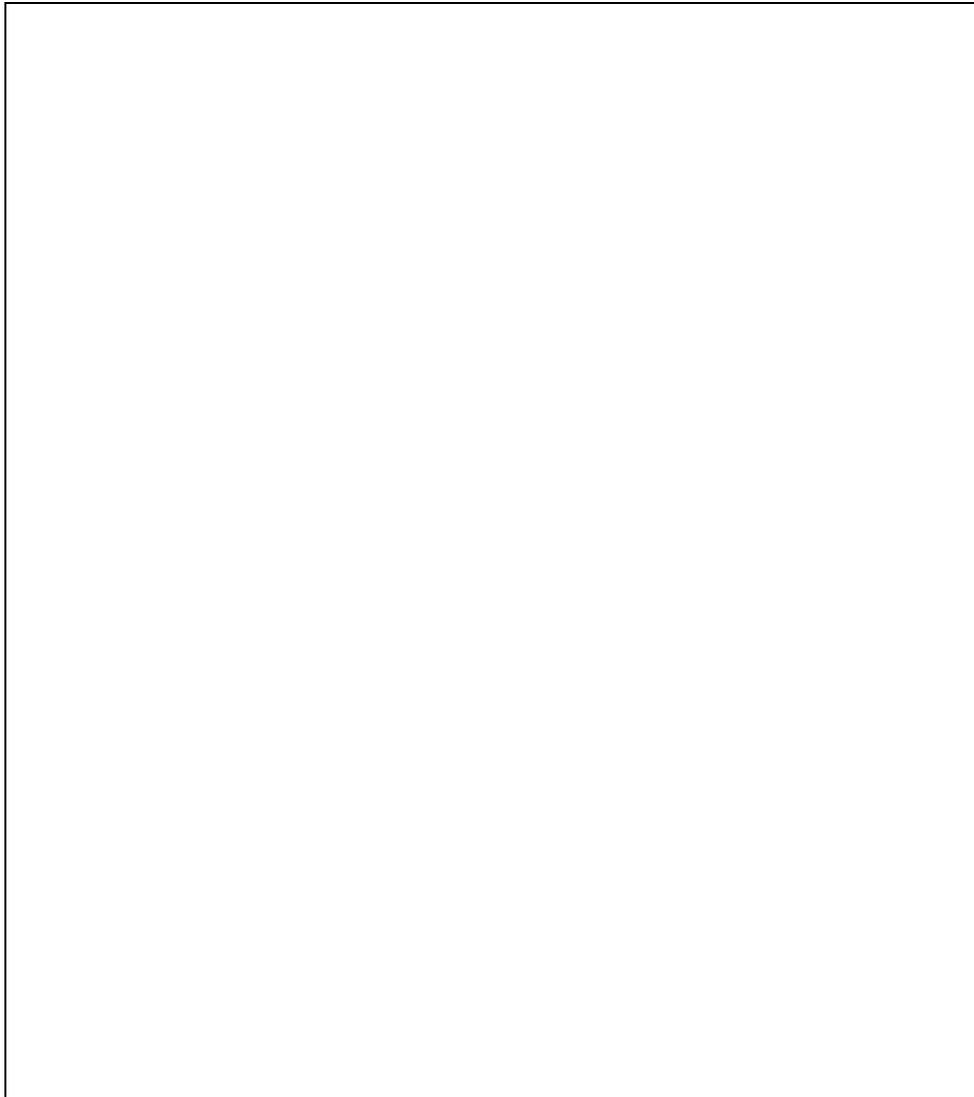


Studies in Matthew

Part Three



Santa Barbara Community Church

Fall Calendar

Teaching Date	Study	Text	Topic
9/26	37	24:1-51	And then the End Will Come
10/3	38	24:42—25:30	Five Parables of Readiness
10/10	39	25:31-46	Sheep and Goats
10/17	40	26:1-16	The Beginning of the End
10/24	41	26:17-30	The Lord's Supper
10/31	42	26:30-46	Gethsemane
11/7	43	26:47-68; 27:11-26	Arrest and Trial!
11/14	44	26:69— 27:10	Peter and Judas
11/21	45	27:27-44	Crucified
11/28	Thanksgiving Sunday: No Matthew Study		
12/5	46	27:45-66	Darkness at Noon
12/12	47	28:1-20	Resurrection / Great commission

The artwork for this study was provided by Ron Davis (even numbered studies) and Micah McWilliams (the cover¹ and the odd numbered studies). The text was written by Reed Jolley. Many thanks to those who proof-read this study and especially Krista Frohling who may be the syntax queen of SBCC.

May God bless us as we study his Word!

¹ The crucifixion. Judgment fire leaps in the background, and from clouds in the spandrels. God's wrath is poured out on our Christ. His mercy is poured out for us.

SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

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

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

The Pattern of Matthew's Gospel*

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

Part 2: To Jerusalem (14:1 — 28:20)

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

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

Study Thirty-Seven And Then the End Will Come Matthew 24:1-51



If you hold a *prophecy conference*, or write a book about the *end times* in America you are likely to become well-liked, famous and wealthy. The American church has, for the better part of a century, devoured literature, lectures and endless speculation about the end times.

Messiah forecasting was big business in the time of Jesus much as it is in our own time. The Sadducees and the Pharisees, the Priests and the people were no strangers to speculating on the future. The *experts* were reading the

signs of the times and making their predictions. And they built up a good deal of folklore concerning what must happen before Messiah comes.

When we read the five sermons of Jesus in Matthew we notice that he doesn't say much about the future.² Instead, he proclaims the presence of the kingdom of God in his own ministry. This kingdom has no borders and is entered by faith (12:28).

But during the last week of Jesus' life, our Lord begins to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God which is coming in the future.

As we prepare to look at Matthew 24, notice the context. In chapter 23 Jesus utters seven *woes* for the *teachers of the law and the Pharisees*. Notice how that section ends. Jesus says,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (23:37-39)

¹ The destruction of the temple is prophesied along with signs of the end of the age. A trumpet is in the center spandrel, sun and moon darkened in the arch centers, and stars falling are in the spandrels. The horsemen represent wars and famines. The broken stone tablets of the Ten Commandments in the foreground represent lawlessness.

² See chart at the beginning of this study guide.

Here Jesus alludes to Israel's history of rejecting the prophets. Now they are rejecting the prophet to whom all the rest pointed, Jesus of Nazareth. But within this lamentation is a prophecy. Jesus will return and the people of God will say, *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

With this in mind, read 24:1-2. Jesus makes a second bold prediction. What is it?

The rest of Matthew 24-25 is, essentially, an explanation of Jesus' two words of prophecy.¹ The setting is the Mount of Olives, adjacent to the city of Jerusalem. The disciples come to Jesus and ask for a lesson on the future.

Before going on in this study read Matthew 24. Make your own outline of this chapter. Think in broad categories. What is the flow of Jesus' lesson? If you were making Jesus' talk into a bullet-pointed *Powerpoint* presentation, what would the main points be? Make a list of the specific instructions Jesus gives his disciples.

Outline of Main Themes

Specific Commands to the Disciples

Bullet Points From Jesus Teaching

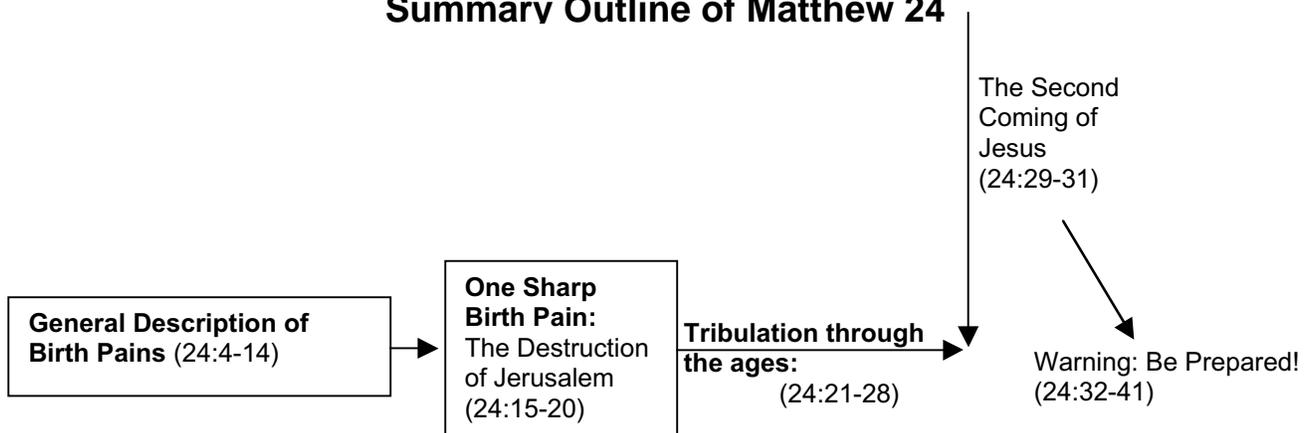
¹ It is quite possible that Matthew is crafting this chapter to distinguish the answers to these two questions. Perhaps the disciples assumed that the answer to the questions, *When will Jerusalem be destroyed*, and *What will be the sign of your coming*, were one and the same. That is, they might have thought that when Jerusalem was destroyed Jesus had come again. Jesus points out, clearly, that when he returns there will be no doubt anywhere in the world!

Why is it important for us to understand and think through Scriptures which address the time before the second coming of Jesus? What are the benefits of knowing these passages of Scripture?

One strand of end times speculation in the time of Jesus held that the Jews would suffer terribly right before Messiah came to bring salvation. Jesus seems to agree. The entire teaching from the Mount of Olives looks forward to the second coming of Jesus. Jesus likens the time before his coming to birth pains (24:8).

Think through this chapter a second time with the following chart in mind.¹ In what ways does this chart help make sense of Jesus' teaching?

Summary Outline of Matthew 24



24:4-14 Look at these verses carefully. What specific lessons does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the immediate near-future? What are the disciples to make of *wars, famine, earthquakes*, etc.? Notice especially verse 6 and 8.

¹ This chart is based on material from D. A. Carson, *God With Us*, 1978, pp. 139-145.

24:4-28 Virtually every New Testament text that deals with the return of Christ is set against the backdrop of a persecuted church. Each text calls the reader to patient perseverance in the midst of hardship. The first part of Jesus teaching in Matthew 24 is no exception. Carson explains,

The burden of the first section of the Olivet Discourse, then, is that this entire age is to be characterized by distress, persecution, witness, opposition, wars, famines, and assorted false Christs whose purpose is to deceive God's people. . . . Jesus was not saying that every Christian everywhere will face exactly the same opposition all other Christs face; but He *was* saying that distress, opposition, and persecution would be *characteristic*. Even a smattering of church history confirms this.¹

But, notice verse 6. . . . *see to it that you are not alarmed*. In what ways can we, or should we apply these words in our time and place. What does this passage have to say about our concerns over the economy, oil prices, radical Islam, Washington politics or other unsettling trends of our historic moment?

What feelings do these verses stimulate for you? What does it mean to be un-alarmed? What helps you to be un-alarmed?

24:15-22 explains a particularly hard birth pain, the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus ties this to the prophecy of Daniel which mentions four times *the abomination that causes desolation* (Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). This phrase refers to the desecration of the Jerusalem temple built by Ezra. In the Jewish mind Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled by the Greeks. The temple was amply desecrated in 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed a pig to the Greek god Zeus on the altar of burnt offering.

But here Jesus teaches that a final desecration will take place in the near future. The temple will again be desecrated. His prophecy came to pass when the Romans came and utterly destroyed the temple and all of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

¹ *God With Us*, pp. 143-144.

Luke 21:20 makes this more explicit. There the *abomination that causes desolation* is replaced with *Jerusalem being surrounded by armies*.

24:21-22 Jesus appears to move seamlessly from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. to the entire history of tribulation his followers will face. He moves from a specific prophecy of an historic calamity to a description of the final period of tribulation God's people will experience before he returns. The *distress* of Jerusalem, will become the *great distress* of the end times. These days will be *cut short*. . . *for the sake of the elect* (the followers of Jesus¹).

24:26-31 What are the emphases of these verses? What does Jesus want the disciples to know with regard to his second coming?

24:32-41 The emphasis of this last paragraph is, certainly, preparedness. Jesus is coming again. No matter what happens, no matter how much persecution you face no matter how many wars you hear of, Be Ready!

What would our lives look like if we lived them in *readiness* for the second coming of Jesus?

Consider the overall emphasis of this chapter. The American church, largely free from significant persecution, sees end times speculation as a form of entertainment. For example, the *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins has sold over 62 million copies! The message of the series is not to persevere during times of persecution. Instead the authors weave a tale of

¹ Notice how Matthew uses the term *elect* (22:14; 24:22; 24, 31). Each time it is shorthand for *the whole people of God*.

the tribulation the inhabitants of the world will face while the church is with Jesus in heaven. How does this message correlate to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24? Summarize the following verses:

- 24:4, 26
- 24:6
- 24:13
- 24:14

C.S. Lewis had an essay published in *Decision* magazine one month before his death. In it he spoke of the necessity of being ready for the return of our Lord.

The world might stop in ten minutes; meanwhile, we are to go on doing our duty. The great thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though the world might last a hundred years.

Readiness and responsibility. How do you maintain this balance in your own life?

Study Thirty-Eight Five Parables of Readiness Matthew 24:42—25:30

Be Ready! These two words form an apt summary of Jesus' teaching from the Mount of Olives. Look back on 24:36-41. Here Jesus gives two warning illustrations of the need to be ready for his second coming.

- It will be like the days of Noah, no one knew when it would begin to rain (24:36-39).
- There will be a sudden separation or judgment (24:40-41).

Jesus continues this theme of preparedness in five parables. These include the famous parables of the ten virgins, the talents and the separation of the sheep and the goats along with the lesser-known parables at the end of chapter 24.



Read this section of Matthew before going on in this study. What initial thoughts or reactions do you have? What is the main point of each parable? Each parable has a slightly different emphasis. What is it?

	Main Emphasis	Initial Reactions
1. 24:42-44 The parable of the homeowner and the thief.		
2. 24:45-51 The parable of the two servants.		
3. 24:1-13 The parable of the ten virgins.		
4. 25:14-30 The parable of the talents.		
5. 25:31-46 The parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats.		

Think about these five parables. To whom are they addressed? They are addressed to the disciples. Matthew wants the reader to understand that it is the closest allies of Jesus who are to be most prepared for his coming.

24:42-44 The parable of the homeowner and the thief. Notice the prevalence of *thief* imagery in some of the New Testament descriptions of the second coming of Jesus.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3
- 2 Peter 3:10
- Revelation 3:10
- Revelation 16:15

What precautions do people normally take to prevent thievery? How would this apply to Jesus' call to be ready for his coming?

Practically speaking, what can we do to *keep watch*?

24:45-51 The parable of the two servants.

Compare the servants in this parable. What are the differences between the *faithful and wise servant* and the *wicked servant*? What does each servant do when the master is away? What is the result for each servant?

The Wise and Faithful Servant

The Wicked Servant

Give an example of someone you consider to be a *wise servant*. What is it about this person's life that demonstrates faithfulness?

James Boice points out the similarity of the three parables in chapter 25. (Boice, pp, 524-525) Glance over these three parables looking for the following:

- Each presents the Lord's return as sudden and unexpected.
- In each parable the Lord's return provokes an unalterable division between two groups of people.
- In each parable, those who are *lost* are taken by surprise.

The sermon from the Mount of Olives is a warning to the church! Commenting on the third similarity of these parables, Boice writes,

When we think about this feature of the stories, we realize that they are not about people who have no use for Christ or his gospel. They are about people who are part of what we would call the visible church. Like many in our churches today, these people think they are saved and that they are on their way to heaven, but their actual destiny is hell. Is it any wonder the Lord states his warning to "keep watch and be ready" so forcefully? (Boice, p. 525)

How does this quotation challenge you as a believer?

24:1-13 The parable of the ten virgins.

This parable is one of the *classic* parables of Jesus. While parables should not be turned into allegories where one presses all the details, it is difficult to resist the temptation in this case.

On the one hand, the parable tells a simple story of a first-century wedding. If bride and groom lived in close enough proximity the wedding party would proceed from the grooms home to the home of the bride's father. There she would be escorted back to the home of the groom. When the processional arrived at the groom's home the couple was married. Then the party would begin.

And it would last for days. Along the way to the groom's home, the wedding party would join the procession. Each invited guest was to be expected to carry a torch. Those without torches were party crashers (Carson, p. 513). Here, ten *virgins*¹ make their appearance. And each has a torch. But some are foolish and have no oil.

In this respect, the parable is a simple warning to be prepared.

But, on the other hand, the imagery used pulls the reader into the larger teachings of Scripture. The Old Testament prophets pictured the Messiah as a bridegroom. Consider the following.

- Isaiah 54:4-6
- Isaiah 62:4-5
- Hosea 2:19²

Readers of the New Testament recognize Jesus in this parable insofar as he identifies himself as the bridegroom of the church. John the Baptist makes the same connection.³ Consider the following.

- Matthew 9:14-15
- Mark 2:19-20
- John 3:27-30

With the above in mind, re-read this parable. What statements can you make about the ten virgins? In what ways are the virgins similar?

In what way are the two sets of virgins different?

¹ The point of this Greek term, *parthenos* is not the virginity of these invited guests. Morris translates 25:1 as *ten girls*. *But they would have been virgins; married women were not attendants of the bride in weddings of that time. These girls would have helped in the dressing of the bride and acted as her attendants. When the bridegroom came, they would have formed part of the procession to his home for the feast.* (Morris, p. 620)

² See also Ezekiel 16:7-34 for an extended, and very bold, example of God as Israel's husband.

³ Paul uses similar imagery in Ephesians 5:21ff. There Paul draws an extended analogy between husband and wives and Christ and the church.

The parable stresses the need to *always* be ready for Jesus to return. But what does it mean to be ready? In 1897 Charles Spurgeon, one of the most well-known preachers of his era, taught on this parable. What does it mean to be ready?

A great change has to be wrought in you, far beyond any power of yours to accomplish, ere you can go in with Christ to the marriage. You must, first of all, be renewed in your nature, or you will not be ready. You must be washed from your sins, or you will not be ready. You must be justified in Christ's righteousness, and you must put on his wedding dress, or else you will not be ready. You must be reconciled to God, you must be made like to God, or you will not be ready. Or, to come to the parable before us, you must have a lamp, and that lamp must be fed with heavenly oil, and it must continue to burn brightly, or else you will not be ready. No child of darkness can go into that place of light. You must be brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvelous light, or else you will never be ready to go in with Christ to the marriage, and be forever with him.

Spurgeon's quotation above could be summarized by saying, *Being ready means being saved! Readiness is found through faith.* Faith is receiving what God has done for us in Christ. The next parable stresses the active side of the Christian life. Using the *talents* God has given us until Jesus returns.

In your own words, what does it mean to be ready? What are the indicators in your life that you are ready?

25:14-30 The parable of the talents.

Review this parable. Does the master seem fair? What details strike you as peculiar? Note as you read that there is some ambiguity in the word *talent*. The Greek word refers to a unit of measure. A talent was between 58 and 88 pounds. But pounds of what? There were talents of gold, or silver or copper. And each weighed a different amount. It was common to see a talent valued at 6,000 denarii, or about 20 years of wages for a laborer. The point is, the master left his servants with a lot of money!

Of course Jesus is making a point in this parable about the Christian life. Jesus is not talking about money and investments. Jesus expects his followers to multiply those things they have received from him while he is away for a *long time* (25:19). This parable goes beyond the others insofar as it teaches the disciples to go beyond waiting for and being prepared for the second coming of Jesus. A bunker mentality will not do.

J. C. Ryle defines a talent as, anything *whereby we may glorify God*. Talents may be,

Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ's church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible—all, all are talents. (Ryle, p. 337)

Think about your own Christian life with the above quotation in mind. Try your best to be neither too hard nor too difficult on yourself. With Ryle's definition of a *talent*, evaluate your own Christian life. What will the *master* say to you when he comes home? Make some notes on this to share with your homegroup. How can your homegroup pray for you in this area? Where do you need some accountability? Which talents can you manage more effectively to the glory of God?

What does this parable say about lazy Christians? Respond to the following.

It is not enough for Jesus' followers simply to "hang in there" and wait for the end. They must see themselves for what they are—servants who owe it to their Master to improve what He entrusts to them. Failure to do so proves they cannot really be valued as disciples at all.¹

¹ D. A. Carson, *God With Us*, p. 149.

Study Thirty-Nine Sheep and Goats Matthew 25:31-46

What happens at the end of history? What will Jesus do when he returns? Will everyone be saved in the end? Would a loving God send anyone to hell, or banish anyone from his presence in heaven? If so, how does God decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell? What will hell be like?

The teaching from the Mount of Olives moves to a crescendo as Jesus speaks



specifically of his *glorious* coming. As we move to this fifth parable (which is not really a parable²) the stakes get higher. The *virgins* were not admitted to the wedding party (25:12). The *wicked, lazy servant* was condemned to *darkness*. But the *goats*, in this final section of Jesus' teaching, are cast *into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels* (25:41).

Read 25:31-46 very carefully. What are the main points of these verses? Pretend that someone has just joined your homegroup. This person shows up and hasn't even read the

passage for this week's study. As you begin the study he says, *Could someone please summarize the Bible passage for tonight?*

What summary statements would you make?

¹ Christ is represented here reigning in judgment on a throne. His foot stool is the Ark of the Covenant, and in his hand is a shepherd's crook. Angels accompany him, and trumpets blast in the side spandrels. Sheep and goats are almost identical creatures in some places, except for their temperaments.

² Notice that Jesus does not use the typical introduction to a parable, *The kingdom of heaven is like. . .* In these verses Jesus uses imagery to describe the judgment which will take place when he returns.

25:31-34 Re-read these verses. What do we learn about the coming of Jesus?

- What will it be like?
- Who will be there?
- What will they do?
- What will Jesus do?

Notice the first statement from the King (25:34). The tense and voice of two verbs are worthy of our attention, *blessed* and *prepared*. Both are perfect passive participles (verbs). The first could be translated *have been being blessed*. The second speaks of “the kingdom that *has been being prepared*.” (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 917). Here we find the conclusion of God’s saving activity that has been going on *since the creation of the world!* This is a teaching that should cause us to break out in praise.

The future kingdom of God is not pie in the sky by and by, after the main meal of the world, a [fantasy] dessert for those with a religious sweet tooth. The kingdom of God is the structure of reality. The so called real world is ephemeral and messed-up. . . It is the church’s purpose to keep this threatened, disbelieved, difficult-to-believe kingdom of God constantly before people’s eyes. The most important questions of all are whether or not people make the decisions that bring them into God’s kingdom. The nature of these decisions becomes the focus of the rest of Jesus’ sermon. (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 917-918)

This verse is saying God planned your salvation (*inheritance*) since the beginning of time! It was this stunning thought that caused Paul to gush in praise as he wrote his letter to the Ephesians.

For [God] chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

Look again at verse 34. Read the statement of the King aloud. It is a stunning thought, but if you are a believer you will hear Jesus say this to you one day.

- If you knew you were likely to inherit a huge sum of money in the near future how would that change the way you think and live in the present moment?
- What would an *inheritance* prepared for you by God be like? How should your Godly inheritance affect the course of your life right now?
- How should the two perfect participles (*blessed* and *prepared*) shape your view of God?

While this parable appears to be quite straightforward, there are some significant questions of interpretation. In fact, the *sheep and goats* parable has been a source of controversy among Christians.

First, Jesus seems to be preaching salvation by works. He seems to be saying, *Serve the poor, and you go to heaven. Neglect the poor and you go to hell.* It *sounds* as though theology, faith and creed do not matter one bit. The last judgment of Christ seems based solely on behavior. But Jesus is speaking to people who have already placed their faith in him. The disciples are already saved by God's grace. Matthew has made this clear in his Gospel.¹ Jesus is not teaching that good works save us. He is teaching that good works give evidence of our having been or not having been saved by faith.

[I]n the case of any given individual what matters is whether he has during his earthly life given evidence of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, of a life in harmony with Christ's commandments and example. (Hendrickson, p. 886)

A second interpretive question is that of the identity of *the least of these brothers of mine* (25:40). Who are these *brothers*?

- Some want to interpret *these brothers* as anyone who is poor or oppressed.

¹ Consider, for example 1:21; 5:3-6; 8-9; 11:25-30; 20:28; 26:28. The Jesus of Matthew's Gospel teaches salvation by grace.

Those who see the *gospel* primarily as a call to social action favor this interpretation. They also delight in this passage because theology, belief, and worship don't seem to be a part of what it means to follow Jesus.

- Other interpreters see *these brothers* as the followers of Jesus, or all Christians.

Carson favors this view. He explains,

Certainly the ethical emphasis in this parable must not be diluted; but it is nevertheless essential to identify it a little more carefully. In particular, Jesus' "brothers" are surely His disciples (see also 12:48, 49; 28:10). Therefore the fate of people is dependent on how they respond to Jesus' brothers—to Messiah's people, to Christians—as also in 10:40-42.

There is something more telling yet. The good works performed by the sheep or not performed by the goats, though clearly related to the ultimate destiny of each group, are not stated to be the *cause* of that destiny. Rather, such good works are the *evidence* of who these people really are.

This is proved by the fact that *both* groups are surprised by the verdict! Neither the sheep nor the goats are surprised at the place assigned them, but *at the reason the King gives for the assignments* (25:37-39, 44-45). This means that how the sheep or the goats treated Jesus' brothers was not for the *purpose* of being accepted or rejected by the King—for then they would not have been surprised. The surprise of the sheep, for instance, forbids us from thinking that they acted this way *in order* to gain reward.¹

Certainly the Scriptures have much in them which command God's people to care for the poor, believers or not, so perhaps the difference between the two interpretations of the *least* of Jesus' brothers should not be pressed. Jesus' point, and Matthew's four fold repetition of his point (25:35-36, 38-39, 42-43, 44), shows Jesus' heart for the poor and the disenfranchised.

These statements are both clear and strong. How do they, or should they, shape the way in which you live your life? What do they teach us about the use of our time, money and resources. What do these verses teach us about the Christian and politics? How should these verses inform the way we vote?

What do Jesus' words teach us about a church budget?

¹ Carson, *God With Us*, pp. 149-150 (emphasis is Carson's).

Notice the powerful sins of omission in this passage. Jesus' condemnation of the *goats* is not based on their performance of heinous acts or detestable deeds. To the contrary, they are punished because of their simple neglect of the poor. The only bad thing the goats did was *nothing*.

Jesus sounds like Ezekiel who condemned Israel for the same neglect.

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.
Ezekiel 16:49

Evaluate SBCC. Do we, as a church, voice an appropriate concern for the sins of neglect? Where and when do you hear this voice? Who do you have in your life to remind you of these sins, and to ask you how you are doing in these areas?

The coming judgment of Jesus is prominent, and vivid, in these parables. Consider the imagery Jesus uses.

- 25:30 “And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
- 25:41 Then [the King] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’
- 25:46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Jesus is teaching about heaven and hell. The stakes in this passage are high. Each of the five parables teaches of a final separation. What will it be like for those separated from God?

Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body; the eternal sting of an accusing conscience; the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels; the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised; the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future—all this is misery indeed: it is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold. And yet this picture is nothing compared to the reality. (Ryle, pp. 344-345)

Think back over the five parables we have pondered in Matthew 25. Each is addressed to the disciples of Christ, to those within the visible church. Jesus says in five different ways, *Be Ready!*

Are you ready?

Sermon Notes. . .

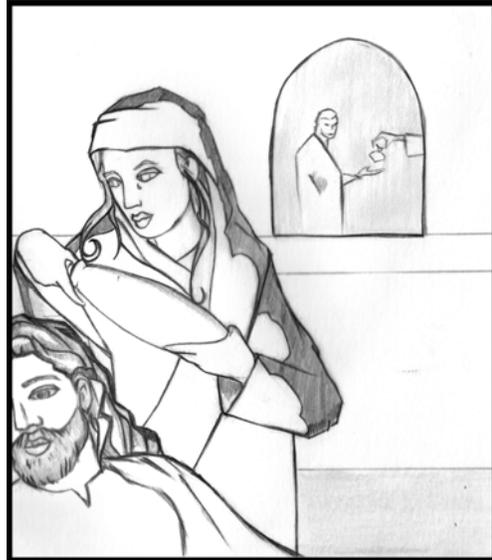
Study Forty

The Beginning of the End

Matthew 26:1-16

Before beginning this lesson, notice where these last two chapters fit into Matthew's overall plan for his book. Look over the chart at the beginning of this study. In this passage we come to the sixth and final section of the first Gospel. This section has a different conclusion than all the others. The first five panels end with a teaching from the lips of Jesus. But this section ends with the story of the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew is making a point. Jesus is still with us! The living Christ is still our teacher. The final punctuation point to Matthew's Gospel (28:19-20) is a call for his disciples to take up Christ's teaching ministry until all nations hear his message.

At the outset of this study take a moment to skim over the last three chapters of the First Gospel. Notice how the final week of Jesus' life grows darker and darker. Make a point-by-point list of the events of these three chapters.



As we open Matthew 26 we come to the beginning of the end of Matthew's story. Notice how 26:1-13 prepares the reader for the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Read this brief passage with the following outline in mind. What comments or questions do you have as you read this passage?

- Jesus announces that the time has come for him to die (26:1-2)
- The religious authorities strategize to kill Jesus (26:3-5)
- A woman prepares Jesus for burial (26:6-13)
- Judas agrees to betray Jesus (26:14-16)

Jesus announces that the time has come for him to die (26:1-2)

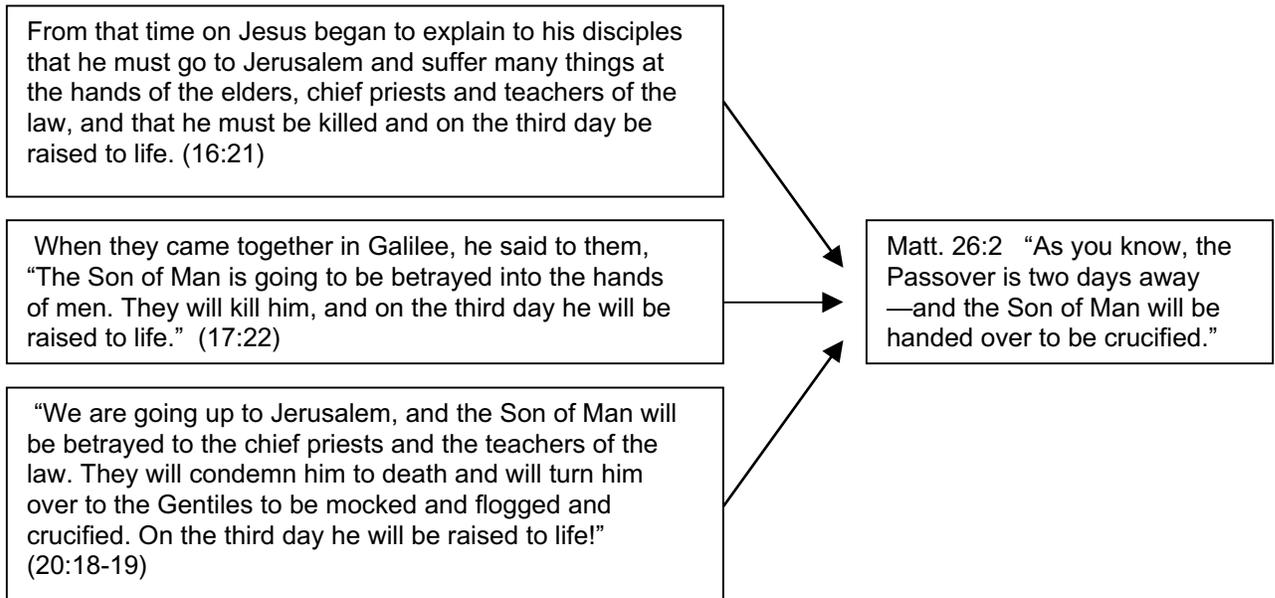
26:1-2 are the equivalent of what is heard at the beginning of the Olympics, *Let the games begin!*

After centuries of preparation, after two or three years of personal ministry characterized by rising predictions about His suffering and death, after unveiling the sweep of the tribulation and hope to come, Jesus declared in effect, “Let the crucial step in the redemptive drama begin!”¹

Even the transitional sentence Matthew favors indicates the end has come. Notice the subtle difference in the way in which Matthew alerts the reader that a new section is beginning (see chart). Each of the previous sections ended with *When Jesus had finished saying these things. . .* (or something similar). But here Matthew writes, *When Jesus had finished saying all theses things* (26:1). Jesus’ teaching ministry is over. All that is left to do is to die. Notice the presentation of the Cross as the supreme work of Jesus. All of his teachings, all of his miracles lead to the cross. It is on the cross that Jesus reconciled sinful men and women to a holy God. Without the cross, Matthew’s story could not properly be called *the gospel*, the good news. One thing that stands out with abundant clarity is that the cross was not an accident. Jesus was anything but a cocky rabbi whose luck ran out. To the contrary, Jesus is in complete control. The cross is his

¹ C. A. Carson, *God With Us*, p. 154.

chosen destiny, the preeminent reason for his ministry. Consider the following verses:



Jesus’ three specific predictions of his death on the cross are now coming to fulfillment. Consider these three prophecies which lead to 26:1-2. In what ways do they become more specific and detailed?

How do you think the original readers of Matthew were affected by these passages predicting the cross? What has come to your mind as you see them printed all together?

Consider two other passages. Why, according to Jesus and according to Peter, does Jesus go to the cross?

- Luke 22:22
- Acts 2:23

The religious authorities strategize to kill Jesus (26:3-5)

26:3-5 Caiaphas is the high priest in Jerusalem who plots with *the chief priests and the elders* to kill Jesus. Jewish readers of Matthew's gospel would not have missed Matthew's point. Caiaphas represented Judaism in its most corrupt state. This high priest was wealthy, powerful and accommodating to Roman authorities¹.

26:5 shows the irony of the plot to murder Jesus. *Let's not kill him during Passover lest the people riot.* A riot would provoke the ire of the Romans who might come and destroy the temple in Jerusalem. So Caiaphas and company plot to destroy the true *temple of God* (see John 2:14-21).

Caiaphas and company want Jesus dead as soon as possible, but they decide to wait at least nine days (2 days until Passover + 7 days of the feast). But Jesus will die ahead of Caiaphas' diabolical schedule. Within the week, when the Passover lambs are being sacrificed, the true Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) will be placed on the cross.

A woman prepares Jesus for burial (26:6-13)

These verses are a *flash-back* in Matthew's account. Jesus and the disciples spent the Sabbath prior to this final week in Bethany, a village east of Jerusalem. They had supper in the home Simon the leper along with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. The anointing of Jesus in Bethany was an event so startling and so significant that Matthew, Mark and John include it in their Gospels. Read these three accounts. Notice the differences in detail.

Matthew 26:6-12

Mark 14:3-9

John 12:1-3

- How do you think you would have reacted to Mary's act?

¹ The high priesthood was to be a lifetime office, but the Romans were in the habit of appointing and deposing high priests with some frequency. Between 37 B.C. and A.D. 67 there were no fewer than twenty-eight high priests. But Caiaphas was high priest from A.D. 15 to 37, a period of eighteen years (his successor lasted only 50 days)! His long tenure can only be an indication of his political skills and his complicity with the Romans.

- How much was the perfume worth?
- Was this a spontaneous act, or was it planned by Mary ahead of time?
- What interpretation does Jesus give of Mary's extravagant act of worship?
- What do you think went through the disciples mind's when they heard this interpretation?

Boice points out the uniqueness of Mary in her anointing of Jesus.

This was not a meaningless act. She was an amazingly perceptive woman, and the only way to appreciate what she did is to recognize that she alone of all the followers of Jesus understood that he was about to give his life for us on the cross. (Boice, vol. 2, p. 552)

Respond to the following quotation.

Genuine worship is the supreme service a Christian can offer to Christ. There is a time for ministering to the poor, the sick, the naked, and the imprisoned. There is a time for witnessing to the lost and seeking to lead them to the Savior. There is a time for discipling new believers and helping them grow in the faith. There is a time for careful study and teaching of God's word. But above all else that the Lord requires of His people is their true worship, without which everything else they may do in His name is empty and powerless. (MacArthur, vol. 3, p. 135)

Are there any parallels to Mary's act of *true worship* in our lives? How can we offer such worship to Christ?

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

Thirty pieces of silver. This is all it took for Judas Iscariot¹, one of Jesus' inner circle of friends, to betray his master. Each of the four gospels includes the story of Judas' betrayal.

What were the motives that induced Judas to betray Jesus? Was it purely money (see John 12:6)? Were Judas' revolutionary dreams shattered when he heard Jesus interpret Mary's anointing as a preparation for burial? We can't be sure. But the story of Judas, if nothing else, teaches us that it is very possible to be very near to Jesus and, in the end, betray him for very little. It is possible to be in the company of people who worship Jesus, and to study the teachings of Jesus, and to read Christian literature and still *betray* Jesus with the same lack of faith found in Judas. Surely there is a call in these verses to worship in the manner of Mary and a warning to flee from the way of Judas and Caiaphas. Let us guard our hearts and minds and offer to Jesus everything we have and are.

Judas betrayed Jesus. What are the ways in which we betray Jesus, or become disloyal to Jesus?

Take time as a homegroup to consider the cross of Christ and respond to Jesus with appropriate worship and praise.

¹ The meaning of *Iscariot* is unclear. It could mean, simply, *the man of Kerioth*, or it could refer to Judas' occupation (*Judas the dyer*). It could also mean *Judas the red-head*, *Judas the carrier of the leather*, or the name could refer to a revolutionary alliance Judas had before becoming a disciple.

Study Forty-One

The Lord's Supper

Matthew 26:17-29

Throughout their history the Jewish calendar was punctuated with annual festivals. The ebb and flow of each year of a Jew's life had a rhythm and cadence that brought to mind the grace of God dramatically poured out on the people of God. All Jewish males were required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year for the three great Mosaic festivals¹.

The Passover Feast celebrated the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. Notice that 26:17 refers to Passover as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Originally these two feasts were separate, but by the time of Jesus the latter term covered both feasts. After the Passover the Jews were to flee Egypt, eating the unleavened bread they had prepared. The Feast of Unleavened Bread reenacted this event.

The Feast of Pentecost (called The Feast of Weeks) celebrated the provision of God at harvest time. Pentecost was the culmination of the Feast of Weeks which began 3 days after Passover. By the time of Jesus Pentecost also celebrated the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.

The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) celebrated the provision God gave his people during Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. Pentecost expressed faithfulness to God at the beginning of the growing season, Tabernacles expressed the same faith and gratitude at the end of the season. Sometimes Tabernacles is called the Feast of Ingathering.



The backdrop of the Lord's Supper is the Passover meal described in Exodus 12. In that chapter the Jews were slaves under Pharaoh in Egypt. On the night of Passover God was going to send one final plague which would provoke Pharaoh to set the Jews free. The Lord himself would take the firstborn male of every Egyptian family. This was God's wrath poured out on a deeply pagan people. The Jews would be spared this calamity when they slaughtered a lamb and put

¹ In addition to these festivals there were *The Day of Atonement* during which the high priest made an annual sacrifice for the people's sins, the *Feast of Dedication* which celebrated the liberation of the Jews from the Greeks in 164 B.C., and the *Feast of Purim* which celebrated God's protection of the Jews from the Persians as recounted in the book of Esther.

some of its blood on their doorposts. The families would then eat the lamb as the Lord *passed over* the homes which were marked with the sacrificial blood.

Every year after this first Passover, the Jews were to reenact this drama.

Read Matthew 26:17-29 with care. Before going on in this study consider the following:

- What surprises did this Passover meal contain for the disciples?
- What do you think the mood of the room was like as the disciples ate?
- Why do you think Matthew includes the story about Jesus predicting his betrayal by Judas? Doesn't this ruin an otherwise beautiful account of the Last Supper?
- What questions do you have after your initial reading of these verses?

Compare Matthew's version of the Last Supper with Mark's and Luke's. How do the details differ in these three accounts? What do we learn in Mark and Luke as opposed to Matthew?

Mark 14:12-31

Luke 22:7-38

In all three accounts the disciples are eating their last Passover meal with Jesus¹. Jerusalem is bustling with pilgrims from all over Israel and the Roman world.

¹ There is a question as to the chronology of the last week of Jesus' life and whether or not the disciples are eating a Passover meal or a supper the night before Passover. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have Jesus and the disciples eating the Passover meal, it seems, on Thursday night (the 15th of Nisan). The Gospel of John, however, appears to place the *Last Supper* the day before

While many recent scholars question his accuracy, the ancient historian Josephus estimates the population of the city bulged to three million people at Passover! Over a quarter of a million lambs would be sacrificed in the temple area. Pilgrims from far and wide are eating a Passover meal within the city limits. Jesus and his disciples join the celebration.

26:17-19 again show Jesus in complete control of his destiny. He has selected the room where they will eat. His predictions of his imminent death have become frequent and unmistakably clear. Mary's extravagant act of worship was unambiguously interpreted as a preparation for Jesus' burial. Surely this gathering of the disciples was a somber one. Later Jesus will direct his betrayer to act in haste (John 13:27). Jesus is not arrested because of an unguarded lapse of concentration. He goes to the cross willingly.

During the Passover meal the disciples were met with two shocking statements from the lips of Jesus.

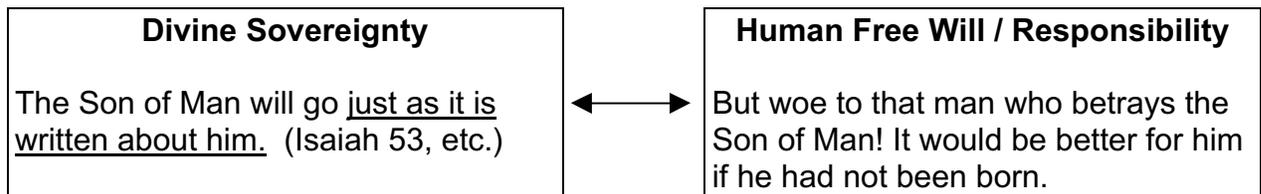
First, Jesus predicts that one of the inner-circle will betray him.

What do the disciples say in response to Jesus' statement in verse 21? Compare Luke 22:23. The disciples, apparently, break into various discussion groups asking, *Who is it???*

the Passover. In John, it seems, Jesus is being crucified at the very moment the 250,000 Passover lambs are being sacrificed in the Temple. So in John, the disciples and Jesus appear to be eating the *Last Supper* the night before Passover. D. A. Carson clarifies. *The Synoptic Gospels clearly indicate that Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover together . . . apparently during the early hours of 15 Nisan (reckoning the beginning of each day at sundown). In that particular year, the Passover ran from about 6:00 p.m. on Thursday to about 6:00 p.m. on Friday. Seven verses in John's Gospel have convinced most scholars that John places the last supper the night before, on Wednesday evening, 14 Nisan (Jn. 13:1, 27; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 36, 42). This reckoning assigns Jesus' crucifixion to Thursday afternoon, at the time of the slaughtering of the Passover lambs at the temple in preparation for the Passover that lay just ahead (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John*, 1986, p. 455). If Jesus was crucified on Thursday afternoon the irony would be rich and very much like John to point it out. The Lamb of God is sacrificed even as thousands of lambs are being killed. Nevertheless, Carson and many other scholars resist this chronology saying, *The solution that carries the fewest difficulties argues that the Synoptic chronology is correct: Jesus and his disciples did indeed eat a Passover meal on Thursday, the beginning of 15 Nisan. John's Gospel, rightly interpreted, does not contradict this chronology in any of the seven verses alleged to do so. . . (Carson, *The Gospel of John*, 1986, p. 457). In his Matthew commentary Carson unpacks the chronology he believes is appropriate. It seems, then, that Jesus' disciples entered the city shortly after noon on Thursday, 14 Nisan, procured the room, took a lamb to the temple court and killed it, roasted it with bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8-9), and made other arrangements for the meal, including the purchase of wine and unleavened bread. Matthew 26:19 explicitly says that they "prepared the Passover." After nightfall on Thursday evening, when it was 15 Nisan, Jesus joined his disciples and they ate the Passover. On these points the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) agree: and this places Jesus' death on Friday, 15 Nisan, probably about 3:00 P.M. (Carson, p. 530)**

26:23 Jesus' answer is foggy because by this point in the meal each disciple would have *dipped his hand into the bowl*. How and when was this prediction of Jesus' fulfilled?

26:24 shows the mystery of God's divine sovereignty (authority) and man's responsibility. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus has been moving toward the cross according to God's plan. Yet, Judas is responsible for his action. *It would be better if Judas had never been born*. Jesus, perhaps, is offering one last gracious chance for Judas to repent with these words. Notice the tension in this verse.



Indeed, this is one of the darkest moments in history. Satan enters Judas and the betrayer leaves the room to do his deed. *And it was night* (John 13:27-30).

The second shocking statement of Jesus comes in 26:26. Jesus leaves the centuries-old script of Passover.

Jesus was supposed to say what the father of his family said every year at this point in the feast,

This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the wilderness.

Instead Jesus says, *Take and eat; this is my body*.

It is almost impossible for us to conceive the astonishment and indeed horror with which this group of Jewish disciples would hear those words for the first time. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of a person is an abomination in almost every culture. To Jews it was utterly beyond the pale. Their amazement knew no bounds that night. (Green, p. 273)

What was Jesus saying with these words? Are these words to be interpreted literally? Or is Jesus saying the bread (and later the wine) merely represent his body and blood? The debate over how to interpret this passage has raged for centuries.

Roman Catholics hold that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus¹. For many reasons this view was rejected by the Protestants during the time of the Reformation.

1. A Jew would never participate in eating real flesh and blood (Deuteronomy 12:23-25).
2. The way in which Jesus, the biblical writers and we ourselves use language does not require an un-natural literal interpretation. We say, *I have a splitting head ache* or *My feet are on fire*. We don't mean the words in a literal sense. Paul said, *That rock was Christ* (1 Corinthians 10:4). He doesn't mean Jesus is a piece of granite. Jesus calls himself a *gate*, a *vine*, the *light*, etc. We know he is not speaking literally.

Some Protestants swing very far to the other extreme and say the Lord's Supper is only a *remembrance*. The Lord's Supper is only a memorial.

These extremes are not our only options. Most Protestants understand the Lord's Supper to include the spiritual presence of Christ.

[This view] holds that Jesus is truly present in the communion service, but that he is present spiritually, not in a physical way. The blessing of the communion service is a real blessing linked to the observance of the sacrament, but it is to be received by faith as are all other spiritual blessings. There is nothing automatic or mechanical about its observance. (Boice, vol. 2., p. 560)

Surely this view is to be preferred. More is at stake in observing this supper than the provoking of our memories.

Respond to the following. How should this inform the attitude with which you approach the Lord's Supper week-by-week in our worship services?

[W]e can say that the communion is far more than a bare memorial of what Jesus did on the cross. It is a means of feeding on him, just as it is a pledge of his return. So, 'this represents my body' is altogether too shallow an interpretation. We have here a great mystery, as mysterious as the parables of Jesus and as the person of Jesus. We shall never plumb its depths. But we need to come with the utmost reverence, gratitude and expectancy to the feast Jesus instituted, to make him as real—no, more real—to his followers than the Passover made the rescue from Egypt real to Jewish worshippers. . . . [The Lord's Supper] brings the Saviour to believing disciples, in all the power and beauty of his sacrificial love. The bread that comes down from heaven is Jesus, and this

¹ This view is called *transubstantiation*.

sacrament brings it before us as nothing else on earth can. (Green, p. 274)

26:27-29 What are we to make of the communion cup?

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

This most likely looks back to Exodus 24:8 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. In Exodus Moses ratifies God's covenant (agreement, contract) with the nation Israel with blood. In our culture we *sign* a contract. In Semitic culture a covenant was *cut*, or made with the shedding of blood.

Centuries later the prophet Jeremiah looked forward to a *new covenant* which would replace the old.

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:31-34

With the communion cup the new covenant has come! In the blood of thousands upon thousands of Passover lambs through the centuries not a single sin was truly forgiven (Hebrews 10:3-4). In the blood of Christ our sins are finally and actually paid for. God will *remember our sins no more!*

Santa Barbara Community Church celebrates the Lord's Supper almost every Sunday.

- What are the benefits and possible dangers of such frequency?
- How do you prepare to take the Lord's Supper? Share your answers with one another in order to glean ideas to enrich your practice of taking the Lord's Supper.

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. What does Paul's teaching regarding the Lord's Supper add to our understanding of this celebration?

John's Gospel has no record of the Lord's Supper. Instead, John includes a sermon-discussion between Jesus and the Jews after the feeding of the 5,000. Here Jesus claims to be the *bread of life* (John 6:48).

Read John 6:43-59. To eat this *bread* and to drink this *blood* is to be forever satisfied and to live forever!

Ponder this passage as a homegroup. Pray over these words and give thanks. Celebrate the Lord's Supper as you worship. Proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Forty-Two

Gethsemane

Matthew 26:30-46



The story of the Last Supper merges into the Gethsemane prayer and then the arrest and trial of Jesus. We are not sure when the meeting in the Upper-Room ended. What is clear is that Jesus deliberately places himself in a position of vulnerability. As we have seen, Jerusalem was teeming with visitors during Passover. Only the wealthy or the well-connected could find accommodations within the city walls. It appears that Jesus and the disciples were camping out on the Mount of Olives, about one mile from the Temple area. Surely Judas would look for Jesus there. The irony of the walk from Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley to

Gethsemane, is bitter. As the disciples walked down the steps from Jerusalem, they would have passed a conduit carved into the earth for the purpose of carrying the blood of the 250,000 lambs sacrificed at Passover. Here the Lamb of God (John 1:29) would pass, pausing, perhaps, to see and smell the blood of thousands of sacrificial lambs as he prepared himself to be slaughtered for the sins of humanity.

This dark night grows darker still as Jesus and his disciples make their way out of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane. Charles H. Spurgeon said of this passage,

Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language. (cited in Boice, vol. 2, p. 566)

Take a moment and prepare yourself to read God's word. Enter in to the darkness of this night. Read these 17 verses acknowledging they contain one of the most somber episodes in Scripture. Make a list of thoughts, lessons, questions and emotions that these verses provoke. Keep the following outline in mind as you read.

- 26:30 A Proclamation of Victory
- 26:31-35 The Prediction of Denial
- 26:36-44 Three Prayers for Deliverance
- 26:45-46 The Pursuit of the Persecutors

26:30 A Proclamation of Victory

Before the disciples leave the Upper Room they sing! How utterly incongruous this seems. After predicting his betrayal by Judas, and predicting his imminent crucifixion, the disciples sing! What song did they sing? More than likely they were singing what every other Jew in Jerusalem was singing. At the conclusion of Passover the Jews sang what is called the *Hallel* (the praise) which consist of Psalms 114-118. Think of the victory these songs proclaimed!

In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free.
The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.
All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.
I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.
The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done
this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success¹.

26:31-35 The Prediction of Denial

It was not only Judas who would deny Jesus. Here Jesus predicts that each of the disciples will abandon him.

¹ Psalm 118:5-10, 21-25.

26:31 The Greek word for *fall away* is *skandalizô* from which we get our word *scandal*. The disciples were *scandalized* because of Jesus. An arrested Messiah on trial is too much for the disciples to handle so they flee.

What is it about Jesus, his teaching or his person, that makes him difficult to follow? How does this passage give comfort?

What is the *scandal* of Jesus for you? Give an example in your life of an area where you have had difficulty following Jesus.

26:33 Here again we meet Peter the impetuous, self-confident disciple who now borders on arrogance with his denial of denial. *Even though every else might disown you. . . I won't. I'll even die with you.* What is Peter saying? *I'll make it Lord, I'm strong enough to go the distance.* Notice Peter's pride. He claims to be stronger than the other 10 disciples, able to endure even martyrdom for the sake of Jesus¹.

What can you learn about the Christian life from Peter's self-assured confidence which was closely followed by his miserable failure?

26:36-44 Three Prayers for Deliverance

In Matthew 17 we read of the transfiguration of Jesus. There he took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain and was *transfigured before them*. The three disciples of the inner circle were sleeping and awoke to see something of the splendor of God himself. This was the supreme moment of the revelation of the deity of Jesus.

In the garden of Gethsemane we see the most intimate glimpse of the humanity of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus has been marching confidently and calmly toward the cross². Now, on the night of his arrest he is *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. Jesus wants out. *My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.*

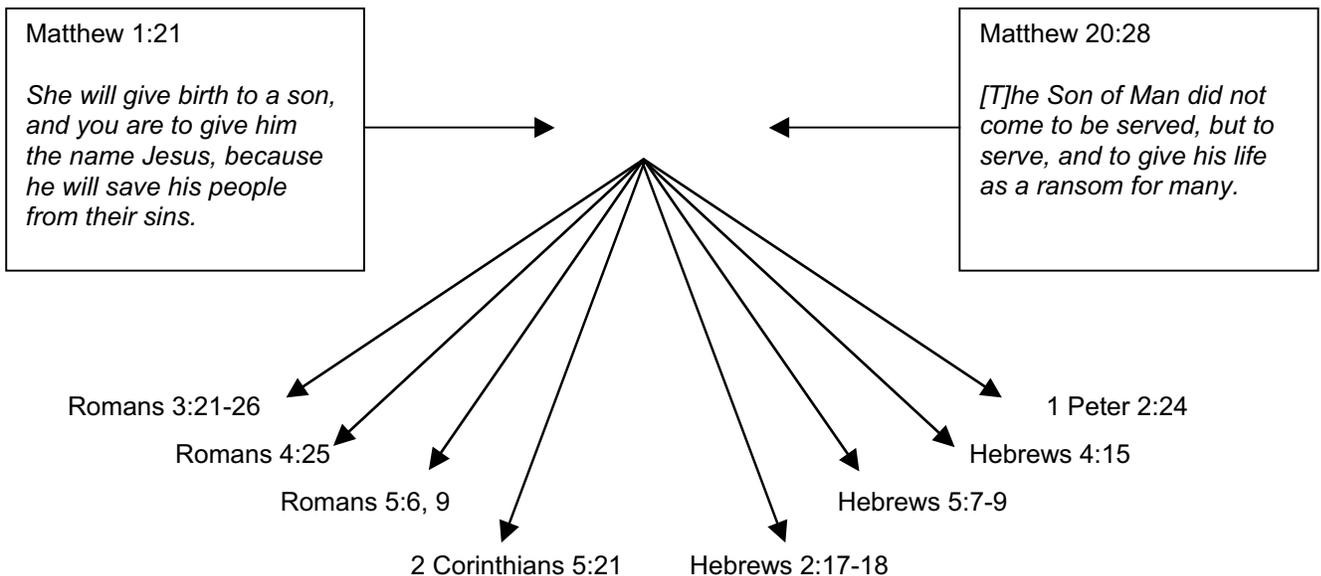
¹ Ten disciples? Yes, by this point in the evening Judas has left to group to betray Jesus (see John 13:30).

² See 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2.

Why? Why would Jesus shudder in prayer as he faces the cross? Much more is at stake than an excruciating execution. Tens of thousands of condemned men faced the punishment of the cross without expressing such fear and trembling.

In addition to the rejections were the blatant injustices He would face. The very Creator of justice would Himself be subjected to the ultimate injustice of mankind. He would be vilified and defrauded in the petty courts of sinful, spiteful, lying men—and that in the name of God. The One whom angels praise and with whom God the Father is well pleased would be cursed and mocked by the vile and wicked multitudes, many of whom had a few days earlier sung His praises and attempted to make Him their king. Jesus confronted a loneliness that no other man could experience. The Son of God who communed with the Father and the Holy Spirit and with all the holy angels of heaven, would find Himself forsaken by His Father as He became sin. He would be so identified with iniquity that the hosts of heaven would have to turn their backs on Him. And the same sin that repulsed them repulsed Him, the sinless, holy, pure and undefiled son of righteousness. (MacArthur, vol. 3, p. 171)

In Gethsemane Jesus grapples with the cosmic dimensions of his mission. He came to bear the sins of the world. As Jesus prays he feels the weight of these sins. Jesus role as sin-bearer becomes the central theme of the New Testament and is pondered by Paul, Peter and the writer of Hebrews. Consider the following:



Jesus prays that the *cup* would be taken from him. The word *cup* in the Old Testament is generally associated with the wrath of God. Why does Jesus agonize so deeply? Because the wrath of God we deserve was poured out on Jesus. Consider the following verses. How do they help you gain a deeper appreciation for the way in which Jesus is praying?

- Psalm 75:8
- Isaiah 51:22
- Jeremiah 25:15-16
- Ezekiel 23:31-34

James Boice writes of this passage,

Jesus drank from the cup of God's wrath so we might never have to drink it. In place of that cup we have the communion cup of the new covenant in Christ's blood. (Boice, vol. 2, p. 567)

Respond to the following. Do you agree? Why?

The hard core of the Passion Story unfolds between two geographical points: Gethsemane and Golgotha. Jesus suffering seems almost as profound here on the Gethsemane side in the Cry of the Cup (26:39: "My Father, if it is at all possible, take [it] away") as it does on the Golgotha side in the Cry of Dereliction (27:46, "My God, my God, why. . . ?"). (Brunner, vol. 2., p. 977)

Surely Jesus serves as a model of earnest praying in these verses. What are the lessons we can learn about prayer from these verses? You should be able to find at least three.

Notice the time Jesus spends in prayer. He doesn't simply say, *If possible let me out of this*. . . Read these verses carefully. How much time does Jesus spend in prayer?

Notice the specific content of Jesus' prayer. The Lord is grappling with finding an alternative to the cross (much like the temptations in the wilderness in 4:1-11).

Matthew 26:39	Mark 14:36
Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."	"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

As Jesus prays he submits his will to the father.

Three times Jesus asked if he might be excused from his assignment. But three times he added, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." As hard as it was, his Father's will became Jesus' will too. Sometimes the only way for a cup to pass is to drink it to the dregs. Fully confident of God's power ("everything is possible for you") and love ("Abba, Father"), Jesus willingly submitted to his wisdom¹.

Sometimes prayer changes not the things we pray for, but rather it changes us. Give an example, if possible, when your will has been shaped by your prayer?

26:45-46 The Pursuit of the Persecutors

26:46 Notice what appears to be a change in nerve for Jesus. While in prayer he is sorrowful to the point of death. Luke tells us Jesus' intensity in prayer was such that he sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44). But at the end of this story, and throughout his trials, Jesus seems unflinchingly resolute. *Rise, let us go! Here*

¹ The NIV *Prayer Devotional Bible* 2004, p. 1213.

comes my betrayer!, hardly sounds like the agonized prayer of Jesus. How would you explain this change in Jesus' countenance?

Jesus agonizes over what lies before him. And then he seems to come through the agony into acceptance. Have you had a similar experience as you have wrestled in prayer? Share this with your group.

Matthew's account of Jesus in Gethsemane, rightly interpreted should lead us to worship. This is not a passage to "figure out," or to "interpret" so much as it is a text to pray through. New Testament scholar D. A. Carson says of this section,

As his death was unique, so also was his anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship. (Carson, p. 543)

Spend some time as a homegroup in *hushed worship*. Read this passage aloud and let it lead you into prayer. Give glory and praise to the one who endured the cross in order to make you fit to stand in his presence.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Forty-Three

Arrest and Trial!

Matthew 26:47-68; 27:11-26

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

Isaiah 53:5-8



With stunning pace, Jesus is arrested, tried and condemned in these verses. The God who became flesh and was born in Bethlehem is now tried on the charge of blasphemy. The accusers in this drama are unprepared, befuddled and desperate to be rid of Jesus. On the other hand, the accused approaches his captors with complete calm. He is in control. This is the reason for which he came (John 12:27).

Before going on in this study read these verses. The first section (26:47-68) contains the account of Jesus' arrest and of his Jewish trial. The second section

¹ Judas' betrayal on the left in the garden. (note the waiting serpent) An olive press is in the middle symbolizing Isaiah 53.10 and the Lord's anointing. He stands before Pilate on the right. Veritas refers to Pilate's philosophy *What is Truth?* and the spandrel crowns to Pilate's question *Are you a King?*

ARREST AND TRIAL!

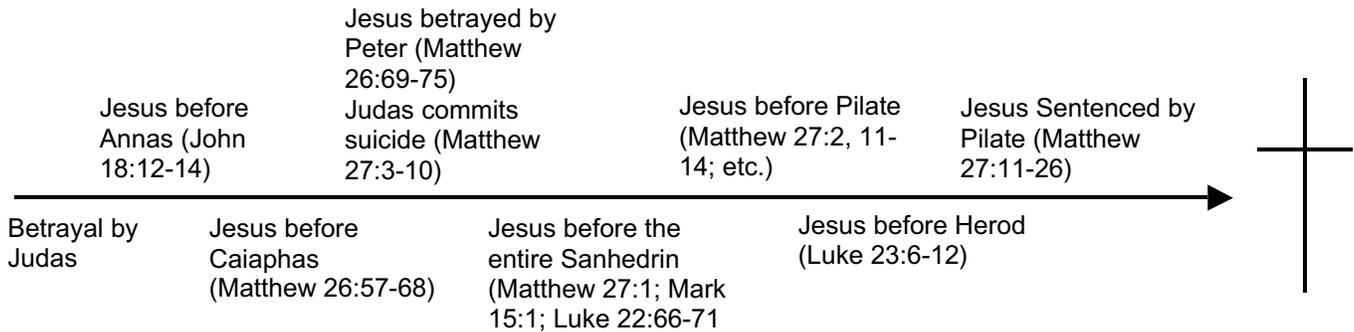
(27:11-26) gives a report of his Roman trial. Matthew’s account is complemented by the other Gospel writers. What initial impressions do you have as you read?

None of the Gospels offer a complete account of Jesus’ two trials. Keep the following chart in mind as you read.

From Gethsemane to Golgotha

The Jewish Trial

The Roman Trial



26:47-56 The Arrest of Jesus

These verses record an incident we might think is unnecessary. Why was it difficult for the authorities to locate Jesus? How could it be that the authorities didn't know what Jesus looked like? In a pre-photographic age the necessity of Judas' kiss is quite natural. Jesus' detractors¹ would have only a murky understanding of what Jesus looked like. Jerusalem is teeming with thousands of Jews staying in every possible nook and cranny. A betrayer is essential to the arrest of Jesus.

The situation is more volatile than we might think. Armed soldiers come for Jesus. The disciples ask if they should draw their swords (Luke 22:49). Peter, of course, doesn't wait for an answer and goes for the head of the first man he sees.

26:51-54 is Matthew's rendition of a story recorded in all four Gospels.

- Why do you think the Gospel writers felt Peter's aggression was important? How does Peter's use of the sword fit into what Jesus has said earlier in the evening?
- Peter, apparently, risks arrest and imprisonment for his act of bravery. How do you think this affected his self-confidence?
- What happens when Jesus identifies himself to the authorities (see John 18:6)?
- What did Jesus do immediately after Peter's whack with the sword (see Luke 22:51)?

¹ John 18:3, 12 imply that Roman soldiers are among those coming to find Jesus along with the Temple police.

- What lesson(s) should we learn about the church and the use of force from Jesus' response to Peter's act? Compare Luke 22:51 and John 18:11.

26:57-68 The Jewish Trial

Look over these verses again. Notice the plot and the sub-plot. Caiaphas is desperate to have Jesus crucified. But Matthew includes the detail about Peter (26:58) following *at a distance*.

The two trials of Jesus, Jewish and Roman, are fraught with illegalities¹ and loaded with ironies.

What is the charge which finally sticks (26:61)? Why would this be such a volatile claim? Consider 27:63-64. Commentators point out that the phrase *in three days* occurs in Matthew, Mark and John in slightly different contexts to point to his death and resurrection (see for example John 2:19-21).

A man as shrewd as Caiaphas could hardly have been unaware of what Jesus' enigmatic saying implied. He must have understood it perfectly, realizing that it was a claim to divinity, even though it was not in a form sufficiently clear to secure a formal condemnation. (Boice, vol. 2, p. 585)

26:62-63 Jesus remains silent before his two accusers.

The fate of the world hung in the silence before that reply. If Jesus said 'No', he would walk out of that trial a free man. If he said 'Yes', he signed his own death warrant. Which was it to be? Could he face the bitter cup that he was agonizing over in the Garden? (Green, p. 283)

Caiaphas plays his last card and applies a legal prerogative called *the oath of testimony* whereby a prisoner could be forced to testify².

¹ Many illegalities took place in Christ's trial, among them the arrest and trial by night, the use of a traitor to identify and secure Jesus, the absence of any formal charge, the rushed one-day duration of the trial, the intervention of the high priest in the proceedings, the lack of a defense, and the unanimous verdict. (Boice, vol. 2, p. 583). On the other hand, there was the pretense of legality. Note the presence of two witnesses (required by Jewish law) in 26:61.

² Though in Jesus' case this *oath of testimony* was illegal because defendants couldn't be compelled to testify against themselves in capital cases.

Jesus gives two answers to Caiaphas' final question. First he says, simply, Yes. Second, he says the one on trial will become the judge. He refers to a passage from Daniel and applies it to himself.

[T]here before me was one like a son of man (Jesus), coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days (a reference to God the Father) and was led into his presence. He (Jesus) was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14, (parentheses added)

26:65-66 Caiaphas did not miss the point of Jesus reference to these verses.

27:11-26 The Roman Trial

A Jewish trial was not sufficient to put Jesus to death¹. The Romans reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves and the governor alone.

Pilate is the governor of Judah and is seen in the Gospels to be a leader who knows what is right yet lacks the courage of his convictions. This is almost surprising because Pilate was a ruthless leader who was generally hated by the Jews².

On the one hand, Pilate knows Jesus is innocent and declares him so three times . On the other hand, Pilate has been in some trouble with the Roman Emperor Tiberias. He fears losing his position of power and prestige. When we compare all the Gospel accounts of the Roman trial we find Pilate making five attempts to set Jesus free without provoking the crowds.

- He declares Jesus' innocence under Roman law (John 18:38; 19:4, 6).

¹ Jews lost the prerogative of capital punishment only about forty years before this time. One might ask, *What about Stephen in Acts 7? Wasn't he put to death without Roman sanction?* Yes, but Stephen's death was a result of mob violence. He was murdered. The Jews want to end the popularity of Jesus. A crucifixion would do the job because everyone who died on a cross was understood to be under Yahweh's curse Deut. 21:22-23 reads, *If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.*

² Pilate seemed to enjoy being the sixth procurator of Judea (normally this dry outpost would be shunned as a place of service). He delighted in offending the Jews. Josephus tells us that Pilate, upon becoming governor, brought Roman culture to Jerusalem. Later he hung golden shields inscribed with Roman deities inside the temple. Pilate used temple tax to build an aqueduct. Luke 13:1 mentions a horrible incident where, evidently, Jews were killed in the temple while offering sacrifices. We can suppose that the Jews offered frequent complaints to Tiberias and that the emperor was beginning to listen. By the time of Jesus' trial Pilate fears he will lose his job.

- He sends Jesus to Herod upon learning that Jesus was from Galilee and therefore was under Herod's jurisdiction (Luke 23:6-12).
- He offers to punish, but not kill Jesus (Luke 23:16, 22).
- He has Jesus flogged in hopes of provoking the people's mercy (John 19:1-5).
- He asks the people to choose between Jesus and Barabbas¹ as the one to be released over Passover (Matthew 27:20-26).

Re-read this section in Matthew.

- Who is in control of the proceedings?
- Why do you think Pilate is impressed with Jesus?
- What do you think of Jesus' style as a defendant (throughout all four gospels)? In what ways does he surprise you?

27:15ff. *Barabbas* was probably not this criminal's name. *Barabbas* means, simply, *son of the father*. Some ancient manuscripts tell us his name was actually *Jesus*! Michael Green, who is attracted to view that Barabbas's name was in fact *Jesus* writes,

Here stood two sons of the father; two men called Jesus ('God to the rescue'). One pillaged and killed. The other loved and suffered. People were called to choose between those two ideals, and still are. On that Good Friday, the one ended up on the cross intended for the other, and the guilty man walked away free. An amazing picture of what the cross of Christ really means! Jesus took Barabbas' place. He took ours, too. (Green, p. 291)

¹ The inclusion of Barabbas in the story is deeply ironic. John tells us that Barabbas was an insurrectionist, the very thing Pilate was afraid of and the charge against Jesus in Luke 23:2.

What words would you use to describe what this means to you personally?

How would you explain Christ's substitutionary death on the cross to a non-believer?

27:26 says that Pilate *had Jesus flogged*. Jewish flogging was restricted to 39 lashes but the Roman version of this punishment continued as long as the soldiers wished. Flogging was conducted with a whip which had pieces of bone and lead embedded in its leather thongs. The prisoners bones would often be exposed after the soldiers were finished. The punishment was so severe that sometimes it resulted in death.

Matthew's version of the Roman trial ends with Pilate washing his hands of his guilt and the crowds taking full responsibility for what they were doing. In the end, of course, Pilate was guilty, the crowds were guilty and so are we. It was their sins, and ours, which sent Jesus to the cross.

[H]e was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. Our response should be grateful praise.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Forty-Four Peter and Judas Matthew 26:69—27:10



Sandwiched in the middle of the two trials of Jesus are the stories of two betrayals. It is as if Matthew wants to personalize the trials of Jesus. The Jews and the Romans are denying Jesus by putting him to death. But each individual must decide what to do with Jesus too. Peter and Judas betray Jesus and grapple with the consequences. One finds forgiveness and the other finds death. Matthew seems to be asking the reader, *Which one are you like? Are you Peter or are you Judas?*

Read these verses making note of anything which comes to mind as you read. What surprises do you find in these verses? Are there any confusing details?

26:69-75 Peter's Three Denials

Look carefully at the three denials. Specifically, how does Peter deny Jesus? Do these denials become stronger or weaker as the evening progresses?

- 26:69-70
- 26:72
- 26:74

One commentator suggests that Peter took three steps toward denying Christ before he even entered the courtyard of the high priest. These steps were,

- Prideful boasting (26:33)
- Insubordination and defiance (26:35, see Mark 14:31)
- Prayerless self-confidence

Furthermore, Peter allowed himself to go where he shouldn't have gone. Jesus made provision for the disciples upon his arrest (John 18:8). Peter shouldn't have been in this vulnerable position.

Which of these steps are you most prone to taking when you deny or fail to obey Jesus?

The second denial is made with an oath. The stakes are getting higher.

A Jewish oath was always assumed to be made in God's presence, whether or not His name was invoked. In effect, therefore, Peter called God as a witness to his lie. Angry, frustrated, embarrassed, trapped, and frightened, Peter desperately tried to hide his identity and especially his association with Jesus. (MacArthur, vol. 3, p. 217)

The third denial (26:74) shows Peter's frustration. He is identified by his Galilean accent. The Greek text omits the words *on himself* in verse 74. It is possible that Peter called down curses on Jesus to prove his disloyalty¹.

And here is Peter, chief apostle in the church, denying Jesus—and not just in front of anyone, but in front of “everybody” present; and denying not just on any occasion, but in the hour of Jesus' trial' and denying not just once, inadvertently, but three times deliberately and with increasing emphasis. Total undependability. (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 1015)

Perhaps Peter remembered Jesus' words,

¹ Later Christians were required to curse Jesus to avoid persecution (see Green, p. 285).

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven¹. (10:32-33)

Peter's weeping was bitter indeed. But it wasn't final. Peter's remorse is genuine. *Blessed are those who mourn*. . . The risen Lord reinstates Peter (John 21:15ff.) and used Peter in mighty ways to lead the early church. Peter fell, but he didn't fall away.

Describe a time when you fell, but did not fall away.

Perhaps the most astonishing part of this story is that it probably came from Peter himself. Most New Testament scholars believe that the Mark was the earliest Gospel writer. The third century historian Eusebius tells us that Mark *was the interpreter of Peter*. It is supposed that Peter told Mark the details of his time with Jesus. Mark then composed his Gospel from the notes he took as Peter reminisced. If this reconstruction is correct then Peter would have been the one to reveal his own sordid deeds for the world to see. Such is the mark of true repentance. The penitent can dare to be a forgiven sinner.

- What encouragement can you find for your own Christian life from this story?
- What does this story teach you about failure and restoration in relation to God?

27:1-10 The Bitter End of Judas

Read these 10 verses.

- What contrasts / similarities do you see between Judas and Peter?

¹ Both in 10:33 and 26:70 Matthew uses the preposition *emprosthen*, *everybody* (*them all* in the NIV). This is an unusual Greek word which may mean that Matthew wants the reader to notice the contrast.

- What provokes Judas' remorse?

Matthew is the only Gospel writer to include the story of Judas' suicide in his story, though it does come up again in Acts 1:16-19. Compare these two versions of the story. Where are they similar? Where do they differ?

Why does Judas commit suicide? His guilt must have been unlike anything any of us have ever experienced. After walking with Jesus for three years, after seeing Jesus' miracles, eating Jesus' bread and becoming one of Jesus' best friends, Judas sold out for 30 pieces of silver. He has betrayed the only sinless man ever to live. His heart is hard even as his guilt is enormous. Eschewing true repentance, Judas is left only with snuffing out his own life.

One obvious lesson from these verses is that it is very possible to feel deep remorse without truly repenting.

- Give an example of this from your own life. Think of a time when you felt *sorry*, but did not change your behavior. If possible share this with your homegroup.
- What is the difference between *remorse*, *regret*, and *repentance*?
- What is Judas trying to do when he attempts to give back the money to the chief priests? Consider the following.

Matthew seems to contrast Peter's *broken* heart (which is a good biblical sign, see The First Beatitude, 5:3) with Judas's *despairing* one (which is a bad biblical sign, recall the Old Testament Saul, 1 Sam 31). The difference between a broken heart and a despairing one may be that a broken heart longs for divine forgiveness while a despairing one think only of what it can do. Both hearts hit bottom, but one realizes its

powerlessness and cries; the other tries a half-dozen remedies. (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 1020)

How can we prepare our *soul* so that it fails after the manner of Peter and not after the manner of Judas?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Forty-Five Crucified Matthew 27:27-44

Simultaneously the crucifixion of Jesus is the climax and the nadir of history. The death of Jesus on the cross is the crowning moment of God's redemptive history promised after sin entered the world (Genesis 3:14-15). This is the moment of God's glory (John 12:27-28). On the cross Jesus reconciled sinful humanity to a holy God. But, simultaneously, the cross is also the nadir, the low point, of human existence. Every other act of wickedness in history pales in comparison to the cross.

David Thomas, a 19th century commentator understands the cross as the supreme manifestation of wickedness.



[For thousands of] years wickedness had been growing. It had wrought deeds of impiety and crime that had wrung the ages with agony, and often roused the justice of the universe to roll her fiery thunderbolts of retribution through the world. But now it had grown to full maturity; it stands around this cross in such gigantic proportions as had never been seen before; it works an enormity before which the mightiest of its past exploits dwindle into insignificance, and pale into dimness. It crucifies the Lord of life and glory².

After the 2004 film *The Passion of Christ* was released, audiences around the world became aware of the horror of death on a cross. There was nothing sentimental about Jesus' mode of execution. The earliest Christians would have been either amused or offended had they seen our jewelry and tattoos which see the cross as a decorative adornment.

¹ Judgment passed, Jesus is given to be crucified. God's wrath begins to pour out. Note the cup in the center, and the judgment fires from clouds in the spandrels. Soldiers mock Jesus on the left giving him a crown of thorns, a red robe, and a staff. Jesus carries his cross to Golgotha. Simon of Cyrene helps.

² *The Gospel of Matthew*, reprinted 1979, p. 536.

In our society we debate the morality and merit of capital punishment. And when we do put a condemned man or woman to death we attempt to make the killing as painless as possible. Crucifixion had the opposite goal. Crucifixion was invented by the Persians, honed by the Carthaginians, further developed and popularized by the Romans¹. Cicero called it *the cruelest and foulest of punishments*.

The unnatural position, growing thirst, exposure to the weather, some loss of blood and impaired breathing contributed to bring about a lingering and painful death. The tension on the arms prevented normal breathing, which caused the lungs to slowly fill with moisture. The victim drowned slowly by internal accumulation of fluid. The action of the heart was seriously affected. Frequently a crucified man might live as long as thirty-six hours, or even longer in an increasing agony, unless by exhaustion or dementia he finally lapsed into unconsciousness. Crucifixion was probably the most diabolical form of death ever invented².

But for a Jew crucifixion held the added revulsion of signifying a separation from God. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 clearly states that everyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. Such was the indignity to which Jesus subjected himself.

After Pilate's verdict, and the soldier's mock coronation, Jesus had to carry the horizontal cross bar (*patibulum*) through the streets of Jerusalem. (The Romans understood the value of a spectacle in deterring future crimes.) When he reached *The Place of the Skull*³ Jesus would have been completely stripped and nailed to the cross beam. A rope was probably used to hoist his body up the vertical stake which was left permanently in the ground. This rope would be tied behind Jesus' back to prevent his slumping forward as he weakened. His legs would be nailed sideways. A peg may have been present to sit upon (which would only serve to prolong the victim's agony). It is no wonder that years later the Apostle Paul would marvel, *He humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross*. (Phil. 2:8)

Read Mathew 27:27-66. This is Matthew's account of the last hours of Jesus' life. We will spend the next two weeks pondering these events as a church. Be sure to let the story stand on its own. Let us beware lest we *intellectualize* the crucifixion and miss its greatness. What impact does this story have on you? How does this story move your emotions?

¹ The cross was so offensive that Roman citizens were exempt from enduring it regardless of their crimes.

² Merrill Tenney, John: *The Gospel of Belief*, 1948, p. 181.

³ Matthew notes that this place is called *Golgotha* which is its Aramaic name. When translated into Latin *skull* becomes *calvaria* from which we get the word *Calvary*.

We can see our passage falling into two distinct sections.

27:27-32 The Preparation for Crucifixion

Jesus has already been flogged (27:26). He is, possibly, near to death because of this savage beating. Now the *whole company*¹ of soldiers mock him as a pseudo-king. *You think you are king? Ha. We'll beat you with your own scepter!* Matthew doesn't say so, but surely he has in mind Jesus' fulfillment of Isaiah 53:8.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

Compare 27:27-30 with John's description of the triumphant Christ who will return in glory and power (Revelation 19:11-16). How many parallels can you find between these two passages?

What hints does Matthew give of the coming, glorious Christ in the following verses (27:45-54)?

How do these verses affect your faith?

¹ Matthew refers to a Roman *cohort* which consisted of 600 soldiers.

27:33-44 The Crucifixion

Read Matthew's description of the crucifixion again. Consider the following details of this account.

1. 27:34 Wine mixed with gall.

Jesus refuses the shelter of a pain-killing drink. He wants to feel the full force of his suffering for sin. Each of the four Gospels mention some sort of libation being offered to Jesus. Actually there were two offers for Jesus to relieve his pain through a drug. The soldiers give Jesus wine-vinegar while he is on the cross (Luke 23:36; John 19:28-30). But Matthew and Mark wine and gall is offered seemingly before the actual crucifixion. There is an obvious fulfillment of Psalm 69:20-21 in this passage.

2. 27:35 Gambling for Jesus' clothes.

Mark tells us the hour is 9:00 A.M. The soldiers get their reward, the clothes of the condemned. John sees the casting of lots as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (John 19:23-24 = Psalm 22:18).

3. 27:37 The *titulus* proclaiming Jesus' crime.

When a man was crucified his crime was written on a *titulus*, a plaque, which was placed at the top of the cross so that those passing by could see why this person was condemned. When we compare the four Gospels we learn that the full inscription was probably *This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. It was written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew (John 19:19-20).

The irony of 27:37 is that Pilate wants to offend the Jews who he believes are asking for an innocent man to be executed. But in his desire to offend he proclaims the truth. *This is Jesus, The King of the Jews* is the equivalent of *This is the Messiah*.

Notice what Paul does with this image. Read Colossians 2:13-15. How does this help shape your understanding of the cross?

4. 27:38, 44 The company of robbers.

We ought not think of these two as petty thieves. More than likely they were murders and insurrectionists. These were, in two words, *bad men*. Was the third

cross, occupied by Jesus, intended for Barabbas? We can't be sure, but it seems likely.

Luke records an amazing incident during the crucifixion (Luke 23:39-43). Read this and ponder its meaning. What does this tell you about the forgiveness and salvation?

5. 27:39-40 The mocking crowd.

The unwitting crowd fulfills Psalm 22:7.

6. 27:41-43 The mocking religious authorities.

The religious leaders fulfill Psalm 22:8.

Notice the comment made by the chief priests. What is the irony in their taunt?

Jesus is on the cross to bear the sins of the world. He is on the cross to bear your sins.

Read the following passages aloud as a homegroup. Ponder the significance of the passion (suffering) of Christ. Worship him together.

- 1 Peter 2:24
- 1 Peter 3:18
- 2 Corinthians 5:21

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Forty-Six

Darkness at Noon

Matthew 27:45-66



The cross is the dead center of the Christian life. The cross is the focus of evangelical preaching, the inspiration for Christian devotion and the motivation for life-transforming mission¹. Paul exults in the cross calling it the *power of God* (1 Corinthians 1:18). It is the object of Paul's boasting (Galatians 6:14) and the means of unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:16). Peter says the cross was our supreme example for life (1 Peter 2:21) and the means of our spiritual healing (1 Peter 2:24). John declares the worthiness of

Jesus to preside over history because he was *slain* on the cross (Revelation 5:9). Indeed, the portrait of the coming Christ is a picture of a crucified messiah—his robe is dipped in blood—who rules and reigns (Revelation 19:13).

The witness to the cross the cross through the centuries has been no less than exuberant.

- Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria in the 4th century said Jesus *became incarnate for our sakes, so that he might offer himself to the Father in our place, and redeem us through his offering and sacrifice.*
- Augustine said *By his death. . . he purged, abolished, and extinguished whatever guilt there was. . .*
- Charles Simeon, an 18th century preacher in Cambridge saw the Christian life as *the religion of a sinner at the foot of the cross.*
- George Whitefield, the 18th century evangelist often signed his letters, *Forget not a bleeding God.*
- G. Cambell Morgan, a preacher in London early in the 20th century said, *every living experience of Christianity begins at the cross. [The cross is] the fulcrum of the spiritual life.*

¹ See Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 2001, p. 21.

- P. T. Forsyth, the 20th century preacher and writer said, *Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there. . . You do not understand Christ till you understand the cross*¹.

Read Matthew 27:45-66. Make a list of Matthew's concerns. What does he want the reader to know and understand from these verses?

Our passage for this study is easily divided into two sections: 27:45-55 concerns the actual crucifixion of Jesus, while 27:56-66 describes the burial of Jesus.

1. 27:45-55 The Crucifixion of Jesus

Students of Matthew's account of Jesus' death often point to five miracles found in verses 45-56. Before reading on in this study, see if you can find each of these miracles.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

27:45 Darkness at Noon

Matthew is careful to give us the timing during the passion of Christ. The *sixth hour* is noon. From 12:00 to 3:00 the sun miraculously holds back its light.

¹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, 1909, pp. 44-45.

Notice that Matthew says the darkness covered the *land*, and not the *earth*. This is a sign for Israel. The Jews have rejected their messiah. Darkness prevails¹.

What is the theological point behind the three hours of darkness? Consider the following. How would Jewish readers, familiar with the Old Testament have understood this miracle?

- Isaiah 5:30
- Isaiah 13:10-11
- Joel 2:10
- Amos 8:9-10
- Zephaniah 1:14-15

One feature which is striking about Matthew's account is the utter silence of Jesus. In fact, when we compare all four Gospels Jesus only interrupts the silence three times.

- Luke 23:34
- Luke 23:43
- John 19:26-27

Boice ponders these silent, dark hours on the cross.

What happened during those three hours of darkness? We know the answer. During those hours the Son of God took the burden of our sins on himself, was punished for them in our place, and experienced such terrible alienation from his Father that he cried out at the end of that dark period, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 46). The darkness veiled the anguish of the Son of God while he was bearing the punishment for our sins, because it was not right for human eyes to look on him in his suffering. (Boice, vol. 2, p. 623)

¹ Some commentators seek to find a plausible explanation of this phenomena from the possibilities of the natural world. We would do better to go with Carson who writes, *It is futile to argue whether the darkness was caused by an eclipse of three hours (!) or by atmospheric conditions caused by a sirocco or something else, not because it did not happen, but because we do not know how it happened, anymore than we know how Jesus walked on the water or multiplied the loaves.* (Carson, p. 578)

What are we to make of the cry of Jesus? In what sense was Jesus *forsaken* by the Father? Consider the following:

- Isaiah 53:5
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 3:13

27:50 Notice the sovereign Jesus. He came to give his life as a *ransom for many* (20:28) and now chooses the moment of his death.

27:51 The Torn Curtain

One prominent feature of Jewish worship through the centuries was that of distance. God was holy, the worshipper was not. Thus it was a fearful event to be in the presence of God (Isaiah 6:5ff).

The people were separated from God even in their liturgy of worship. In the Jerusalem Temple only the high priest would enter the *Holy of Holies*, and that only once a year to make blood sacrifice for the sins of the nation. This inner sanctuary was shielded by a veil, a curtain.

Read Hebrews 9:25-28 carefully. How do these verses interpret the torn curtain in the temple. Consider also Hebrews 10:19-25.

- What are the implications of the torn curtain for your Christian life?
- How are you different from Isaiah with regard to being near the holiness of God?
- With the death of Jesus the curtain was miraculously torn. Those who are *in Christ* have access to God himself. What does this access mean to you?
- How would it be possible to take this access for granted, or to be too casual with the access we have been granted?

27:51b The Earthquake

Earthquakes in the Scriptures are often signs of the power of God (Exodus 19:18; 1 Kings 19:11). The book of Revelation links earthquakes to the judgment of God (Revelation 6:12, 8:5; 11:13, etc.).

Matthew doesn't tell us explicitly why the earth quakes as Jesus dies, but we may confidently surmise the quake is a sign of God's judgment of sin. The sins of the world are being paid in full. The earth shakes.

27:52-53 The Dead Rise

This story is found only in Matthew and it raises a number of questions. Who are these people? Did they live forever or face death a second time? Why is Matthew the only Evangelist to record this event? Derek Tidbal probes the significance of these verses.

Using the imagery of Ezekiel, who prophesied that the Sovereign Lord would open graves and resurrect people to life in the valley of dry bones,¹ Matthew is content to let the event stand unadorned because its symbolic meaning is clear. The raising of these holy ones is a foretaste of the resurrection to which all believers can look forward. Through the death of Jesus a new day has arrived, a day when death has been defeated by death, and resurrection to life eternal has been made possible.²

Jesus' words recorded in John 5:25 are coming true. Brunner explains writing,

[This is a] review of coming attractions. While the other Gospel writers wait until Easter, Matthew wants to say that already in Jesus' death, death was killed dead. (Brunner, vol. 2, p. 1060)

27:54 The Faith of the Centurion

Boice calls this the greatest miracle of all. A Gentile witness to the death of Christ sees Jesus for who he is. Surely this is the climax of Matthew's crucifixion account.

Almost 2000 years later, what leads us to exclaim, *Surely this was the Son of God?*

¹ Ezekiel 37:11-14.

² Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 2001, p. 133.

2. 27:56-66 The Burial of Jesus

Re-read these verses. What are Matthew's chief concerns as he describes the burial of Jesus? How do you think he was trying to encourage his original readers? How do (or could) these verse encourage you?

Spend some time in prayer as a group acknowledging Christ's death for you. Proclaim its meaning in your lives!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Forty-Seven

He is Not Here

Matthew 28:1-20



With Matthew 28 we come to the end of the First gospel and to the end of our study. The chapter is short, only 20 verses, but full of significance and meaning. Matthew is not simply *wrapping up* his story. Instead, he leaves the reader with an unlikely claim about the past and a profound charge for the future. The unlikely claim, of course, is that the same Jesus who died and was buried has been raised from the dead. The charge, or commission for the future is for the followers of Jesus to *make disciples of all nations*. . . .

Before going on in this study, read these 20 verses. Make note of the details Matthew includes in this chapter. Be prepared to read this list to your group.

28:1-15 The Unlikely Claim

At the heart of the Christian drama is the story of a dead man who was raised to life. The resurrection was, and is, the teaching on which the whole of the Christian faith stands or falls.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul's claim to this effect in 1 Corinthians 15.

¹ The tomb is empty. A radiant angel sits atop the doorway. Christ, the Son of God, is risen, the firstborn of the dead. Crowns are in the spandrels, he is our victorious King.

If there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors . . . And if Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. . . If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot¹.

Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, writes, *The Gospel without the Resurrection is not merely a Gospel without its final chapter; it is not a gospel at all*².

Matthew agrees and he wants to show his readers they are not a *sorry lot*. Jesus really did rise from the grave and the writer of the first Gospel invites the reader to investigate.

Beginning with 27:62, look over Matthew's account of the resurrection. How many details can you find that indicate to the reader, *The resurrection really happened?*

Consider the following questions:

- Does anyone actually *witness* the resurrection?
- What might the significance of the earthquake be in 28:2? Matthew is the only Gospel writer to mention an earthquake both at the death of Christ and now at the resurrection. Consider Isaiah 29:6; Jeremiah 10:10.
- Why does Matthew include the detail of *the angel of the Lord* in 28:2? When was the last time we met an angel in Matthew? What might this mean?

¹ From *The Message*.

² A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Study of the Event and its Meaning for the Christian Faith* (Fontana, 1961), p. 9.

- What is the irony found in 28:4?

- **28:5-7** The angel gives the women four commands. What are they? How could we apply these commands to our Christian lives?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

28:8-9 Notice the emotions and the response to the news of the empty tomb. In what ways has your response to the living Jesus been similar?

28:9 Notice the women's response to meeting the risen Lord, they *worship* Jesus. The same verb occurs only one other time in Matthew (28:17) when the eleven disciples *worship* Jesus.

One feature of this story that should not be missed is the fact that Matthew reports that the earliest witnesses to the empty tomb were women. No first century writer would make this up. Women endured a greatly diminished status in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world of the first century.

They were nobodies: they were goods and chattels; they could in some circumstances be offered for sale; they could not bear witness in a court of law. And God perpetrates the supreme irony of having two women¹ as the first witnesses of his Son's resurrection!

Green goes on to point out how this final episode is but one final touch to a deeply ironic story.

¹ *The other Mary* would be the mother of James and Joseph. See 27:56.

Jesus had been born in an obscure province that nobody had heard of; his genealogy contains various disreputable females who might be considered liabilities in a family; he worked as a jobbing builder where nobody would have dreamed of looking for him; he went to a cross, the place associated with God's curse, not his approval and now the last and greatest surprise is that God allows the first witnesses of his resurrection to be women! If anyone was going to fabricate the story of the resurrection, would they have made the witnesses women? Of course not. Only God could have dreamed up so remarkable a thing. But this is the supreme irony, the supreme humour, the supreme surprise value of almighty God, that when he does his greatest act since the creation of the world, in raising his son from the dead, he attests it through the lips of those who were so widely discounted. Magnificent! (Green, p. 313)

28:10 Jesus says he will see *my brothers* in Galilee. This is probably reference to a group much larger than the 11 surviving disciples (see 1 Corinthians 15:6).

Why would Matthew emphasize the resurrection appearances in Galilee? It seems that in this very Jewish Gospel, Jesus' going again to Galilee underscores *the great transfer* of the kingdom of heaven from being the exclusive province of the Jews to an inclusive gathering of people from all nations. Consider the progression in the First Gospel.

- After Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness he journeys north to Galilee, Gentile territory, where most of his teaching and miracles are performed.
- *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom (that is, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (8:11-12)*
- *Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Jews) and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed. (21:43-44)*
- After his resurrection Jesus meet his *brothers* in Galilee.

The reader is being prepared for the commission of 28:20.

28:16-20 A Profound Charge

The followers of Jesus were never intended to be satisfied with the status quo. Jesus does not leave his disciples with a manual for survival. To the contrary, he instructs them to take the message of the kingdom to *all nations*, or, to *all Gentiles*. Each of the Gospel writers includes this commission in one form or another¹.

The basis for Jesus' charge to his disciples is his *authority*. With his death and resurrection Jesus was given unique authority by the Father. Paul speaks of this authority in his letter to the Ephesians.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church. . . Ephesians 1:22

Examine carefully Jesus' charge to his disciples. What are the specific components of his instruction?

How are you personally challenged by this *great commission*? In what ways are you seeking to fulfill this charge?

Note the wonderful unity of Matthew's Gospel. It began with a reference to Jesus as the son of Abraham.

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham. . . (1:1)

It was through Abraham that God promised to bless all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Now at last this promise is coming to fruition. The disciples are to take this message outward until it penetrates all peoples, all language groups, every tribe and village.

¹ See Mark 16:15ff., Luke 24:47-48 (Acts 1:7-8); John 20:21-22.

Matthew's Gospel has come to an end. Jesus entered our world so that he might die our death (20:28). In the end his mission becomes our mission. Here he passes the responsibility of spreading the good news of the kingdom of heaven to his followers. May God bless us as we live in the light of this story of all stories.

Sermon Notes. . .