (money). He gives his servants responsibilities according to their individual abilities—some got five talents, others two, etc., and he told them to make a profit with the funds. But not everyone did. Out of fear, one buried his talents. Another returned what he had been given and yet another servant doubled his talents.

What has God given you to use for Him? Are you burying it or doubling it? Someday you will stand in God's presence and give an account of how you have used what He has given to you. The Lord is not going to ask us how *much* we have done for Him but how *faithful* we have been to that which He wanted us to do.

The child of God must remember two things:

1. Find out what God wants you to do, and
2. Be faithful to do it.

Let's just listen and know that, although He is talking to someone else, we can make application of these wonderful parables to our own lives.

## **A SCENE FROM THE FUTURE**

As Jesus finishes the Olivet Discourse while overlooking the city, He again asks His people to ready ourselves for His coming.

During the Tribulation, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations. The 144,000 Jews sealed at the time of the Great Tribulation will preach the gospel of the kingdom, which is to receive Christ as the sacrifice for their sins and to be ready for His immediate coming. Everyone will have the opportunity to hear and receive God's message. Some will reject these messengers and their message, thereby rejecting Jesus Christ.

The Antichrist will have God's messengers butchered and slain, and anyone who would give them a cup of cold water will do so at the risk of his life. To hand out a cup of cold water today is just a small kindness, but in the Great Tribulation it will mean taking a stand for Jesus Christ. He says, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it for Me" (25:40)—because the messengers represent Him. That will be the way people show they understand and accept the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and they must repent and turn to Christ to be saved.

Both individuals and nations will be judged by their acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. For those who reject, there is only judgment. But some will receive the message with joy. This polarization moves history toward placing Jesus Christ on the throne of this world. This is the message of the Gospel of Matthew—in fact, it is the message of the entire Word of God.

## **JESUS FOCUSES ON THE CROSS**

Every incident and detail in Matthew 26 points to the cross. Some may think Jesus is caught in the vortex of circumstances over which He has no control. Look closely, however, and you see Jesus is the master of circumstances, and He is never more kingly than when He draws near the cross.

The plan Jesus told the disciples about in Caesarea Philippi six months previous are now taking place. He is now in Jerusalem, He will suffer many things, be killed, and be raised again on the third day.

Not only is Jesus moving according to God's timetable, He is forcing the issue. He is *not* the helpless victim caught between the Jewish religious intrigue and Roman power. According to the record, He has told the disciples about His death six times. But now Jesus sets the *time* of His death—it will be during Passover. The religious rulers had other plans (26:5), but Jesus decided and He said, *Passover*. Jesus, not His enemies, set the time of His execution. He is in command; He is the King in Matthew's Gospel, and when He seems more helpless and weak than at any other time, He still is in charge. The bitter hatred of His enemies led them to plot His murder, and do it their way, but Jesus was in charge. The closer Jesus gets to the cross, the more kingly He becomes.

Now we pass from that dark incident to one of marvelous light.

## MARY ANOINTS JESUS FOR BURIAL

For Jesus, Bethany was the place of love, as Jerusalem was the place of hate. He stayed in Bethany during His last hours before His death. Those who loved Jesus, those whom Jesus had healed, sat down and fellowshiped with Him. As they were having dinner, Mary came to Jesus with an alabaster box of precious burial oil and anointed both His head and His feet.

This beautiful story of the broken alabaster box has filled the world with its fragrance, just like the Lord said it would. We are hearing about it right now. Of all Jesus' followers, Mary alone understood and entered into His death, while the apostles missed the point completely. Mary let Jesus know she understood what He was about to do, and she blessed Him. Did she waste her ointment like the critical disciples thought? No, Mary alone had the privilege of anointing Him. We need to break our alabaster box of oil in the name of the Lord Jesus and show the world what He has done for them.

Now from this beautiful scene of light we go to a dark scene. In contrast to Mary's act of spiritual insight, Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus is shameful. He should have been loyal, but instead Judas looked for opportunities to betray Jesus to the religious rulers. He waited for the right moment, and now it was here.

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**NEXT: Witness the most important event in history.**

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WHAT HAS GOD GIVEN YOU  
TO USE FOR HIM?

THE LORD IS NOT GOING TO ASK US  
HOW MUCH WE HAVE DONE FOR HIM  
BUT HOW FAITHFUL WE HAVE BEEN  
TO THAT WHICH HE WANTED  
US TO DO.



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 19

# PASSOVER, GETHSEMANE, THE TRIALS, THE CROSS



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 26:23–27:50**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](http://TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 26:23-75** and **Matthew 27:1-50**

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Now we go with Jesus to the Upper Room, and there He announces one of His own will betray Him. Every one of us has it in our heart to betray Christ. Have you discovered that yet? We would betray Him in the next five minutes if He didn't keep His hand on us. That alone ought to keep us close to Him.

Jesus looks all of them who sat around the table in the eyes and unlike the other disciples, Judas could not call Him Lord. In fact, Judas leaves the room and the countdown begins.

Over the dying ashes of a fading feast of Passover, Jesus stands and institutes a new celebration.

***And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*** –Matthew 26:26-28

According to tradition, the cup circulated seven times during the Passover. On the last time, Jesus introduced the Lord's Supper. During the feast they sang the Hallel Psalms—Psalms 111 to 118. Next time you read them, imagine Jesus Himself singing them.

At this last supper, He establishes a new monument to Himself, not made of marble or bronze, but of temporary elements—bread and wine. Both speak of His death until He comes again.

The Lord said He would drink the fruit of the vine again in the kingdom. At that time, the Passover will look *back* to His death on the cross. For centuries, the Passover looked forward to His coming, but then, during the Millennium, it will look back.

A couple hours later, Jesus will be praying in a garden called Gethsemane where He talks about another cup, the cup of suffering. This cup represents His cross, and its contents are the sins of the whole world.

More than the death itself and the terrible suffering of crucifixion is something else very significant. Jesus, “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26), was made sin for us. There on the cross, the sin of humanity was put on Him—not in some forensic or academic manner, but in reality. The horror He felt when sin was placed on Him must have been unimaginable. Even so, Jesus did not ask to escape the cross, but He wanted God’s will to be done.

It is impossible for us to enter into the full significance of Gethsemane. Undoubtedly, He was tempted by Satan in Gethsemane as truly as He was in the wilderness. Yet Jesus persevered and accepted the cup and God’s will. To say our Lord was trying to avoid going to the cross is not exactly true. In His humanity He felt the awful horror of having the sins of the world placed on Him, and He recoiled for a moment from it. But He committed Himself to the Father. He came to do the Father’s will.

The disciples Peter, James, and John in the garden with Jesus fell asleep while Jesus prayed. Jesus warned them to stay awake, to be alert so they weren’t tempted. Jesus knew Satan was there. He wrestled with an unseen foe, and He overcame the enemy there in the dark. The victory of Calvary was won in Gethsemane.

When Jesus came back later and the disciples were fighting sleep, He told them to rest. They would need it because Judas and the Roman guards were on their way to seize Him.

The fact that Judas and Jesus' enemies had witnessed many miracles makes them realize Jesus has supernatural power and He might use it. So when they come to arrest Him, they bring a whole crowd of armed men. Then, to identify Jesus to the soldiers, Judas kisses Jesus on the cheek. This kiss of betrayal is one of the most despicable acts in recorded history.

Judas made up his own mind to betray our Lord and had every opportunity to change his plans. Yes, it was prophesied Judas would betray Jesus. However, after Judas had fulfilled the prophecy, after Jesus was betrayed, Judas could have repented. Jesus gave Judas one final opportunity to accept Him. Even after he gave Jesus that scorching kiss of betrayal, Jesus called him, "Friend" (26:50). Later, when Judas went to the temple and threw down the silver given to him to betray the Lord, he could have changed his mind. As the priests were taking Jesus to Pilate, Judas could have fallen down before Him and said, "Forgive me, Lord, I did not know what I was doing." The Lord would have forgiven him.

Back in the garden when the guards took Jesus, Peter drew a sword and in trying to protect the Lord, cut off a guard's ear. Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman. He sliced off the man's ear when he was after his head. Jesus told Peter to put away the sword. He was not after a fight with religious rulers. He had come to die for the sins of the world.

This was His hour.

The guards led Jesus through the darkened streets of Jerusalem to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. The crafty religious rulers were strategizing how to get the Roman government to pass the death penalty on Jesus. Trouble was, they had no charge against the Lord Jesus; they had to find *false* witnesses who could stand up under investigation. Pilate might be inquisitive (which he was) and ask annoying questions.

The rulers try to get the Lord Jesus to answer so they can plan their arguments, but the accusations are so farfetched the Lord doesn't even answer. Not until the high priest specifically asks Him, "*Are you the Christ, the Son of God?*" (26:63) does Jesus speak.

***Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." –Matthew 26:64***

Jesus claims for Himself the title “Son of Man.” This is the highest title the Lord had, the title the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel used to describe Jesus’ deity. No greater description could have claimed than He was “the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (see Daniel 7:13, Matthew 24:30).

At this, the high priest tears his robes, signifying extreme grief at this “blasphemy.” Now they have a charge against Jesus, and they let loose their hatred on Him. They spit in His face and pounded Him with fists; others slapped Him. This is the natural antagonism of the human heart to Jesus’ goodness, His righteousness, His holiness, and the fact He is God.

Not far from where this was happening, Peter waited in the courtyard. The night was charged with danger. When a couple girls recognized him as being one of Jesus’ disciples, he denied he even knew Jesus. But when they heard his Galilean accent, they fingered Peter again. Again he denied he knew Jesus. This was Peter’s darkest and weakest hour. But the Lord had prayed his faith would not fail, and it did not.

Peter remembered Jesus said he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed, and it broke him. Simon Peter was simply in the wrong place. For him, it was the place of temptation. No alibi can be offered for his shameful denial. But as soon as he realized what he had done, Peter repented and came back into fellowship with the Lord he loved.

## WHEN JESUS DIED

We have come to the apex of the gospel message: The crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

None of the four Gospel writers give a record of the actual crucifixion. They merely tell what went on around the cross. It is as if God placed the mantle of darkness over the last three hours of Jesus’ life on the cross and said, *“This is something you cannot look at. It is beyond human comprehension. The suffering cannot be fathomed.”* It was a transaction between the Father in heaven and the Son on the cross. The cross became an altar upon which “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) was offered.

Matthew’s simple statement is, “Then they crucified Him” (27:35).

This is the morning after Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, after He was brought before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, after false witnesses testified against Him, after He was beaten and ridiculed, and after Peter denied Him.

The chief priests and elders formulated a charge against Jesus and are taking Him now to the supreme court, to Pontius Pilate. They think they have a case that will stand up before the Roman court.

On their way to Pilate, as the chief priests and elders were leading Jesus through that hall, here comes Judas, bringing back the thirty pieces of silver he was paid to betray Jesus.

Why doesn't Judas turn to the Lord Jesus and ask forgiveness? Instead, he pleads with the religious rulers. "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (27:4). They dismissed him with, "*You did the job. We paid you off, now get out of here.*" Judas throws the silver on the floor, runs out of the temple, and goes to a cliff and hangs himself. Jesus was on His way to die—even for Judas. Our Lord had given him an opportunity to come back to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, and even at this eleventh hour, Judas could have turned to the Lord Jesus and would have been forgiven.

The chief priests gathered the money but couldn't put it in the treasury because it was blood money. Instead, they used it to buy a field to bury strangers. This sordid scene is a remarkable fulfillment of prophecy from Zechariah 11:12-13.

To the religious rulers, Jesus committed blasphemy. They would have stoned Him, but Rome didn't allow the Jews to carry out the death penalty. So they had to deliver Jesus to Pilate with a charge that would stick in Roman court. Treason would—so Jesus was charged with claiming to be the King of the Jews.

Pilate had a problem on his hands. Obviously, Pilate knew the religious rulers had no basis for the death penalty. Jesus had not incited rebellion against Rome. Pilate needed to maintain peace in Jerusalem, but felt he could not arbitrarily sentence the Lord Jesus to death. His solution was simple. According to tradition, he could release a Jewish prisoner during Passover. He would offer the crowd a choice: Jesus or the very notorious prisoner, Barabbas, who was guilty of murder, robbery, and treason.

Pilate was a clever politician. He thought surely the crowd would ask for Jesus to be released—the contrast between Him and Barabbas was so clear. Even Pilate’s wife, superstitious as could be, asked her husband to have nothing to do with Jesus.

But the religious rulers were clever politicians, too. They circulated among the crowd saying, *“Ask that Barabbas be delivered and Jesus be destroyed”* (27:20). So when the crowd demanded Barabbas released, Pilate was shocked.

Pilate asked the crowd, “What then shall I do with Jesus?” (27:22). The answer was flung in his face—*“Crucify Him!”*

When Pilate saw that he couldn’t win, he called for a basin of water and washed his hands, declaring he would have nothing to do with Jesus’ execution. But it wasn’t that easy. He had to decide—every person does. The blood of Jesus was on his hands no matter how much he washed them.

“Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified” (27:26). Pilate was willing to stoop this low himself.

The soldiers took this opportunity to have their fun with Jesus before He was crucified. He became a plaything for this brutal, cruel crowd. They stripped him, put on him a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns, and bowed the knee before him. They mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews” (27:29). They took turns beating Him until He was unrecognizable. Since He was going to die anyway, they could mutilate Him and do anything they wished with Him.

Jesus was subjected to abject humiliation and untold suffering. When they led Him to Calvary, He was too weak to carry His cross and so whipped He hardly looked like a man. (See Isaiah 53:3.)

## **JESUS IS CRUCIFIED**

Yet everything happened according to Scripture.

On the cross, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21.

They tore his clothes and cast lots for them in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18.

They posted a sign over his head, his accusation written: THIS IS JESUS KING OF THE JEWS.

They taunted Him saying, *“If you are the Son of God, come down from there by yourself”* (27:40). Little did they realize that *because* He is the Son of God, He will not come down from the cross. He has nothing to prove at this point. He is now dying for the sins of the world.

The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked Him, too. You’d think after this pack of bloodhounds succeeded in getting Jesus on the cross, they would go home and let Him die in peace, but they didn’t. They stood there taunting Him till His dying breath.

They spit out, *“He saved others; but He can’t save Himself”* (27:42). That is a true statement. To save us, He would have had to die on that cross. If He had come down from the cross, we would have to be executed for our sins. We deserve it; we are hell-doomed sinners. Jesus Christ was taking our place there.

Our Lord was put on the cross at the third hour, which would be nine o’clock in the morning. By twelve noon, man had done all he could to the Son of God. Then at the noon hour, darkness covered the land and that cross became an altar on which the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world was offered up.

Around three o’clock in the afternoon, Jesus shouted out, *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”* that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (27:45-46).

We find the answer in Psalm 22:3: “But You are holy ....” When our sin is put on Jesus, God has to withdraw. Our Savior had to be executed if He was going to take on our sin.

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**NEXT: What happened after Jesus died.**

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## LESSON 20

# FROM DEATH TO LIFE AGAIN



Begin with prayer



Read **Matthew 27:50–28:20**



Listen at [TTB.org/Matthew](https://www.TTB.org/Matthew) to **Matthew 27:50–28:20**

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No matter how many times you may read about it—the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most compelling true story in all of history. Sit a little longer at the foot of the cross as we look at the events that happened immediately after Jesus died and ponder Jesus’ “Great Commission”—His final words on earth to His followers.

When Jesus died, He dismissed His Spirit. He left His body willingly. At that moment, several significant things happened. The first was an earthquake. Then quickly following, the thick curtain hanging in between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the temple tore from top to bottom. Only God could have done this. This veil symbolizes the body of Jesus, rent upon the cross when He had paid the penalty for our sin in His own body. Now broken, Jesus opened the way into God’s presence.

From that moment on, we don’t need a priest or a preacher to go to God for us; we can go directly to the throne of God through Jesus Christ. The only way to the Father is through His Son (see 1 Timothy 2:5).

Another event, recorded only here in Matthew's Gospel, happened when the earth shook. This was an intelligent quake, not haphazard, because only certain graves opened and "many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised" (27:52). Many witnesses saw them and marveled. We wish more had been told about this.

One witness to this scene was the centurion in charge of Jesus' crucifixion. As the soldier witnessed these miraculous events, he confirmed Jesus was the Son of God. He believed. He knew extremely little, except who Jesus really is. But he knew enough to take his place beneath the Cross of Christ, and that is all God asks of any sinner.

In the chaos of the earthquake and the darkness of the eclipse, we learn new things about those who followed Jesus. The very thing which caused the apostles to scatter drew others into the open. They who had been secret disciples now stepped up and declared their faith.

Joseph of Arimathaea was one of those courageous followers. Joseph went to Pilate and begged for Jesus' body, and it was granted him. Only loving hands touched Jesus' body after His death. Joseph laid Jesus' body in his own new tomb, hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a huge stone in front of the door to the sepulcher and left.

And in the shadows were other courageous followers, several women—Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. When the apostles had fled, these two were faithful to Jesus and stayed with Him at the cross and burial.

The next day, Pilate's guards, afraid Jesus' men would try to steal His body, sealed Jesus' tomb and posted Roman guards. Interestingly, the enemy's zeal helped to confirm Jesus' resurrection. Nobody could steal Jesus' body now. Of course, no one believed Jesus would be resurrected, including the apostles who didn't believe Jesus would come out of that tomb alive.

### **But He did. Jesus is alive!**

The gospel rests on two great pillars: Jesus' death and His resurrection. (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Our salvation is dependent on the fact that Jesus "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Think of how unique the Resurrection is. All other religions record the death of their leader. *Only* the Christian faith records the resurrection of its founder. All other religious leaders are dead. *Only Jesus is alive*. This is important and imperative to grasp.

None of the four Gospel writers gives us a complete picture of the Resurrection, but together they present a composite picture and no conflict or contradiction appears among them.

Matthew presents Jesus as the King. He gives us spectacular and sensational details. Jesus was born a King, He lived as a King, He died a King, and He rose from the dead a King. Matthew tells of the earthquake, of the angel's descent, of the stone rolled away, of the frightened guards, and of the effort by the religious rulers to disavow the empty tomb.

Compare Luke's Gospel with Matthew's. A quietness shows Luke's purpose. In the stillness of the early morning, the women come and find the stone already rolled away. The Lord Jesus appears to two unknown disciples on an obscure road leading to Emmaus and then to the disciples in a secret room of an unknown address. Luke records the human story, while Matthew presents Him as a King. Both records are accurate, as are the records in the other two Gospels, but they are presented from four different viewpoints.

Back at the tomb, on the first day of the week, the two Marys return to the tomb with sweet spices to anoint Jesus' body. They were concerned how they were going to roll back the sealed stone. It wasn't a problem, though, because an angel had rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it.

Why was it necessary to roll back the stone? To let Jesus out? No, He was gone when the stone was rolled back. The tomb was not opened to let Him out but to let *them* in.

The angel sitting inside had a countenance like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow (different from other descriptions, see Daniel 10:6 and Revelation 10:1). The guards, helpless in the presence of an angel, had run from the tomb, but the angel spoke right to the ladies, "Do not be afraid" (28:5). The angels invite the women into the tomb. "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (28:6). When the supernatural touches the natural, it's always with a word to calm fears.

This is the divine announcement of the Resurrection. Jesus had left the tomb before the stone had been rolled away. Later He would enter a room with a locked door. Jesus' glorified body was radically different from the body with which He was born.

The angels then gave the women directions to tell Jesus' disciples. Tell them Jesus has risen from the dead. Do you believe that? Before you try to witness about Jesus, you must first be convinced of the truth of His resurrection. Have it settled in your own mind that Christ died for your sins and was buried and then rose again. Then with these convictions, you can go quickly, and tell—just like the angel told the women.

What about the soldiers guarding the tomb? After the stone was rolled away, they discovered Jesus' body wasn't there. They could have been executed for allowing this to happen, but the elders bribed them with a lie. *"Say you fell asleep and His disciples stole the body. We'll cover for you"* (28:13-14). Such a feeble excuse was the first century alibi to explain away the resurrection of Christ. Unbelief has now had nineteen centuries to think it over, and there are other alibis. However, none yet have been offered that can explain away the evidence.

## JESUS' FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

Matthew didn't write down the total record of Jesus' resurrection, neither did he give us everything on Jesus' commission before He left the earth. But together with the instructions from Acts 1:8, we can get a composite picture of His instructions. Clearly, we see Jesus calls us to be His witnesses, emboldened with His power from on high. Some of the disciples worshipped and some doubted—that is how it has been for over two thousand years! And we're all in one category or the other.

Jesus, speaking as the King, tells them to "go ... and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This has direct application for us today. Jesus continued, "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:19-20).

Our Lord promises to be with us right on through to the very end of the age. Only in His power can the Great Commission be carried out.

Matthew did not include anything about Jesus' ascension back to heaven. Why? Because the kingdom will be here upon this earth, and Matthew leaves the King where the King is to be. Matthew is the Gospel of the King. Jesus was born a King. He lived as a King. He died as a King. He rose again as a King. And He will be coming again to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords! Let it be the honor of your life to bow to Him today.



A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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