

1 Matthew: Who, What, Why and When?

Written by whom?

The early church fathers were unanimous in saying that Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, was the author of this Gospel. Some scholars have disputed this, saying that the writing owes so much to the Gospel of Mark that the writer of Matthew must have based his book on Mark's book. This study will assume that the book was indeed written by Matthew, with material gathered by oral tradition, written fragments, familiarity with the other Gospel writers, and the testimony of eyewitnesses.

Written from where and when?

The Jewish nature of Matthew's Gospel possibly suggests that it was written in Palestine, though it is possible that it was written in Syrian Antioch. It may have been written as early as AD 50 or as late as AD 70.

Written to whom?

Since the Gospel is written in Greek, the readers were obviously Greek-speaking. They also seem to have been Jews. Matthew is very concerned with fulfillment of the Old Testament: he has more quotations from and referencing the OT than any other New Testament author. He traces Jesus' descent from Abraham; he doesn't explain Jewish customs; he uses Jewish terminology (Kingdom of heaven, Father in heaven); he emphasizes Jesus' role as "Son of David". Matthew does not, however, restrict his Gospel to Jews. He records the coming of the Magi to worship the infant Jesus, as well as Jesus' statement that the "field is the world". He also gives a full statement of the Great Commission. These show that, although his Gospel is Jewish, it has a universal outlook.

Why was it written?

Matthew's main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in his life and ministry fulfilled the OT Scriptures. He even finds the history of God's people in the OT retold in some parts of Jesus' life. Matthew arranges his Gospel around five great teachings. Each narrative section leads up to these teachings. The way the book is divided into five sections suggests that Matthew modeled his book on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) and may have been presenting the gospel as a new Torah and Jesus as a new and greater Moses.

2 Matthew: Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, who were the two most important of the ancestors? (vs. 1)
2. What event ended the independent rule of David's descendants on the throne of Israel? (vs. 11)
3. In Matthew's edited genealogy, how many generations were there in all between Jesus and Abraham? (vs. 17)
4. How did Mary come to be pregnant? (vs. 18)
5. Since he was a righteous man, what did Joseph plan to do when he found out Mary was pregnant? (vs. 19)
6. Why didn't Joseph follow through on his plan? (vs. 20)
7. Why was Mary's son to be given the name 'Jesus'? (vs. 21)
8. Which prophecy was fulfilled by the name given to Mary and Joseph's son? (vs. 22, 23)
9. How did Joseph react to the dream? (vs. 24)
10. What sort of relationship did Joseph and Mary have, until Jesus was born? (vs. 25)

3 Matthew: Chapter 1 – What did it mean to them?

In Matthew's prologue, he introduces such themes as the son of David, the fulfillment of prophecy, the supernatural origin of Jesus the Messiah, and God's protection of his Son in order to bring him to Nazareth and accomplish the divine plan of salvation from sin.

In Jesus' day Palestine was full of people with messianic expectation. Not all of it made sense, and many Jews expected two different "Messiahs". Matthew doesn't want his readers to have any doubts of his claims for Jesus, so he deliberately and early links "Christ" (equivalent, in Greek, to Messiah) and "son of David". This last title is very important. God swore covenant love to David and promised that one of his immediate descendants would establish the kingdom. He also promised that David's kingdom and throne would endure forever. During Jesus' day, there were at least some branches of popular Judaism that believed "son of David" to refer to the expected Messiah.

Nowadays, we don't put much emphasis on genealogy, so it is hard to understand how important Matthew's list is. He uses it to show that Jesus Messiah is truly in the kingly line of David, heir to the promises, the one who brings divine blessings to all nations. This is why the genealogy focuses on King David on the one hand, yet on the other hand includes Gentile women. Many of the names would stir the reader's memories and bring back the old stories and promises, and Matthew is determined to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of these promises.

Dreams as a means of divine communication were not unknown, and Matthew concentrates several in his prologue. The focus is on God's intervention.

There was much Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would redeem Israel from Roman rule and even purify his people. But no one expected that this Messiah would give his own life as a ransom to save his people. The word translated as "save" can refer to deliverance from physical danger, disease, or even death, but here it focuses on salvation from sin. Matthew seems to be pointing the reader to the basic purpose of Jesus' coming and the essential nature of the reign he would have as King Messiah.

4 Matthew: Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. Matthew's readers found it very important to know about Jesus' lineage. It was an important part of the truth to them that he was, indeed, the Messiah. Matthew uses frequent prophecies and quotes from the OT to reinforce this truth. Since most people outside our church walls are ignorant of prophecies or the Bible, what can we use to convince them of the truth—the truth that Jesus is Savior and Messiah?
2. Joseph was called 'righteous', which to the Jews meant law-abiding. He was probably a calm, quiet, steadfast kind of man—who started following dreams to protect his family. Have you ever had a dream that you KNEW was a command to do something? What did you do? How can you follow a dream without getting yourself institutionalized?
3. Jesus is called "Son of David", which emphasizes his royalty and his right to rule. How seriously do you think Christians take the idea of letting Jesus' words rule them? Can you truthfully say that you are under the command of an invisible King?

5 Matthew: Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. Where did the Magi go to ask about the new king of the Jews? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Who was upset about their questions? (vs. 3)
3. What answer did King Herod and his researchers discover? (vs. 6)
4. How did Herod work with the Magi? (vs. 7, 8)
5. How did the Magi feel when they found the right place for the newborn king? (vs. 10, 11)
6. After they worshipped and gifted the child, where did they go? (vs. 12)
7. What was Joseph told to do after the Magi left? Where did he go with his family? (vs. 13, 14)
8. What prophecy was fulfilled by the new home of Joseph, Mary and Jesus? (vs. 15)
9. How did Herod react to the news that the Magi had tricked him? (vs. 16)
10. Which prophecy was fulfilled by this massacre? (vs. 17, 18)
11. What did Joseph and his family do after they received news of Herod's death? (vs. 19-22)
12. What last prophecy did the move to Nazareth fulfill? (vs. 23)

6 Matthew: Chapter 2 – What did it mean to them?

'Bethlehem in Judea' was a village about five miles south of Jerusalem. Matthew emphasizes the 'Judea' to highlight that Jesus came from the tribe and territory that produced the line of Davidic kings. The prophecy quoted by Herod's researchers and Matthew shows that the Jews expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem and to be from David's family.

Herod the Great was a non-Jew who was appointed king of Judea by the Roman government in 40 BC. He gained control in 37 BC. Like most rulers of the day, he was ruthless. He murdered his wife, his three sons, his mother-in-law, his brother-in-law, his uncle and many others—not to mention the babies in Bethlehem. His reign was also noted for splendor. He had many theaters, amphitheaters, monuments, pagan altars, fortresses and other buildings either erected or refurbished—including the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Magi were most likely astrologers, perhaps from Persia or southern Arabia. These types of scientist-scholars were well respected all over the eastern world. They were almost certainly Gentiles. The fact that they came searching for a king indicates that they were not following an ordinary star, planet, or comet, since these would have not been unusual enough for professional astrologers to take a long journey. Some scholars have identified this star with the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Ancient astrologers saw unusual planet conjunctions as meaningful in human history, though even at this time there were records of previous conjunctions. Chinese stargazers (who kept records for thousands of years) noted a comet in 5 BC that was visible for 70 or more days.

King Herod was understandably upset with the news that there was a new king of the Jews. He called together the people most likely to help him understand this prophecy: the chief priests (Sadducees) and teachers of the law (Jewish scholars). The Sadducees were aristocrats, tended to be wealthy, and held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council. They worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of Rome, and seemed to be more concerned with politics than religion. Religiously, they were more conservative than the Pharisees. While the Pharisees gave oral tradition equal authority to the written Word of God, the Sadducees considered only the written Word to be from God. They especially valued the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Despite this valuation of written Scripture, they held several beliefs that contradicted that Scripture: 1) They denied God's involvement in everyday life; 2) They denied any resurrection of the dead; 3) They denied any afterlife, teaching that the soul perished at death; 4) They denied the existence of a spiritual world (such as angels and demons).

7 Matthew: Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. The prophecy about the Messiah was a “some day” kind of thing for most people, which makes it significant that the religious leaders in Jerusalem were upset about someone actually coming to fulfill the prophecy. Which people would be really, really upset if Jesus came back tomorrow? Why? Which people would be glad? Why would they be glad?
2. Origin stories are very popular as movie themes. Some aspects of Matthew’s retelling of Jesus’ origin are unique to him; for instance, the star that led the Magi is not referred to in the other two Gospels. How important is it that some parts of the story are different in other books of the Bible? Would it be important if some of the story was symbolically but not literally true?
3. Herod’s massacre of the children in Bethlehem is horrifying, though given his character and history, not surprising. How does it make you feel, knowing that the birth of the Prince of Peace is accompanied by the murder of innocents?
4. Joseph protected his little family by avoiding political notice, going so far as to leave the country. Some people today feel that our government is becoming hostile to believers (though of course it is nothing like as difficult as it is for people in other countries). Should we just keep our heads down and stay ‘under the radar’?

8 Matthew: Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. What was John the Baptist's mission statement? (vs. 2)
2. Which prophecy did John fulfill? (vs. 3)
3. How did the people respond to John and his call? (vs. 5, 6)
4. Was John welcoming to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to hear him preach? (vs. 7-10)
5. How did John contrast his baptism and that of the one who was coming? (vs. 11)
6. What was John's vision of the way Jesus would deal with people? (vs. 12)
7. Why did John try to prevent Jesus from being baptized? (vs. 14)
8. Why did John consent to the baptism? (vs. 15)
9. What happened when Jesus came up out of the water of baptism? (vs. 16)
10. How did the voice from heaven describe Jesus? (vs. 17)

9 Matthew: Chapter 3 – What did it mean to them?

In contrast to the Sadducees, the Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen, and therefore were in contact with the common man. The Pharisees were held in much higher esteem by regular people than the Sadducees. Though they were a minority in the Sanhedrin and held a minority number of positions as priests, they seemed to control the decision making of the Sanhedrin far more than the Sadducees did, again because they had the support of the people.

Religiously, they accepted the written Word as inspired by God. At the time of Christ's earthly ministry, this would have been what is now our Old Testament. But they also gave equal authority to oral tradition and attempted to defend this position by saying it went all the way back to Moses. Over the centuries, these traditions added to God's Word, which is forbidden (Deuteronomy 4:2) and the Pharisees pushed to strictly obey these traditions along with the Old Testament. The Gospels are full of examples of the Pharisees treating these traditions as equal to God's Word. Along with these traditions, however, they also followed other important doctrines. In contrast to the Sadducees, they believed the following:

- 1.They believed that God controlled all things, yet decisions made by individuals also contributed to the course of a person's life.
- 2.They believed in the resurrection of the dead.
- 3.They believed in an afterlife, with rewards and punishments on an individual level.
- 4.They believed in the existence of angels and demons.

Though the Pharisees were rivals of the Sadducees, they managed to set aside their differences on at least one famous occasion—the trial of Jesus. They united in order to put Christ to death.

While the Sadducees as an organization collapsed after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Pharisees (who were more concerned with religion than politics) continued to exist. In fact, the Pharisees were against the rebellion that brought on Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, and they were the first to make peace with the Romans afterward. The Pharisees were also responsible for the compilation of the Mishnah, an important document in the continuation of Judaism beyond the destruction of the temple.

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees received rebukes from Jesus. There are, however, lessons we can learn from them. Unlike the Sadducees, we are to take seriously all that the Bible teaches, including the miraculous and the afterlife. Unlike the Pharisees, we are not to allow our relationship with God to be reduced to a legalistic set of rules and rituals.

10 Matthew: Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. Baptism has always been a very critical element of Christianity. What does baptism mean to you? Do you remember your own baptism, and can you share anything about the experience?
2. John the Baptist was a harsh preacher, lived in a crude fashion, and had a fairly simple message. Is our message today too complicated? Should we be more direct about telling people they need to change the way they live? Why or why not?
3. The Pharisees and Sadducees (the religious leaders from the left and right, politically) came to see what was happening—and John was bluntly antagonistic to them. How do you feel about religious leaders ‘policing’ other religious leaders?
4. Most likely the Pharisees and Sadducees had serious political concerns about John’s pronouncement about a new ‘kingdom’ that was coming. It was the leader’s responsibility (as far as Rome was concerned) to keep everybody quiet and obedient to the government. How involved should religious leaders be with local/state/national government?

11 Matthew: Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. What was the devil's first temptation for Jesus? How did Jesus answer? (vs. 4)
2. What was the second temptation? How did Jesus respond? (vs. 6, 7)
3. What was the third temptation? How did Jesus respond? (vs. 8-10)
4. When did Jesus come back to Galilee? (vs. 12)
5. Why did Jesus move to Capernaum? (vs. 14-16)
6. What message did Jesus preach? (vs. 17)
7. As Jesus began to gather disciples, who did he call? (vs. 18-22)
8. Jesus' ministry consisted of three main points: (vs. 23)
 1. Teaching in the _____
 2. Preaching about the coming _____
 3. Healing _____ and _____
9. From where were the crowds coming? (vs. 24, 25)

12 Matthew: Chapter 4 – What did it mean to them?

One of the points Matthew tries to emphasize in his gospel is the correspondence between Jesus' life and the history of Israel. In this setting, his temptation in the desert can be seen as a reminder of the time the Lord led the Israelites in the desert 40 years "to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands" (from Deuteronomy 8). Here at the beginning of his ministry Jesus has a similar test and shows himself to be a true Israelite who lives on (as he quotes) "every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord". Another reason that it was important for Jesus to be tested/tempted was so that he could become our high priest, one who had been tempted but remained faithful. This made him the model for all believers.

The first temptation tempted Jesus to use his supernatural powers for his own purposes, rather than for God's purposes. There was no question but that Jesus would be hungry after 40 days in the desert, and the easy fix was to turn the stones to bread. Satan was trying to trick Jesus to use powers that were rightly his but which he had left behind to carry out God's mission. Jesus' response (based on Scripture) is not only recognition of his dependence on God's word, but also reminder from the author to his readers to depend on this Scripture. No doubt Matthew was thinking of the recorded words of Jesus as part of this Scripture.

The second temptation for Jesus was to test his sonship against God's pledge to protect his own by throwing himself from the top of the temple. Jesus recognized this as a kind of manipulative bribery; demanding miraculous protection as proof of God's care. This attitude is the opposite of the trust and obedience demanded of God's followers.

The third temptation offered the kingdoms of the world and their "splendor". Here the temptation was to achieve power in the world by taking a shortcut to full authority, abandoning the Cross and introducing idolatry (worship of the devil). Jesus recognized that this suggestion would set up someone else to be worshipped. Jesus knew that at this time neither God's 'son' Israel or God's 'Son' Jesus could stray from the path of undivided allegiance to God himself.

The end result of these temptations as recorded by Matthew was to establish from the very beginning the kind of kingdom and servanthood that Jesus had in mind. It was not to be brilliant or theatrical. It would be a kingdom of obedience to God and service to him.

13 Matthew: Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. The devil used scripture to try to manipulate Jesus. Can you think of ways that people have used scripture in questionable ways? How can we avoid this?
2. The devil knew who Jesus was (there was no question of contesting his identity, power, or right to divinity), so just acknowledging Jesus isn't enough to save us. What moves people from acknowledgment to commitment?
3. The word translated 'tempt' can also be 'test', in the sense of character development, like testing or training muscles. Can you think of a time when God was 'training' you? How did it turn out?
4. Jesus taught, preached and healed. Our church does pretty well with the first two. How do we do with 'healing'?

14 Matthew: Chapter 5:1-26 – Scripture Questions

1. Jesus lists seven groups of people who experience the spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God:
 1. Those who are poor in spirit will receive _____.
 2. Those who mourn will be _____.
 3. Those who are humble before God will inherit _____.
 4. Those who are hungry to know God and long to be righteous will be _____.
 5. Those who show mercy to others will be shown _____.
 6. Those who are pure in heart will see _____.
 7. Those who create peace will be called _____.
 8. Those who are persecuted because of their devotion to God will have _____.
 9. Those who are rejected because of following Jesus should be glad because _____
_____.
2. How does Jesus describe salt that has no flavor? (vs. 13)
3. How should we let our light shine? (vs. 16)
4. Why did Jesus say that he had come to earth? (vs. 17)
5. How was true righteousness supposed to compare with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law? (vs. 20)
6. How did Jesus change the command about murder? (vs. 21-22)
7. What are we supposed to do if we find out that a brother (or sister) has a grievance against us? (vs. 23, 24)
8. If legal troubles occur, how does Jesus suggest that these troubles be settled? (vs. 25, 26)

15 Matthew: Chapter 5:1-26 – What did it mean to them?

The Sermon on the Mount, one of the most famous of Jesus' teachings, is the first of five discourses, or teachings, in Matthew. It has three kinds of material: 1) beatitudes, or descriptions of blessedness, 2) ethical teachings, and 3) contrasts between Jesus' ethical teaching and Jewish legalistic traditions. The Sermon ends with a short parable stressing the importance of practicing what has just been taught.

There are differing opinions between scholars as to whether the Sermon is a summary of what Jesus taught on one occasion or a compilation of teachings presented on numerous occasions. Matthew may have taken a single sermon and expanded it with other similar teachings of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount's call to moral and ethical living is so high that some have said it is completely unrealistic, or that it will only be fulfilled in the future kingdom. It seems to be true that Jesus (and Matthew) set this sermon as a standard for all Christians, realizing that the demands could not be met in our own power. It is also true that Jesus occasionally used hyperbole to make his point.

The word 'blessed' means more than just happy, because happiness is an emotion which depends on circumstances. Here, 'blessed' refers to the ultimate well-being and spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God.

When Jesus speaks of the Law, his listeners understood this to be the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament). Jesus fulfilled the Law in the sense that he gave it its full meaning. He taught and lived the deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it rather than mere outward acknowledgment and obedience. He was against hypocritical legalism, which meant keeping the details of the Law but leaving behind the heart, or meaning, of the Law.

16 Matthew: Chapter 5:1-26 – Application Questions

1. Jesus speaks of those who are blessed, and it was not what his listeners expected. If you were going to create new beatitudes today, how would you write them?
Example: Blessed are the addicted, because in God's kingdom they will be free.
2. Nearly everyone we know is a Christian, or claims to be one. How can our light possibly “shine before men” when we look so much like everyone else?
3. Jesus wasn't coming to get rid of the Law, but to make it what God intended it to be. How about the way we practice Christianity today? Is it what God intended it to be? If not, how should we change it?
4. Jesus seems to think that we shouldn't let bad blood between believers go unresolved. Can you think of a time when unresolved trouble between Christians was destructive? What should have been done instead?

17 Matthew: Chapter 5:27-47 – Scripture Questions

1. What two things did Jesus equate? (vs. 27, 28)
2. In a bit of exaggerated description, what did Jesus say to do with uncontrollable body parts? (vs. 29, 30)
3. In Jesus' time, how did husbands rid themselves of their wives? (vs. 31)
4. Why did Jesus say that his listeners should not swear oaths? (vs. 34-37)
5. What kind of response did Jesus want his disciples to have in the face of evil that was done to them? (vs. 38, 39)
6. What kind of attitude toward unreasonable demands does Jesus teach? (vs. 40-42)
7. How are we to treat our enemies? (vs. 44)
8. Why should we treat enemies (or those who insult or offend us) in this way? (vs. 45)
9. "If you love those who love you, what _____ will you get? Are not even the _____ doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even _____ do that? (vs. 46, 47)
10. How does Jesus say his followers should be? (vs. 48)

18 Matthew: Chapter 5:27-47 – What did it mean to them?

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus draws sharp contrasts between the way that the Law had been interpreted and his understanding of the true meaning of the Law.

The Old Testament command not to commit adultery is often treated in Jewish sources not so much as a function of purity as of theft: it was to steal another's wife. Jesus here insists that the seventh commandment points in another direction—toward purity that refuses even to lust after any woman. He is addressing the difference between outward compliance and inner obedience and purity.

Cutting off or gouging out offending body parts (“right hand” is most likely a euphemism for the male sexual organ) is a way of saying that Jesus' disciples must deal radically with their sins. Imagination is a God-given gift; but if it is fed dirt by the eye, it will be dirty. All sin, not least sexual sin, begins with the imagination.

In the section on divorce, Jesus' use of scripture seems to imply that divorce, adultery and lust are equivalent to one another. In each case, the heart of the husband is turned away from his wife and toward self-satisfaction. It is worth noting that Jesus is speaking to the husband, who in this society held all the power in the relationship.

The last section of this chapter deals with Jesus' teaching of the direction of the Law. He showed that the real direction was love, rich and costly love, extended even to enemies. Jesus' disciples had as their example God himself, who loved so indiscriminately that he sent sun and rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. Jesus is calling his disciples to live and love in a way that is superior to the patterns around them. Christian love must go beyond what naturally takes place in the human heart.

Jesus taught that the true direction of the law was not toward rules or restraints, concessions that come from the hardness of human hearts. It all pointed to the perfection of God.

19 Matthew: Chapter 5:27-47 – Application Questions

1. Jesus was cutting through rabbinical teachings that had accumulated into traditions in order to get back to the true point of God's commands. Can you think of something that the Church (or our church) has made extremely complicated in the last two thousand years? How do we get back to the original intent of those issues?
2. It is probably impossible to find a family untouched by divorce. Even in clear-cut cases that show its necessity, there is still pain and sorrow. How can we apply Jesus' teachings here to our lives? What is the central truth he is teaching?
3. The teachings about retaliation, vengeance and resistance are a little unnerving. How can we follow Jesus' words and yet not let people take advantage of us?
4. The hardest thing Jesus commands is to love those who are against us. Is this supposed to extend to people to annoy us, or get in our way, or don't go along with us on activities that are important to us? How can we possibly love those people who make our lives difficult?

20 Matthew: Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. Jesus assumes that his followers will help the needy. How does he tell them to do it? (vs. 1-4)
2. How does Jesus tell us to pray? (vs. 5-8)
3. This famous prayer has several parts: (vs. 9-13)
 1. Praise and honor to _____
 2. Ask God to make the _____ right, like it is in heaven
 3. Asking for daily _____
 4. Give us a heart that _____
 5. Asking for protection from _____
4. What happens if we don't forgive people who sin against us? (vs. 14, 15)
5. Jesus assumes that his followers will fast. How does he tell them to do this? (vs. 16-18)
6. Why does Jesus tell us to store our treasures in heaven? (vs. 21)
7. What happens if we try to keep one eye on God and the other eye on Money? (vs. 22-24)
8. How does Jesus reassure people who focus on God instead of material wealth? (vs. 30)
9. What should we do instead of worrying over daily needs? (vs. 31, 32)
10. What does Jesus say will happen if we focus on God's work in our lives? (vs. 33)

21 Matthew: Chapter 6 – What did it mean to them?

There are three great spiritual disciplines addressed by Jesus here: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (charity to the poor). He approaches them in a way that would have been particularly startling to his listeners.

In Mediterranean culture, to give and receive 'gifts' or alms was a way to show the status of your family. If you were wealthy, it was necessary to make that clear by the kinds of clothes you wore, the parties you hosted, and the amount of money you gave to the poor. It was absolutely necessary that others know of your 'gifts', otherwise your family honor and status would be lowered. Jesus is telling them to do something that is counter to the culture: to keep charity 'secret' known only to God.

When Jesus addresses prayer, he uses a word translated 'hypocrite'. This word literally means 'stage actor'. He is telling his listeners that if they pray like a stage actor, the applause they receive from listeners will be the only reward they will receive. God is not interested in staged piety. In fasting, also, Jesus instructs his listeners not to do it as a stage production, but to make it something between them and God.

The contrast is between outward gestures and inward devotion. Jesus was warning against turning outward gestures which were supposed to signify reverence for God into a way of enhancing human reputations. This is a betrayal of loyalty and breaks the first and greatest command to love God with all that we have.

In the middle of these warnings and instructions is The Lord's Prayer, a simple and direct appeal to God. It does not enhance the speaker, it does not make them seem important to their listeners. Instead, it acknowledges dependence on God and the longing for a close relationship with Him.

22 Matthew: Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. There are over 300 verses in the Bible relating to caring for the poor and needy. Jesus himself was a poor itinerant preacher, presumably dependent on the gifts of his followers. Many members of our congregation are deeply involved with caring for the downtrodden. How much support and care is enough? Where do we draw the line about giving to the poor?
2. In Matthew's world, keeping one's religious observances to oneself would be countercultural. What kind of observance could be countercultural today?
3. We don't go in much these days for fasting. Can you think of some good reasons to take it up as a spiritual discipline? Can you list some reasons why it wouldn't be a good idea?
4. It's all well and good for Jesus to say "Don't worry about tomorrow". The bills still need to be paid, and it takes forethought and work to make that happen. What do you think Jesus is really talking about in this passage?

23 Matthew: Chapter 7 – Scripture Questions

1. What sort of standard of judgment will be used on us? (vs. 1, 2)
2. What can we do to help a brother or sister when they have a flaw or problem? (vs. 3-5)
3. Should we teach the Gospel to everyone? (vs. 6)
4. How does Jesus teach us to pray? (vs. 7, 8)
5. How does Jesus sum up the Law and Prophets? (vs. 12)
6. What is the difference between the wide gate and the narrow gate? Where do they lead? (vs. 13, 14)
7. Jesus assumes that there will be false prophets (teachers) among his followers. How are we supposed to recognize these dangerous people? (vs. 15-20)
8. Who will decide whether or not people are really Christians? (vs. 21-23)
9. How does Jesus describe the people who hear and practice what he teaches? (vs. 24)
10. Why were the listeners amazed at Jesus? (vs. 28, 29)

The 'Golden Rule' is found in the negative form in rabbinic Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. It is also found in various forms in Greek and Roman ethical teaching. Usually, it was stated as "Don't do to other people what you don't want to be done to you". Here, Jesus converts it to a positive form, one that requires active behavior.

24 Matthew: Chapter 7 – What did it mean to them?

While this section begins “Do not judge”, it does not forbid all judging of any kind. Jesus himself goes on to speak of some people as dogs and pigs, and to warn against false prophets. We must look and listen carefully to those who claim to be followers of Jesus, so that we can properly separate the false from the true. Jesus’ demand here is for us not to be judgmental, putting people down. People who ‘judge’ like this will be judged by God. We must be cautious not to put ourselves in the place of God.

So far in the Sermon on the Mount, we have seen what is expected of Jesus’ followers: righteousness, sincerity, humility, purity, and love. Now he assures us that we can receive these gifts if we seek them through prayer. He uses ‘ask’, ‘seek’, and ‘knock’ to emphasize the persistence and sincerity required. Jesus assures us that he will provide the means to do what would otherwise be impossible.

When Jesus teaches what we know as the Golden Rule, he is summing up the Law and Prophets. We can think of it as a summary of the righteousness that should be practiced by those in the Kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount ends with four warnings, each with two things compared: two ways, two trees, two claims, and two builders. The way these warnings are worded, it is plain that Jesus is still talking about the kingdom of heaven. It is also clear that no one is forced into choosing The Way. Not only that, but the ‘fruit’ of people’s lives—the results of the way that they live—will clearly show whether or not their commitment to Christ is real or only pretended.

At the end of this Sermon, Matthew has the first of five story-telling devices which point to the next section. Here, the mention of Jesus’ authority leads into stories of the clash of his authority with that of others. The crowds are amazed at his assumption of his own right to divine authority.

25 Matthew: Chapter 7 – Application Questions

1. Jesus' teaching about not giving sacred things to dogs and pigs is kind of weird. It is probably about not wasting your time teaching kingdom lessons to those who are determined to reject the Gospel with scorn and contempt. The question is, how do we tell who these people are? How do we tell who is going to be receptive?
2. The “ask, seek, and knock” section is most likely not about getting whatever we ask for, but about asking for and receiving the ability to live faithfully. What kind of activities are included in ‘living faithfully’?
3. In a way, the idea that we can tell good Christians from bad ones is kind of handy: we look at the results of what they do. What kind of effects do bad Christians have on our church? What kind of effects do the good ones have? How do we get rid of the bad ones?
4. The story of the wise and foolish builders makes it clear that storms come to everyone. The people who don't obey Jesus are the ones whose lives fall apart. Doesn't this seem kind of harsh? Or is this another way we can sort people into true believer and false believer?

26 Matthew: Chapter 8 – Scripture Questions

1. What instructions did Jesus give the man who was healed of leprosy? (vs. 4)
2. Why did the centurion NOT want Jesus to come to his home? (vs. 8, 9)
3. How did Jesus respond to the faith of the centurion? (vs. 10-12)
4. How did Jesus fulfill the word from the prophet Isaiah? (vs. 16)
5. A teacher of the law wanted to follow Jesus. What answer did Jesus give him? (vs. 20)
6. During the storm that frightened the disciples, what was Jesus' main rebuke to them? (vs. 26)
7. What evidence did the disciples see of Jesus' authority? (vs. 26, 27)
8. How did the demons inside the two men of Gadarene address Jesus? (vs. 29)
9. Where did Jesus send the demons? (vs. 32)
10. What did the townspeople think of this demonstration of Jesus' power? (vs. 34)

27 Matthew: Chapter 8 – What did it mean to them?

There are several themes in this section: faith, discipleship, the Gentile mission, and a widening view of what it means that Jesus is the Christ. It also expands on the idea that Jesus was fulfilling all the promises of the prophets concerning the messiah. In this chapter, Matthew specifically records some examples of his healing ministry. Along with the healing, the disciples begin to be aware of Jesus' authority as the Son of God.

With the cleansing of the leper, we learn that not only is Jesus not made unclean (though this would have been true for any observant Jew), but he is able to make that which is unclean pure and clean. This outward cleansing is, of course, a foreshadowing of Jesus' ability to make the inward man clean from sin.

While there were no Roman legions in Palestine at this time, there were non-Jewish auxiliaries led by Roman centurions. This centurion, because of his military training, had understood something that escaped many of Jesus' listeners: that when Jesus spoke, it was with the authority of God, and therefore with the power of God.

Matthew's brief quote from Isaiah is an implicit reference to an entire section of the prophet which was called the "Servant Song". Both Scripture and Jewish tradition believed that all sickness was caused by sin, either through human actions or through the fallen nature of creation. One of the main emphases in the Servant Song was the idea of 'substitutionary atonement', meaning that the servant bore the sicknesses of others through his suffering and death. So, in this story Matthew is suggesting that Jesus' healing ministry is, itself, a function of his substitutionary death, by which he lays the foundation for destroying sickness.

The demons stand in contrast to the disciples, for they know exactly who Jesus is. When they call him "Son of God", they recognize him not only in terms of his power but also in terms of his person. He was the Messiah, God's Son.

28 Matthew: Chapter 8 – Application Questions

1. The leper was an outcast. Even after he was healed, he probably wouldn't have been able to bring much of value to Jesus' ministry (except his testimony). Who in our society would be comparable to this leper? What would happen to our congregation if it was full of 'lepers' who brought no financial benefit with them?
2. Jesus was extremely impressed with the understanding and faith of the centurion. The Jewish listeners would have been surprised, because he wasn't one of them. What wisdom have you heard from non-Christians? Where are some places where we can find and learn from this kind of wisdom?
3. Why do you think we don't see any demon-possessed people today? Or do we?
4. The teacher who wasn't committed and the man who wanted to stay home until his parents passed both were only marginally invested with Jesus. Is being committed to Jesus' church the same as being committed to his person? Why or why not?

29 Matthew: Chapter 9 – Scripture Questions

1. After Jesus was back in his home town of Capernaum, who was brought to him? What did Jesus consider his greatest need? (vs. 2)
2. What did Jesus do to show the teachers of the law that he had the authority to forgive sin? (vs. 6)
3. When Jesus called Matthew to follow him, he went to his house to eat. Why were the Pharisees upset about the company there? How did Jesus answer them? (vs. 11-13)
4. Why did Jesus excuse his disciples from fasting? (vs. 15)
5. Using the parable of old/new wineskins, what was the problem with doing new things in old ways? (vs. 16, 17)
6. Which two people did Jesus heal in public (and spectacular) fashion? (vs. 18-26)
7. The two blind men followed Jesus inside to ask for healing, which they received. What did Jesus tell them to do afterward? (vs. 29-31)
8. As the blind men went out, who passed them on his way in? (vs. 32)
9. Who did the Pharisees say was responsible for Jesus' success at driving out demons? (vs. 34)
10. What did Jesus tell his disciples to ask of the Lord? (vs. 37, 38)

30 Matthew: Chapter 9 – What did it mean to them?

Definition of blasphemy: lacking in reverence for God when speaking of God or action concerning God or sacred things; an act of cursing or reviling God; the crime of assuming to oneself the rights or qualities of God; irreverent behavior toward anything held sacred, priceless, etc.

In Jesus' day, the precise definition of blasphemy was hotly disputed. The consensus seemed to be that using the divine name was an essential part of blasphemy. Here the teachers of the law seem to have expanded blasphemy to include Jesus' claim to do something that only God could do. Jesus was able to understand their hearts, to know that what they were thinking was untrue, unbelieving, and blind to what was being revealed before their eyes. These people were more concerned about what Jesus said than the miracles being performed.

When Jesus returned to Capernaum (on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee) he found Matthew (Levi) working at the tax collector's booth, which was a customs and excise booth at the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas. Having shown that he had the authority to forgive sins, Jesus now calls a man whose job made him a pariah—a sinner and an associate of sinners.

“Sinners”, as the Pharisees used the term, grouped together those who broke their rules of conduct: harlots, tax collectors, and generally disreputable people. Eating with them brought danger of ceremonial defilement. The Pharisee's charge against Jesus showed that they did not understand the purpose of Jesus' mission. Jesus' response to them (from Hosea) used the word ‘mercy’, which means ‘faithful covenant love’. He was not simply telling them that they should be more sympathetic to outcasts and less concerned about ceremonial purity, but that they were being like the ancient Israelites who were more concerned with preserving the shell while losing the heart of the matter.

31 Matthew: Chapter 9 – Application Questions

1. Jesus changed the complicated method of getting your sins forgiven (sacrifices at the temple, performed by professionals) to one that was fairly simple: he said, “Your sins are forgiven.” Is there anything that we have made too complicated in our faith? If so, how can we simplify it without making things too easy-going?
2. The parable Jesus told about new/old wine in new/old wineskins was a way of talking about doing new things in old ways, and the problems that will cause. Thinking of the new things we are doing at our church, is it a mistake to try to do them in old ways? Example: singing newer Christian songs using piano and organ.
3. Jesus traveled over the countryside teaching, preaching and healing. What advantages does a traveling preacher have? What disadvantages does he/she have? What is the downside to having a fixed location and congregation?
4. Jesus’ power to heal and resurrect is stunning. How do we see his power today? Why do you think this power isn’t displayed openly and publicly?

32 Matthew: Chapter 10– Scripture Questions

1. What authority did Jesus give to his twelve apostles? (vs. 1)
2. What was the one-line message the apostles were told to preach? (vs. 7)
3. Which miraculous abilities were the apostles told to display on their missionary journey? (vs. 8)
4. How were the apostles to respond to those who rejected their message? (vs. 14)
5. When they were arrested, who would give the apostles the words to say? (vs. 20)
6. What sort of reception did Jesus warn the apostles that they would receive? (vs. 22, 23)
7. How did Jesus tell the apostles to compare themselves? (vs. 24, 25)
8. Why were the apostles not supposed to be afraid? (vs. 29-31)
9. Who is worthy of Jesus? (vs. 37-39)
10. Jesus says, “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is _____, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his _____.” (vs. 42)

33 Matthew: Chapter 10 – What did it mean to them?

The word ‘apostles’ can have several meanings: it can mean merely a messenger, it can refer to Jesus (“the apostle and high priest whom we confess, Heb 3:1), or mark a group of missionaries. The usual meaning is a narrower one, meaning special representatives chosen by Christ himself and given special authority and abilities. (This particular meaning is what allows Paul to include himself as an apostle, even though he was not with Jesus while he was on earth.)

This mission for the apostles has some complications for us. At least the beginning of the teaching is specific to the apostles, telling them how they were to approach, whom they were to teach, and how to deal with conflict or acceptance. Beginning in verse 17, Jesus seems to be moving beyond the immediate concerns of the apostles and into future prophecies about his followers. By the end of the chapter, Jesus moves almost entirely into the future, warning of the need for complete commitment—and promising reward for persistence.

The section addressing the audience for this preaching mission is uncomfortable for us, as Jesus limits the potential converts to the Jews only. While there are several possible reasons for this limitation (the Twelve might not have been ready to engage Samaritans and all the intercultural issues that were a part of that situation), it is most likely that Jesus’ personal claims would offend so many of his own people that he did not want to increase the opposition by devoting time to Gentile ministry.

When Jesus tells his disciples how to face the certain persecution, he specifically tells them ‘not to fear’. First of all, he reminds them that as their master suffers, so will the disciples. Second, the worst that others can do to them doesn’t begin to approach the power of God—who stands behind Christ himself. The third reason given is that God’s care is so all-embracing that he can be trusted to cover the disciples.

While it may be gloomy and forbidding to hear that one must prefer Jesus above all family ties, this kind of discipline ends with reward.

34 Matthew: Chapter 10 – Application Questions

1. Jesus warns his disciples that they must be shrewd (avoiding conflicts and attacks where possible) but also innocent (not so cautious or suspicious that they become fearful and hidden). There is a huge discussion among Christians today about how to deal with immigrants—not just those from Central/South America, but all those who come to our country. Is it even possible to be shrewd AND not fearful of the outsider? How can we do this?
2. Jesus' apostles were given miraculous powers as a way to back up the words that they spoke. Their abilities proved that they had the authority to preach of the coming of the kingdom. What authority do we have as believers? How do we prove that we have the authority to speak about Jesus?
3. Jesus told his apostles to preach that “the Kingdom is Coming”. Think of this as the message on the local synagogue sign, meant to get people's attention so that they came to hear ‘the rest of the story’. What simple message could we use in order to attract people's attention to Jesus?

35 Matthew: Chapter 11 – Scripture Questions

1. What question did John the Baptist send to Jesus through his (John's) disciples? (vs. 3)
2. How did Jesus answer John's question? (vs. 4-6)
3. When Jesus was talking about John, how did he describe him? (vs. 9)
4. What was John's purpose, according to Jesus? (vs. 10)
5. Who has higher status than John? (vs. 11)
6. Some of those who heard John and Jesus rejected them both. Why did they reject John? Why did they reject Jesus? (vs. 18, 19)
7. Why did Jesus denounce the cities of Korazin, Capernaum and Bethsaida? (vs. 21-23)
8. Jesus praised God because understanding was not given to the wise and learned. To whom was this wisdom given? (vs. 25)
9. Who gave Jesus the authority he possessed? (vs. 27)
10. What was the invitation that Jesus gave to those who listened to him teach? (vs. 28-30)

36 Matthew: Chapter 11 – What did it mean to them?

Beginning in chapter 11, Matthew shows us that there was beginning to be disappointment in Jesus' message and opposition to the kingdom of God. He was not turning out to be the kind of Messiah that people had been expecting. Even John the Baptist had doubts, and the Galilean cities that were sites of most of Jesus' miracles had begun to harden themselves in unbelief. Conflicts with Jewish leaders began to intensify, and his listeners seemed to misunderstand the most basic elements of his teaching and authority.

Apparently John had been in prison during most of Jesus' Galilean ministry, maybe for as long as a year. John had preached that there would be judgment on those who deserved it—so far Jesus had only brought healing and teaching. In the four passages from Isaiah which Jesus quotes to John's disciples, there were references to both healing and judgment. Jesus seems to be telling John that where the healing is, the judgment will be also—even though it is delayed.

Jesus defends John to those around him, saying that he is the embodiment of the great prophet Elijah. In fact, John is the greatest prophet of all since he is the forerunner to the Messiah. One way to understand the talk about him being 'less than the least of these' is this: Jesus said John was the greatest born of women, but those who were in the Messiah's kingdom would be born of the Spirit. Because of this, John would always be 'behind' those in the kingdom. Another way to understand it is that while John was the prophet who most clearly pointed to Jesus, those who committed themselves to Jesus were completely and unambiguously saying that Jesus was Lord and King.

The verses referring to disgruntled children address the criticism of those who opposed both John and Jesus. These people found it easier to whine their criticisms than 'play the game'. Wisdom in the Old Testament is strongly concerned with right living. John and Jesus were both criticized for the way they lived. Their lifestyles, however, were vindicated by their actions in right living.

37 Matthew: Chapter 11 – Application Questions

1. Jesus offers a gentle, achievable yoke—but it is still a yoke. We are not free from all constraints, and there is work to be done. What ‘yoke’ are you currently wearing? Does it fit you well?



2. John the Baptist died in prison (unjustly), and evidently struggled with doubt about Jesus. This seems like a poor way to reward the greatest prophet of all time. How do you cope with disappointment and let-down when you have put your heart into service to Jesus?
3. Jesus verbally slams the Galilean cities where people were starting to reject him and his vision of the kingdom. How would you put into words what Jesus’ Kingdom vision is, and what do you think his mission was for those cities--and us?
4. The verse about the children who didn’t want to play (vs. 17) is referring to people who used whatever excuse they could come up with in order to refuse Jesus. What are some of the excuses people use today to avoid being a follower of Jesus?

38 Matthew: Chapter 12 – Scripture Questions

1. Why were the Pharisees upset with Jesus? (vs. 2)
2. Who is the Lord of the Sabbath? (vs. 8)
3. What was the next test the Pharisees had for Jesus? (vs. 10)
4. Why did Jesus say it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath? (vs. 11, 12)
5. What prophecy of Isaiah points out that Jesus will not be a noisy street preacher? (vs. 19)
6. Jesus said, “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the _____ has come upon you.” (vs. 28)
7. For what will people have to give an accounting at the day of judgment? (vs. 36, 37)
8. What sign did Jesus say that the ‘wicked and adulterous generation’ would receive? (vs. 39, 40)
9. According to Jesus, what will be the condition of those who reject the Son of Man? (vs. 45)
10. Who does Jesus say are his family? (vs. 48-50)

39 Matthew: Chapter 12 – What did it mean to them?

Jewish rules of conduct about the Sabbath were extremely detailed, though for many Jews of Jesus' day, the Sabbath was a happy day, a sign of the covenant between them and God. The point here is the Pharisaic regulations which so burdened the people. The forbidding of picking grain was one of their rules about work on the Sabbath. When Jesus responds to them, he uses rabbinical techniques to show them that he is, in fact, the Lord of the Sabbath. This infuriates the Pharisees.

The action now moves from the field to the synagogue, with Matthew making very clear the malice on the part of the Pharisees. The customary Jewish ruling was that healing was permitted on the Sabbath only when life was in danger, which of course did not apply here. In his response to them, Jesus assumes that the Pharisees would not hesitate to lift an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath. Therefore, a far more valuable person is eligible for healing. Jesus forces the question: was the Sabbath a day for evil activity (like the intentions of the Pharisees in questioning him) or for the good action? The healing of the man with the withered hand confirms Jesus' claim to be Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus often withdrew from intense opposition. This refusal to engage in debates or street riots was a fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus is gentle and humble. Not only that, his ministry is so gentle and compassionate that the weak will not be trampled on or crushed. The use of the "suffering servant" part of Isaiah emphasizes the way that Jesus fulfills prophecies.

The casting out of the demon brings on another attack by the Pharisees. Jesus now asks them to see and understand that his miracles reflect authority greater than that of Satan. He also makes clear that there can be no neutrality in our relationship to him. The claims of the kingdom and the demands of Jesus are so exclusive that to be indifferent or apathetic to him is to be against him.

The distinction between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Spirit is that the first sin is rejection of the truth of the Gospel. For this sin, there may be repentance and forgiveness. The second sin is rejection of the same truth with full awareness that that is exactly what one is doing.

40 Matthew: Chapter 12 – Application Questions

1. Jesus and his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath and ate it, in violation of the law against work on the Sabbath. When is it okay to break the law in order to help people?
2. Jesus warns against a kingdom divided against itself. Is God's Kingdom divided against itself because of Christian divisions/denominations? If not, why not?
3. On the day of Judgment, every person will give an account for every careless word they have spoken. Does Jesus mean this literally? And if so, does this apply to Christians or unbelievers? What do you think the term 'careless' means?
4. Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me." What does it mean to be 'with' Jesus? Who gets to decide whether an interpretation of scripture is for or against Jesus?

41 Matthew: Chapter 13 – Scripture Questions

1. What were the four types of soil on which the seeds were cast? (vs. 4-8)
2. Why, according to Jesus, did he speak to the people in parables? (vs. 13)
3. How did Jesus explain the four types of soil? (vs. 18-23)
 1. Path _____
 2. Rocky _____
 3. Thorny _____
 4. Good _____
4. In the parable of the weeds, how did the owner decide to deal with the weeds among the wheat? (vs. 29, 30)
5. The parable of the mustard seed and of yeast in bread taught that even though the kingdom of heaven was starting small, eventually it would end up _____. (vs. 32, 33)
6. In Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds, who was the one who sowed the good seed? (vs. 37)
7. At the end of the age, what will happen to everything that causes evil and those who do evil? (vs. 42)
8. In the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, what is the kingdom of heaven worth? (vs. 44-46)
9. What did the fisherman do with the net full of fish in the parable of the net? (vs. 48)
10. What sort of response did Jesus receive when he taught in his home-town synagogue? (vs. 54-58)

Our word “parable” comes from a Greek word which means “a placing beside”. So, it is a comparison or an illustration. Jesus uses this technique with examples from nature and human life.

42 Matthew: Chapter 13 – What did it mean to them?

The parables were stories that made spiritual points by comparing every day life to eternal principles.

The parable of the Sower tells about different soils that represent the receptiveness of different people to seeds of truth about God. The path was tightly packed soil that gave no place for seed to settle and grow and was eaten by birds. This stood for people that didn't understand the seed of truth.

Rocky ground was shallow soil that offered initial places for the seed to grow, but could not support deeper roots. This stood for people that initially were receptive and then lost interest in God's truth. Thorny soil was covered in weeds that choked out any unfortunate seeds that fell on it. This stood for people that were too filled with the cares of life to be able to support the truth of God.

The good soil was deep and allowed growth. This stood for people who were receptive to God's truth, could understand it, who were deep enough to be interested in learning and were not too smothered in worldly cares.

The parable of the weeds taught that sometimes, rooting out the bad people (the weeds) from among the good, would be too damaging - and in cases like this, Christ seemed to say that God would take care of the sorting.

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast taught that only a small amount of a powerful message could change things for the better.

The parable of the pearl of great price illustrated to what great lengths a person will go to obtain something that is truly valuable – like the kingdom of heaven.

The parable of the fisherman and the fish teaches how God will sort out the good fish from the bad – at the day of judgment separating his people from those that are not part of the kingdom.

Jesus was not welcomed in his home town by the people that knew him earlier in his life. Their familiarity made them unwilling to accept that he was a true prophet, even though they acknowledged that he could do great miracles and had great wisdom.

43 Matthew: Chapter 13 – Application Questions

1. Jesus' explanation of the different types of responses to 'seed planting' almost sounds as if people aren't responsible for their response to the 'seed' of the message of the kingdom. Can we help it if some people aren't receptive? Can they help it? Why or why not?
2. In the parable of the weeds, Jesus seems to be teaching that we should let the angels sort out the good people from the bad people in his kingdom. Does this mean we should turn a blind eye to people that are like weeds? What damage do these kind of people do? Can we prevent it?
3. At least two of the parables in today's chapter, Jesus explicitly says that the wicked will be thrown into a "fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." How do you feel about this? If we believe Jesus, what should we do about this warning?
4. In his hometown, Jesus evidently didn't try to force them to believe in him. The people were amazed but rejected his words because they knew his family. Why do you think that familiarity with a person makes it hard to take them seriously?

44 Matthew: Chapter 14 – Scripture Questions

1. Who did Herod the Tetrarch think Jesus was? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Herod, who hated John the Baptist, was also afraid of him. Why did he have him killed? (vs. 3-12)
3. How did Jesus react to the news about his cousin? (vs. 13)
4. What did Jesus' compassion for the people lead him to do? (vs. 14-19)
5. How much food was left over? How many people were fed? (vs. 20, 21)
6. Why did Jesus go up on the mountainside? (vs. 23)
7. How did Jesus get out to the boat on which the disciples were sailing? (vs. 25)
8. After Jesus called Peter to him, what happened? (vs. 29-31)
9. How did the disciples respond to this show of power? (vs. 33)
10. What did the people of Gennesaret do when they recognized Jesus? (vs. 35, 36)

According to Roman reckoning, the night was divided into four watches: (1) 6:00-9:00 pm, (2) 9:00-midnight, (3) midnight-3:00 am, and (4) 3:00-6:00 am. The Jews had only three watches during the night: (1) sunset-10:00 pm, (2) 10:00 pm-2:00 am, and (3) 2:00 am-sunrise.

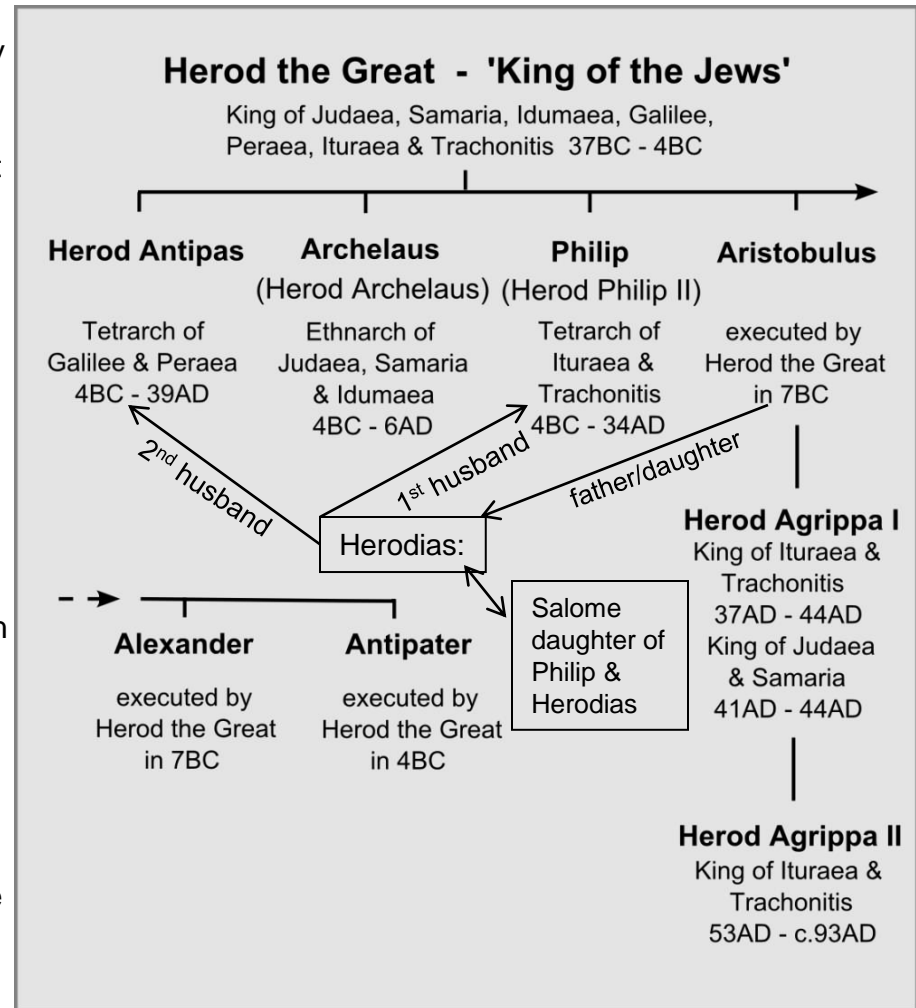
45 Matthew: Chapter 14 – What did it mean to them?

The family of Herod the Great was large and tangled. His family was Jewish, by race, but they were actually Idumeans (Edomites), descendants of Esau. He faced continual plots by his family, and he jailed and executed many of them. He died at the age of 69 after suffering from dropsy, ulcers, convulsions, and probably cancer. After his death his kingdom was divided between three sons. When Herod Antipas ruled, he lived in the shadow of his father’s reign. Much of what he did was in an attempt to live up to his father’s image. At this point in Matthew’s story, Herod Antipas was actually living in adultery with his half-brother’s wife Herodias...who was the daughter of another half-brother. Herodias’ young daughter Salome was used in a way consistent with the amorality of the family.

The feeding of the 5,000 is found in all four Gospels. We can see, in hindsight, that it is an example of the future banquet with the messiah, but this text focuses on Jesus’ compassion, the responsibility of his disciples to care for those that follow them, and on a miracle of creation.

Jesus began his walk on the water sometime between 3:00 am and 6:00 am. The disciples were understandably frightened, though Peter recovers quickly. The climax of the story is not the stilling of the storm, or even the water-walking: it is the confession and worship of the disciples: “Truly you are the Son of God.” This is the first time Jesus has been addressed by the disciples with this full title.

The last section, with the recognition and healing in Gennesaret does three things: (1) it shows how far Jesus’ public ministry had grown; (2) it shows that Jesus’ ministry extended to all the people; and (3) Jesus’ unconcern about rubbing shoulders with crowds sets the stage for the next encounter in chapter 15, the confrontation over clean and unclean.



46 Matthew: Chapter 14 – Application Questions

1. After Jesus hears about the death of John the Baptist, he 'withdrew to a private place'. Was Jesus grieving? Why? What do we learn about him from his response to the death of his cousin? How can we use this knowledge about Jesus when we talk to people about him?
2. You can almost feel sorry for Salome, brought up in the Herod family. She was probably 12-14 years old, dancing for her great-uncle/stepfather's drunken birthday party. There are young people this age today who are caught up in prostitution, many running from terrible homes. Do young people in these situations bear any responsibility for their actions? Why or why not? How do we help young people that come from horrible families?
3. The feeding of the 5,000 is a famous miracle. Jesus held his disciples responsible for the feeding: they provided the raw materials, he provided the power to make it more than enough. How can we apply this to the work our church does? What 'raw materials' do we provide?
4. Don't you love Peter's impetuous faith? As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he walked on water. Have you ever had an experience where you did something wildly outside what you thought was possible? Where have you seen the power of Jesus in your life? Have you failed spectacularly? What did you learn?

47 Matthew: Chapter 15 – Scripture Questions

1. Why were the Pharisees and teachers upset with Jesus and his disciples? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees and teachers hypocrites? (vs. 5, 6)
3. How did Jesus explain the difference between 'clean' and 'unclean'? (vs. 10, 11)
4. What did Jesus say his disciples should do about the offended Pharisees? (vs. 14)
5. How did Jesus expand his teaching about 'clean' and 'unclean'? (vs. 19, 20)
6. When the Canaanite woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter, what did he say to her? (vs. 24-26)
7. What was the Canaanite woman's answer to Jesus? How did he respond? (vs. 27, 28)
8. Why were the crowds praising the God of Israel? (vs. 31)
9. Jesus had compassion on the crowds. What were the disciples worried about? (vs. 33)
10. How many people were fed? (vs. 38)

After the Babylonian captivity, in an effort to hold the people together in their commitment to Yahweh, the Jewish rabbis began to make meticulous rules and regulations governing the daily life of the people. These were interpretations and applications of the law of Moses, handed down from generation to generation. In Jesus' day this 'tradition of the elders' was in oral form. It was not put into writing in the Mishnah until 200 AD.

48 Matthew: Chapter 15 – What did it mean to them?

The Pharisees and teachers of the law mentioned here came from Jerusalem and were probably well-regarded. We can tell from Matthew's perspective, though, that he probably regarded them as a semi-official delegation from the Sanhedrin. Certainly they were the source of passionate opposition to Jesus. In this instance, they attack Jesus through his disciples' behavior. They spoke of 'the tradition of the elders' being broken. For a very long time, the Pharisees had been the keepers of the oral traditions that ordered the lives of ordinary Jewish people. In fact, they had elevated this oral tradition to almost the same level as the books of Scripture.

Jesus' response is not exactly a rebuttal. He instead makes it clear that they are not above using the rules and regulations to benefit themselves. The greed of at least some of these men made them disobey one of God's commands—Honor thy father and thy mother—by taking the money which should have gone to the support of elderly parents and instead giving it to the temple. Jesus accused them of making a show of devotion to God, when what they were really doing was failing to follow a direct command.

The whole idea of 'clean' versus 'unclean' deals with the fact that what a person truly *is* affects what he or she says and does. True religion must deal with the inner nature of a person and not with mere external behavior. In that sense, Jesus points out to the Pharisees that they, in fact, are unclean. No amount of hand-washing (or fulfilling the letter of the law) can make their hearts clean.

The healing of the Canaanite woman happens after Jesus has withdrawn from the opposition of the Pharisees and entered non-Jewish territory. Matthew's Jewish readers would be intensely interested in Jesus' doing a miracle to aid a Gentile, on Gentile territory. Jesus' silence does not quiet the woman; so his disciples beg him to stop her persistent cries, probably by answering her begging. While the word translated 'dog' probably means a pet, it is still made clear that Jesus' concern is first of all for the lost children of Israel. However, his presence in this region, and the subsequent feeding 4,000 Gentiles (nearly 10,000 with women and children), make it clear that the promise and the kingdom will be for all peoples.

49 Matthew: Chapter 15 – Application Questions

1. The Pharisees used the tradition of hand-washing to rebuke Jesus. He answered by pointing them to a command of God. What are some modern ways we could rephrase this? For example: “Why do these deacons break the tradition of our church? They wear shorts to serve communion!” Jesus might respond, “Why are you thinking about the fashion choices of these deacons instead of your heart’s relationship with God?” What are some other examples?
2. From the way Jesus describes it, if people have evil behaviors, then they probably have evil in their hearts. What if people’s behaviors are not this bad? For instance, they haven’t given false testimony, just fudged the truth a little. Are they still evil? Where does ‘clean’ become ‘just a little smudged’?
3. This interaction with the Canaanite woman is odd. Why do you think Jesus ignored her? He did, after all, come into her hometown area. Can we relate this, possibly, to the way we aid homeless people? Can we say “Our money has to go first to support our church or our families”? Why or why not?
4. Jesus’ compassion for the hungry Gentiles caused a huge amount of work for his disciples. It looks as though Jesus thinks the needs of others outweigh the needs of his disciples. What do you think about this? Should we put our needs aside and focus on the needs of other people?

50 Matthew: Chapter 16 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did the Pharisees and Sadducees come to speak to Jesus? (vs. 1)
2. Why did Jesus tell them they would only get the sign of Jonah? (vs. 4)
3. How did the disciples misunderstand Jesus' warning about the 'yeast' of the Pharisees and Sadducees? (vs. 7)
4. What did the disciples finally understand about Jesus' allusion? (vs. 12)
5. When they reached Caesarea Philippi (a pagan area), what question did Jesus ask his disciples? (vs. 13)
6. How did Simon Peter answer the question of Jesus' identity? (vs. 16)
7. Who revealed this knowledge to Peter? (vs. 17)
8. What did Jesus begin to teach the disciples? (vs. 21)
9. How did Peter react to this teaching? (vs. 22)
10. How will Jesus' followers be rewarded, when he comes in glory with the angels? (vs. 27)

The word "church" is from a Greek word "ekklesia", which means called out. In the New Testament it usually refers to a Christian congregation, or to all God's people redeemed by Christ.

51 Matthew: Chapter 16 – What did it mean to them?

Fear is what drove the Pharisees and Sadducees to Jesus, to test him. Fear of loss of control of the heart of the people. Fear of Roman reprisals. Fear of confusion among people they had shepherded for so long. Fear of loss of certainty about God's heart towards his people. The fear that comes from self-doubt. The fear of theological solid ground becoming quicksand under their feet. Fear of **not knowing** what was to come. We can't really blame them for their fear. The biggest problem wasn't the fear itself, it was the determination and clutching of the old ideas in the face of Jesus and his open power. The Pharisees and Sadducees had either seen his power demonstrated, or they had spoken to witnesses. Their refusal to accept what they knew in their hearts to be true was the sign of their hardness of heart.

Jesus' withdrawal from Galilee was his last one before he began his trip towards Jerusalem to his death. We can imagine that the conversation he has with his disciples is on the boat trip, with them concerned about food and Jesus thinking about his opponents. The disciples are in danger of following those opponents: they are concerned about food, even though they have seen Jesus do acts of creation. This act of ignoring what they knew to be true was a dangerous step towards being like the Pharisees and Sadducees, and Jesus makes clear to them that they must be wary.

There were many opinions about Jesus' identity, even among his disciples. Because Jesus knows the end of his ministry is approaching, he forces his followers to articulate their beliefs. When Peter says out loud that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, he is breaking with Jewish teachings about God and firmly setting his feet on another path—a path away from the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus' affirmation that this revelation comes from God himself must have been something of a relief to the disciples: it did not depend on their mental abilities, but on the graciousness of God.

Peter was an accepted name in Jesus' day. The word "petros" was masculine, and in the follow-up statement Jesus uses the feminine word "petra". Because of this change, many have attempted to avoid identifying Peter as the rock on which Jesus builds his church. However, if it weren't for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken 'rock' to be anything or anyone other than Peter. Peter was, in fact, the first to make this formal confession. He was prominent in the new church. We can think of him as 'first among equals', and on the foundation of such men Jesus built his church.

52 Matthew: Chapter 16 – Application Questions

1. It is significant that the Pharisees and Sadducees joined forces against Jesus. Most of these leaders were protecting the status quo and trying to keep political peace, but there were probably some genuine seekers. When we are trying new things at church, how can we tell the troublemakers from those who are genuinely curious?
2. Not all teaching is good—or even right. Can you think of some popular teachings that have been just plain wrong? What should we do when we hear others speak approvingly of these teachings?
3. For almost the entire history of the church, there has been conflict about what Jesus meant when he said “On this rock I will build my church”. Do you think he was talking about Peter himself or the confession? Why do you think this? Do you think it makes any difference? Why or why not?
4. Jesus said that if anyone was going to follow him, that person must deny himself and take up his cross. What does this look like in our everyday lives? How do we live this out?

53 Matthew: Chapter 17 – Scripture Questions

1. After Jesus was changed, how was he described? (vs. 2)
2. Who was with Jesus, and what did Peter want to do for them? (vs. 3, 4)
3. What did the voice from the cloud say? (vs. 5)
4. When would the disciples be allowed to tell what they had seen? (vs. 9)
5. What did Jesus say that helped them understand who 'Elijah' was? (vs. 12, 13)
6. Why did the man bring his epileptic son to Jesus for healing? (vs. 16)
7. What was the reason behind the disciple's failure to heal the boy? (vs. 20)
8. Why were the disciples filled with grief? (vs. 22, 23)
9. What situation greets Peter and Jesus in Capernaum? (vs. 24)
10. How did Jesus deal with the tax money problem? (vs. 25-27)

The 'two-drachma' tax was the annual temple tax required of every male 20 years of age and older. It was worth approximately two day's wages (half a shekel) and was used for the upkeep of the temple.

54 Matthew: Chapter 17 – What did it mean to them?

Jesus' transfiguration accomplished three things: 1) it was a revelation of Jesus' glory as the Son of God, a glory that was hidden for now but would be fully revealed when he returns; 2) it was a confirmation of the difficult teaching given to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi (Peter's confession and Jesus' pronouncement); and 3) an encouraging and uplifting experience for the disciples, who had become discouraged after having been reminded so recently of Jesus' impending suffering and death. The "cloud" signifies the presence of God, as it did in the Old Testament. It also was associated with the future. What the Voice from the cloud says stresses that Jesus is both Son and Suffering Servant, and that he is to be listened to, even above Moses and Elijah.

The two other people who appeared with Jesus were extremely important to the Jewish nation. Moses appears as the representative of the old covenant and the promise of salvation, which was soon to be fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Elijah appears as the appointed restorer of all things. It was taught that Elijah would appear before the coming of the Messiah. The disciples apparently wondered why, if Jesus was the Messiah, that Elijah had not appeared. In this reading, Jesus helps them understand that John the Baptist was, in fact, Elijah returned. "Restore all things" can best be understood as "restore the true meaning of righteousness before God", which John the Baptist certainly did in his preaching.

The failure of the disciples to heal the epileptic boy is part of the pattern of the disciples: advancement in understanding, then failure to understand. Sometimes their faith in Jesus made them able to heal and do wondrous things: other times, they seemed to be trying to wield the power like magic, as something in their own power. These were the times they failed. Only when they acted in sincerity and purity in faith and prayer did they succeed.

The "two-drachma tax" was most likely a Jewish tax to support the temple services. Jesus teaches Peter that, just as royal sons were exempt from the taxes imposed by their fathers, so too Jesus was exempt from the 'tax' imposed by his Father. In other words Jesus acknowledges the temple tax to be an obligation to God; but since he is uniquely God's Son, he is exempt. He also is freeing his disciples from the temple tax on the grounds that they, too, will belong to the category of "sons". However, he pays the tax anyway, presumably because he was so humble that he would not deliberately (or needlessly) cause offense.

55 Matthew: Chapter 17 – Application Questions

1. When Peter, James and John saw (and heard) things that made it clear who Jesus really was, they fell down terrified. Before this, they had only THOUGHT they knew him. There is a lot of talk today about “Jesus would never do (*this*)” or “Jesus would care about (*that*)”. What are the problems with making those kind of statements?
2. Jesus was exasperated and annoyed with the disciple’s failure to deal with the demon-possessed boy, telling them that it was their lack of faith that had caused the problem. Thinking of this in terms of ministry responsibilities that we (as disciples) have been given, do you think that we can blame failures on lack of faith? Does a successful ministry deserve to be praised for an abundance of faith on the part of those who accomplish it?
3. On the other hand, it seems to be true that Jesus’ disciples were attempting to carry out ministry on his behalf. Should they have waited until they were formally commissioned? How effective is it when people do ministry ‘on their own’, without formal plans or oversight?
4. The involuntary temple tax that Jesus paid for himself and Peter was necessary for the upkeep of the temple. Jesus said that while they didn’t actually need to pay, it was better to do so. Can this be compared to the need to support our church building and facilities? Why or why not?

56 Matthew: Chapter 18 – Scripture Questions

1. What do Jesus' disciples want to know, after learning that Jesus (and they) are in the family of God? (vs. 1)
2. What sort of person will be the greatest in the kingdom? (vs. 2-5)
3. Which is worse, to be drowned or to cause a 'little one' to stumble in their faith? (vs. 5)
4. How does Jesus tell his followers to deal with something that causes them to 'stumble' in their faith? (vs. 7-9)
5. How does God feel about a single person who is lost? (vs. 14)
6. What is the process for dealing with a person who is sinning? (vs. 15-17)
7. How does Jesus encourage his followers about requests made to God? (vs. 19, 20)
8. What problem does Peter ask Jesus to solve? (vs. 21, 22)
9. In the parable Jesus tells, what kind of debt does the first servant have to the king? (vs. 23-27)
10. How does this forgiven servant deal with one who owes him a much smaller debt? How does the king react to news of the hard heart of his servant? (vs. 30-34)
11. How does Jesus apply this story to Peter's original question? (vs. 35)

57 Matthew: Chapter 18 – What did it mean to them?

At the end of the last chapter, Jesus teaches Peter that he (Jesus) is royalty and exempt from the temple tax. Therefore, Peter is exempt too, because he is with Jesus. So as soon as the other disciples hear about this, they come to Jesus and ask who is going to be the greatest in heaven. Their first concern is to know their place in the structure of heaven! It was common in ancient days for writers to put forward models of heroes and statesmen for their readers to imitate; Jesus instead points to a child. More so then than now, children were powerless, without status and completely dependent on their parents. Jesus teaches that his followers were to imitate people of no status, people who recognize their dependence.

The word “stumble” means to ‘sin’. This meant specifically to cause the person to fall from the way of Christ and be damned. Jesus refers then to a form of punishment that would have been horrifying to his Jewish hearers, that of drowning. He says this punishment would be an act of mercy compared to what is in store for those who turn ‘little ones’ from Christ’s way. Jesus then moves from others as the cause of stumbling to personal responsibility. Judaism abhorred self-mutilation, so this is an especially frightening image of the cost that one must be willing to pay to avoid spiritual death.

In ancient Jewish times, people believed in guardian angels. Jesus implies that the guardian angels of children were of the highest rank, showing how they were valued. When you connect this belief with the stress on God’s agenda to go after those who stray, we can see that it is not enough not to cause stumbling (sin); we must actively seek to prevent anyone from stumbling.

Synagogues doubled as local courts, useful in handling disputes in Jewish communities. Later on, Christians transferred the same function to churches. It was standard to require at least two witnesses. In the case of a habitual sinner, the assumption is that this person was never truly saved. Here, Jesus (with the authority of God) authorizes his followers to deal with an unrepentant person. From the original language it appears that believers in this situation are merely ratifying the heavenly court’s decree. They are not so much condemning a person as they are recognizing their true nature.

Judaism also stressed forgiveness, though some teachers saw the need to limit forgiveness for premeditated sin, pointing out that repentance was otherwise not genuine. Here Jesus reverses that principle, demanding unlimited forgiveness toward the truly repentant. The story he tells of the king’s forgiveness uses well known principles. If poor crops or other circumstances forced a ruler to forgive taxes, he did so with the understanding that his people would in turn release the debts of those indebted to them. Jesus is clear: forgiveness must issue from the heart, and it must be sincere. God has forgiven us; if we fail to show grace to others who have repented, this text promises us hellfire.

58 Matthew: Chapter 18 – Application Questions

1. Can you identify your own worst sin? What are you willing to “cut off” in order to remove this sin from your life?
2. In Jesus’ parable of the shepherd, the 99 sheep were left while the one lost one was searched out. Do you think this is a good way to think of church members who have stopped coming to church (any church at all)? Should somebody seek them out? What sort of technique should we use to bring them back to the ‘sheep fold’?
3. As far as Jesus was concerned, someone who claimed to be a follower of his but refused to stop sinning was to be fully excommunicated, which implied spiritual death. Is this even possible today? What sorts of persistent, unrepentant sins do you think our congregation would accept as worthy of excommunication?
4. On the other hand, someone who is genuinely repentant is to be forgiven over and over. How can we tell if someone is genuinely repentant if they keep doing the same thing over and over? Where do we draw the line?

59 Matthew: Chapter 19 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did the Pharisees come to question Jesus? (vs. 3)
2. Since the Pharisees were unable to argue against God, who did they invoke next, in an attempt to disrupt Jesus' connection with the people who followed him? (vs. 7)
3. After Jesus taught that divorce was not God's intent for humanity, how did the disciples respond? (vs. 10)
4. Who did Jesus say this kind of permanent commitment was for? (vs. 12)
5. How did Jesus treat the children who were brought to him? (vs. 14, 15)
6. What was the rich man concerned about? (vs. 16)
7. Why was the young man saddened? (vs. 20-22)
8. Why were the disciples astonished? (vs. 23-25)
9. What great truth did Jesus teach them about their ability to be saved? (vs. 26)
10. How would Jesus reward his apostles at 'the renewal of all things'? (vs. 28-30)

60 Matthew: Chapter 19 – What did it mean to them?

God sometimes allowed what was less than ideal because people's hard hearts made the ideal unattainable. To be able to exercise some restraint over human injustice, Moses' civil laws regulated some institutions rather than seeking to abolish them altogether: divorce, multiple wives, the avengers of blood feuds, and slavery. Jewish lawyers themselves recognized that God had allowed some behavior as a concession to human weakness. Here, Jesus' opponents are assuming that since there was a law addressing divorce that God permitted divorce. Jesus says that divorce was permitted by Moses only as a concession to Israel's hard hearts, which of course implied that his questioners also had hard hearts. Some husbands today twist biblical teachings to justify abusing their wives. And some churches use Jesus' words in this very passage—words that may have been meant to protect an innocent Jewish wife from being wrongfully divorced by her husband—to batter innocent parties in divorces. Human nature hasn't changed very much over the years!

God's ideal was always that we should avoid divorce; the preservation of a marriage depends on both people, however, and one partner can (obviously) end a marriage against the other's will. Roman law permitted either party to divorce the other; Jewish law permitted the husband to divorce the wife, regardless of the wife's wishes. Both Jewish and Roman law required divorce for adultery, and Matthew's audience would have interpreted Jesus' words as sexual unfaithfulness to the marriage as grounds for divorce. To divorce a spouse after adultery was simply the recognition that the marriage had already been terminated by the creation of a new union. Any Jewish reader would have taken this for granted.

The phrase 'except for infidelity' most likely refers to the validity of the divorce itself. No one in ancient times permitted remarriage if the divorce was invalid, but a valid divorce by definition included the right to remarry. Jesus' point is not to break up second and third marriages, but to underline in no uncertain terms the sanctity of marriage and our responsibility to preserve it when this is at all possible.

The disciples were concerned about the danger of marrying without an escape clause. Marriages were arranged by parents, and in Galilee at least prospective spouses could not spend time alone until after the wedding. More so than today, marriage partners could not know in advance how their spouse would turn out. To marry without the possibility of divorce in a painful marriage seemed worse than not marrying at all, in the disciples' minds.

Jesus' remark about celibacy would have seemed very graphic to the Jewish listeners. Jewish religious practice did not allow eunuchs full participation in the faith community. Although there were some who may have preferred celibacy, mainstream Jewish society regarded marriage and childbearing as solemn responsibilities. Jesus' description of the demands of following him was, therefore, startling and troubling to his disciples.

61 Matthew: Chapter 19 – Application Questions

1. God's standards for us seem awfully high. Is there any point to even trying to live up to his standards? What are we supposed to do when we fail to live up to them?
2. Jesus is constantly taking time to feed hungry people and bless children, right in the middle of teaching about the coming of the Kingdom. Our church does a pretty good job of helping people. On a scale of one to ten, how do you think we measure up on the 'coming of the Kingdom' part?
3. Wealth and status make perfect surrender to God's will more difficult, because we think we have more to lose. Can you think of something that you are simply not willing to give up in service to Jesus? Example: What if giving up a cell phone would give you enough money to support a mission?
4. Many of the Jews of Jesus' time viewed wealth as a mark of God's blessing. If this is not true (and we believe it is not), then what IS a mark of God's blessing? What does it mean to be blessed by God?

62 Matthew: Chapter 20 – Scripture Questions

1. In the parable, how does Jesus describe the kingdom of heaven? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Why did the landowner hire the people standing around at the end of the work day? (vs. 7)
3. When it was time to pay the laborers, in what order were they paid? (vs. 8)
4. What did those who were hired first expect? Why did they complain? (vs. 10-12)
5. How did the landowner answer those who complained? (vs. 13-15)
6. During the third teaching to the Twelve about his coming death, who does he say will actually perform the physical punishment and death? (vs. 19)
7. How did Jesus respond to the request of James, John, and their mother? (vs. 23)
8. What teaching did Jesus give the other ten apostles when they were indignant about James' and John's request? (vs. 26-28)
9. As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, what did the blind men shout? (vs. 30, 31)
10. How did Jesus respond to their request for healing? (vs. 34)

The area around Jericho was well-known as a source of balsam, which was believed to be useful in the treatment of eye ailments. So, to walk past blind people on the road would have been completely normal. (Imagine walking past MD Anderson in Houston and seeing people there for cancer treatment.)

63 Matthew: Chapter 20 – What did it mean to them?

Eternal life is not 'fair'; it is a gift of God's grace. If eternal life were 'fair' (that is, a payment to us based on the quality and quantity of our good works), nobody would ever see heaven. Eternal life cannot be earned, but it can be received as a gift. That is what Jesus was teaching with this parable. It is not the 'righteous' (those who do the most good deeds, or those who know the scripture best) who get to heaven, it is sinners who know that they don't deserve anything but wrath, but who have received the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, working in the vineyard is a fairly common way to understand serving in the Lord's kingdom. While there is an emphasis on wages, showing that this story is primarily about God's gifts (or rewards) for faithful service, the length of service and the amount of work done does not determine what the reward is. It is possible that this story was prompted by the disciples' claim that they had left everything to follow Christ. Maybe they felt that they deserved a reward for their service. This parable makes some clear points to the disciples (and to us). First, the Lord is sovereign over His kingdom. He can reward/pay people whatever he wants, as long as He is just. Second, everyone who serves the Lord will be treated fairly. Third, how the Lord treats all of His servants is by grace. Last, the workers should be pleased with what He gives them, and not concerned with what He gives other people.

The disciples recognized that Jesus was Messiah. They believed that he would soon reign. However, they seemed to misunderstand the seriousness of the sacrifice that must come first. We can see this by James and John Zebedee and their request for a place in the new Kingdom. Matthew contrasts this request with the request of the two blind men. Both groups of people recognize Jesus as the coming King, but James and John (and their mother) were looking for personal advancement. The blind men were looking to Jesus out of genuine need.

The idea that only those who suffered with Jesus would reign with him was a principle that became a standard teaching of early Christians. The 'cup' to be shared is his death, and was an image borrowed from the Prophets. This was a price that they would pay for following Christ.

64 Matthew: Chapter 20 – Application Questions

1. It is a given in America that the harder you work, the better you should be compensated (ideally). This creates a real conflict with Jesus' description of the Kingdom as a place where we all receive the same kind of salvation, based on what God has offered rather than based on our own efforts. What is wrong with expecting a reward for doing good things in Jesus' name?
2. The disciples may have understood Jesus' phrase "on the third day he will be raised to life" to mean that Jesus would be entering into ETERNAL life, not life on this planet. There is a lot of contention and confusion among Christians about what different doctrines "really mean". How important is it that we get doctrines right? What happens if we get them wrong?
3. Jesus told the Twelve that if they wanted to be great, that they had to be willing to be servants and slaves. In our church, are the greatest those who serve the most? Why or why not?
4. The two blind men were persistent and (after they were brought to Jesus) direct. Is it possible that the clarity and directness of their need is what caused Jesus to heal them? What do you want from Jesus? Are you clear about it?

65 Matthew: Chapter 21 – Scripture Questions

1. As the group got closer to Jerusalem, what did Jesus send two disciples to find? (vs. 2)
2. How did the crowd participate in the entry into Jerusalem? (vs. 8-11)
3. Why did Jesus turn over the money changer tables in the temple courts? (vs. 13)
4. How did the chief priests and the teachers of the law respond to the healings and the cheers? (vs. 15)
5. What happened to the fig tree that had leaves but no fruit? (vs. 19)
6. What were the chief priests and elders of the people questioning Jesus about when he was teaching in the temple courts? (vs. 23)
7. In the parable of the two sons, what was the difference between their responses to their father? (vs. 28-32)
8. How did the vineyard tenants treat the servants and the son of the vineyard owner? (vs. 35-39)
9. According to the chief priests and elders, what should happen to the tenants of the vineyard? (vs. 41)
10. What happened when the chief priests and elders realized that Jesus was talking about them? (vs. 45, 46)

66 Matthew: Chapter 21 – What did it mean to them?

The trip to Jerusalem from Jericho was 17 miles, rising 3,000 feet. The road went through Bethany (where Jesus would stay for a week) and run close by Bethphage (which means ‘house of figs’).

The quotation from Zechariah 9:9 speaks of a donkey, the animal sometimes ridden by rulers in times of peace. The Jews certainly understood these verses as prophecy about the Messiah. So Jesus was now openly proclaiming himself as Messiah, and he was showing the kind of peace-loving approach he was making to the city. His ability to ride an ‘unbroken’ colt in the middle of all the cheering crowds shows his control over nature.

The words of praise came primarily from Psalm 118:26-26, and it was part of the ‘great Hallel’ of the Passover celebration. “Hosanna” was a word from Hebrew that originally meant ‘Save!’. By Jesus’ time, this word had become a word recognizing blessing and the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus probably entered Jerusalem through the north entrance to the outer court of the Temple. His anger at the marketplace atmosphere of the Temple is accompanied by Scripture, beginning with Isaiah 56:7. Isaiah was looking forward to a time when the Temple would be a house of prayer. Then Jesus moves to Jeremiah 7:11, which uses ‘den of robbers’. Jeremiah is warning against a superstitious reverence for the physical temple compound mixed with wickedness. The word translated ‘robber’ meant ‘nationalist rebel’. So instead of a place dedicated to prayer and worship of God as a witness to the nations, the temple had become a symbol of the superstitious belief that God would protect and promote his people regardless of whether or not they followed His will.

The story of the fig tree is what is called an ‘acted parable’, a physical demonstration of a truth the disciples needed to learn. Fig trees normally have figs if the leaves are showing. Jesus takes the opportunity of this ‘false’ tree to teach that if there is a pretense of life but no actual fruit, there will be serious consequences. This story, then, falls in line with the cleansing of the temple, which criticizes those who pretend to be holy but are spiritually barren.,

67 Matthew: Chapter 21 – Application Questions

1. The idea of authority was important to the chief priests and elders. It was more important than whether Jesus' teaching was true. Why do you think they felt this way? What do we gain by leaning on the teachings and authority of others? What do we lose?
2. In the parable of the two sons, one said no but changed his mind. The other said yes but didn't follow through. Why is the second one a bad son? He had good intentions. Should intentions count? Why or why not?
3. Jesus told the disciples that if they believed, they would receive whatever they asked for in prayer. We have all asked for things that we didn't receive. Was this promise only for the disciples? Is our belief too weak? Why aren't all prayers answered "yes"?
4. The money changer tables and the dove sales tables were so hateful to Jesus that he turned them over and chased the sellers out. He said they were perverting the purpose of the temple. Are there things that happen in our worship, or in our sanctuary, that pervert the purpose of that place and time? What should we do about them?

68 Matthew: Chapter 22 – Scripture Questions

1. In the parable of the wedding feast, how many times did the king call those invited to the banquet? (vs. 3-5)
2. How did the king respond to the snub of the invited guests? (vs. 7)
3. After people from the streets were invited, who got in trouble? (vs. 11, 12)
4. How did the Pharisees and Herodians try to flatter Jesus (before they trapped him)? (vs. 16, 17)
5. What did the questioners think about Jesus' answer? (vs. 22)
6. Why was it odd that the Sadducees were asking a question about the afterlife? (vs. 23)
7. When Jesus shut down the Sadducees, how did the crowd respond? (vs. 33)
8. How did Jesus answer the question from the Pharisees about "the greatest commandment"? (vs. 37-40)
9. While the Pharisees were still standing there, what did Jesus do? (vs. 41, 42)
10. What was the effect of all the questions and answers? (vs. 46)

69 Matthew: Chapter 22 – What did it mean to them?

In this parable of the wedding banquet, the king is to be understood as God. Although it is called an 'invitation', since it comes from a king it is to be understood as more than just a social invitation. You can refuse, but if you do you defy the authority of God and so choose the alternative: destruction in outer darkness.

In ancient custom, the invitations would have been sent out far in advance. The servant's job was simply to tell those who had long ago been invited that it was time to come. The comparison is to the Jews: long ago God had promised them a Messiah, and now it was time to accept him. Jesus' parable makes clear to his listeners that if they reject him as the promised one, they will condemn themselves to outer darkness. The story-in-a-story about the man not wearing wedding clothes is a little obscure, but may simply be meant as a warning to those who come late to the banquet: salvation is offered to all, but it requires repentance and obedience.

Matthew next tells of three attempts by the Jewish authorities to outwit Jesus, either to draw him into making statements on some controversial issue or to embarrass and discredit him before the people. The Pharisees (with the help of the Herodians) made the first attempt. Next came the Sadducees, then last another attempt by the Pharisees.

The question about paying taxes was a deliberate plot to trap Jesus. The Pharisees opposed the payment of this tax (a poll tax), and the Herodians supported the payment of the tax. The questioners, therefore, were ready to either hand him over to Caesar or to get him in trouble with the common people. What happened, however, was that Jesus refused to support rebellion against Rome. He taught the validity of human government and recognized Roman rule, while teaching that God alone is sovereign and always over 'Caesar'.

The question about marriage after death was intended by the Sadducees to embarrass Jesus. The story of the seven brothers was most likely a stock joke used by the Sadducees to point up how ridiculous it was to think of life after death. Jesus uses their own Scripture (the Pentateuch) to answer them. The New Testament doctrine of resurrection avoids two extremes, the literal view of the Sadducees and the Greek view of life after death. One understanding of the biblical view of resurrection sees the body as essential to what people are, and the body is seen as undergoing change similar to the renewal that begins with the inner self.

70 Matthew: Chapter 22 – Application Questions

1. In the wedding banquet parable, both the good and the bad were brought in to the feast. It was the king himself who sorted out the ones that needed to be tossed out. Do you think our congregation has both good and bad people attending? Is it okay to secretly hope that God tosses some of them outside?
2. The whole idea of questioning Jesus was not to get answers, but to get him in trouble (with somebody). What are some questions that people have today about Jesus? What do we achieve, accomplish, or avoid, by asking these questions?
3. The Pharisees had identified over 600 commandments, all of which they felt were equally important. Do you think Jesus' summary is harder or easier than having a list? Why?
4. At the end of this section, Jesus turns the tables on his questioners by forcing them to confront the question of his identity. They chose not to answer (publicly) because anything they said would force certain behaviors and actions. So: who is Jesus? If we answer this question out loud, what does it commit us to do?

71 Matthew: Chapter 23 – Scripture Questions

1. Jesus tells his disciples to obey what they were told to do by the Pharisees, but not to behave like them. Why? (vs. 3, 4)
2. Why did the Pharisees do the things they did? What did they love? (vs. 5-7)
3. What sort of names were the disciples to choose for themselves? Why? (vs. 8-12)
4. The first woe comes because they shut the kingdom of _____ in men's faces. (vs. 13)
5. The second woe relates to converts. What do they do? (vs. 15)
6. The third woe is because they misunderstand what makes things _____. (vs. 17-19)
7. The fourth woe comes because of neglecting _____. (vs. 23)
8. The fifth woe relates to the contrast between an outside that is clean but an inside that is _____. (vs. 25)
9. The sixth woe blasts the Pharisees: on the outside they appear righteous, but on the inside they are full of _____ and _____. (vs. 28)
10. The seventh woe accuses them of being descendants of _____. (vs. 31)
11. What did Jesus say was going to happen to these Pharisees? (vs. 35, 36)
12. How did Jesus express his sorrow over Jerusalem? (vs. 37)

72 Matthew: Chapter 23 – What did it mean to them?

This collection of ‘woes’ is a fiery blast against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The language, pounding anger and forcefulness make it clear that Jesus was not a soft-hearted pushover, or the ‘happy smiley bunny-loving’ figure that people sometimes try to make him into.

Jesus begins by making it clear that he is not opposing Moses or any of the teachings of Moses. On the contrary, he actually insists on obedience to the teachings of Moses as presented by the Pharisees. This shows that the Pharisees actually did know the law and the demands of the law. From here on out, though, Jesus exposes the pretense and inner lives of deceit of these teachers.

Phylacteries were boxes that contained printed out scripture verses. The boxes were worn tied to the foreheads and arms of those who were devout. It was a way of keeping the word of God close. Think of it as an old version of the “What Would Jesus Do (WWJD)” bracelets that were popular several years ago.

Jesus gives a warning against seeking titles of honor for the purpose of bragging, or making oneself important in the eyes of others. He is not only discussing the error of the Pharisees but is also teaching the disciples the type of teacher and leader that they should try to become in the days ahead. As Matthew has repeated elsewhere, humility and service are of paramount importance in the Kingdom of God.

The central message of the ‘woes’ is that the Pharisees did not rightly understand the scriptures, and therefore had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. They seemed to believe that proper conduct was the key to being admitted to the kingdom, rather than a proper heart for God. They were converting people not to Judaism, but to Phariseeism (which left no room for Jesus). They neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness in order to focus on things of lesser importance, which distorted God’s will as revealed in Scripture. They had become so occupied with external religion that their internal lives had become like ‘tombs full of dead men’s bones’. They spoke fondly of their ancestors, but are already plotting ways to put an end to Jesus—just as their ancestors did to the prophets.

Jesus’ sorrow over Jerusalem accomplishes two things. First, it tinges the judgments with compassion. Second, it is a definite identification of himself with God. He is the One who has longed to gather and protect this rebellious nation—if only they would permit him to do so.

73 Matthew: Chapter 23 – Application Questions

1. The Pharisees were condemned for ‘shutting the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces’. One way they did this was by making it impossible to follow all the rules. Does church today do this in some way? How?
2. Jesus didn’t say “don’t follow the rules”. In fact, he said told them to keep the law, without neglecting the important matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness. How does this apply to the popular idea that ‘Jesus loves me just as I am, flaws and all’? Should we come up with a standard of behavior to follow?
3. The Pharisees wore fancy boxes on their heads and arms and big tassels on their robes to show everyone how pious and devoted they were. What do people do today to show how religious and devoted they are to God?

74 Matthew: Chapter 24 - Scripture Questions

1. After Jesus told his disciples that the Temple would one day be destroyed, what did they want to know? (vs. 3)
2. What were the 'birth pangs' of his return that Jesus told the disciples to watch for? (vs. 5-7)
3. How did Jesus say it would be known when the end is near? (vs. 14)
4. What did Jesus say they should do when the abomination appeared in the holy place? (vs. 16-20)
5. What sort of things will happen during the time of waiting before Jesus returns? (vs. 23, 24)
6. How clear will it be, when Jesus actually returns? (vs. 27)
7. Who will know the day or hour of Jesus' return? (vs. 36)
8. What is it going to be like when Jesus returns? (vs. 38-41)
9. What will it be like for those who are living in obedience at the time of Jesus' return? (vs. 46)
10. How will it be for those who are NOT living in obedience when Jesus returns? (vs. 51)

Josephus wrote that there were many who pretended to be Divine sons of God, deceiving the people. One, an Egyptian false prophet, led 30,000 men into the desert. These were cut down by Felix, the procurator of Judea (under the reign of Nero). In fact, during Felix's time imposters were so frequent that some were taken and killed almost every day.

75 Matthew: Chapter 24 – What did it mean to them?

This chapter contains a prediction of the utter destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the collapse of the Jews as a nation and people. All of the things that Jesus speaks of came to pass and are told by the ancient writer Josephus. Some believe that the questions that Jesus answers referred only to the destruction of the Jewish nation. Others believe that Jesus is speaking not only of the destruction of Jerusalem but also of the Last, or Judgment Day.

No stone left upon another: Josephus says that Caesar gave orders that they should demolish the whole city and temple, except for three towers and a part of the western wall. It was scattered so completely even with the ground that there was nothing left to make those who came later believe that it had ever been inhabited. Even the foundations of the temple were dug up. A temple to Jupiter was built in the same location, then destroyed in 325 CE by Constantine. In 637 Arabs captured Jerusalem and began the building of what became known as al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock. Except for a brief period, the area has remained under Muslim control since then, though the city itself is under Israeli control.

For many shall come in my name: Beginning soon after Jesus' crucifixion, men began to appear claiming to be the Christ. Simon Magus is one that is known to have persuaded the people of Samaria that he was the Son of God.

Wars and rumors of wars: after Caligula ordered his statue to be set up in the Temple (which the Jews refused to do), there was every expectation of a war with the Romans.

Nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom: at Caesarea, there was a conflict that resulted in the total expulsion of the Jews, with more than 20,000 killed. The Jews rose up and burnt and sacked the neighboring cities and villages of the Syrians, killing untold numbers of people. Then the Syrians destroyed an untold number of Jews. There were battles in many places, with tens of thousands dead.

Pestilence and famine: In the days of Claudius Caesar a famine came which was so severe in Jerusalem that Josephus says many starved to death, and the pestilences came with the scarcity and bad quality of food.

Earthquakes: several occurred, one in Crete in the reign of Claudius, others in many other places. There was one that occurred in Judea (mentioned by Josephus) which was accompanied by terrible storms, violent winds, constant lightning and thunders.

Josephus computed the number of those who were killed in the siege of Jerusalem at eleven hundred thousand. Afterwards, Titus (the Roman general who led the destruction) had a triumphal arch erected to his honor in Rome.

76 Matthew: Chapter 24 – Application Questions

1. Some people believe that Jesus' teachings here refer only to the fall of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. Some people believe that it includes this fall, but also is a foretelling of the time when he will return to this world. Does it make any difference if we choose one interpretation over another?
 2. How should we act with our friends who believe differently about the end of the world than we do? Is it worth arguing over? What if they are convinced they're right and feel they must change you to their way of thinking?
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1. Each of us will face a personal end of our own world when we die. How would you behave differently if you knew your world would end in a week?
 2. One thing that is crystal clear is that at some point, this world will be ended. How does this make you feel? Should we emphasize this more in our teaching about Jesus?

77 Matthew: Chapter 25 - Scripture Questions

1. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, how does Jesus set the scene of the story? (vs. 1-5)
2. What conflict arises between the bridesmaids who are waiting for the bridegroom? (vs. 6-9)
3. After the unprepared bridesmaids are turned away, what is the moral of the story? (vs. 13)
4. In the next parable, how does Jesus set up the scene? (vs. 14-18)
5. How are the first two servants rewarded? (vs. 19-23)
6. What is the difference between the first two servants and the third servant? (vs. 24, 25)
7. What does the master do to the last servant? (vs. 26-30)
8. When the Son of Man is on his throne, what will he do with the people before him? (vs. 32, 34)
9. What did those on Jesus' right do to earn his pleasure and reward? (vs. 34-40)
10. What did those on Jesus' left do to earn his displeasure and punishment? (vs. 41-46)

The term 'talent' was first used for a unit of weight (about 75 pounds), then for a unit of coinage. A talent was the equivalent of 600 day's wages. The present day use of 'talent' to indicate an ability or gift comes from this parable.

78 Matthew: Chapter 25 – What did it mean to them?

The idea of Messiah as a bridegroom comes from several Old Testament passages. The Lord is spoken of as the 'husband' of his people. Jesus himself, in his parables, places himself in the Lord's place. Both John the Baptist and Jesus spoke in a way that Jesus=the Messiah=the bridegroom. From what we know of the marriage customs of the day, normally the bridegroom (with some close friends) left his home to go to the bride's home, where were various ceremonies, followed by a procession through the streets (after nightfall) to his home. The ten 'virgins' may be the bridesmaids who were assisting the bride. Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch. Those without a torch were assumed to be party crashers or even robbers. The main distinction in this story is not that they dozed, but that the wise brought not only the oil in their lamps but brought an extra supply. It is interesting that the wise women can't help the foolish ones. The implication here is that being prepared is not something that can be shared or transferred between people.

The next parable is different in that it expects the watchful servants to not only be prepared for a long delay, but are also to use and improve their 'talents' right up to the time of the master's return. Servants (slaves) in the ancient world could have a great deal of responsibility and authority. The master in this story entrusts his cash to three slaves who seem to be almost partners in his affairs, maybe even sharers in the profits. The value of the cash given to the slaves is enormous. While we are uncertain of the actual value of a talent, there is no question that it was a huge amount. The wicked servant is worthless because he failed to do good with what was given to him. The parable insists that Jesus' disciples may not simply wait for his return: they must do their duty, growing and developing the resources entrusted to us by God.

In the third passage, it is possible to understand 'the least of these brothers of mine' in a couple of ways. First, it can refer to all who are hungry, distressed, and needy. It is also possible to see the phrase as referring to the way that Jesus' disciples would be treated while they were spreading the Gospel. Jesus identifies himself with the fate of his followers and makes compassion for them equal to compassion to himself.

The surprise of the sheep and the goats is an interesting part of the parable. Neither the 'sheep' nor the 'goats' are surprised at the place the King assigns them, but they are surprised by the reason: they are admitted or excluded on the basis of how they treated Jesus. This is one way that we can see how works of righteousness are valued: the sheep did not show love to gain a final reward, but because of their own compassion. True disciples will love one another and serve the least brother with compassion. This kind of service shows the heart of commitment to Christ.

79 Matthew: Chapter 25 – Application Questions

1. All the bridesmaids started out with oil. The ‘wise’ ones had an extra supply—they were ready to wait a long time. What exactly is involved in being ‘prepared’ for Jesus’ return? For what are we watching?
2. One way to look at the parable of the talents is to think of different levels of understanding about the Gospel. Some people know a lot, some people know a fair amount, some people only know a little. How can we know if we are using our ‘talent’ in a way that will make our Master happy?
3. Jesus is pretty blunt about what is going to happen at The End. There will be a judgment, and people will be divided between those that get into heaven and those who are separated from him eternally. How do you feel about this? Does it seem overly harsh, or are you glad that some people aren’t going to get in?
4. How does this view of Jesus—that he divides people based on how they treat people—affect the way we care for others, especially the physically needy?

80 Matthew: Chapter 26:1-35 - Scripture Questions

1. Why did the chief priests and elders decide not to arrest Jesus during the Passover Feast? (vs. 5)
2. Why were the disciples irritated when the woman anointed Jesus' feet with perfume? (vs. 8, 9)
3. What prophecy did Jesus speak about the woman and her action? (vs. 13)
4. How much money did Judas get from the chief priests for betraying Jesus? (vs. 15)
5. Jesus and his disciples needed a place to celebrate the Passover meal. How did they get the space they needed? (vs. 18)
6. What did Jesus tell the disciples while they were eating? (vs. 21)
7. How did Jesus answer Judas' question? (vs. 25)
8. The actions of Jesus during the Passover created what we call "Words of Institution". What promise did he make to the disciples at the end of the meal? (vs. 29)
9. What did Jesus warn the disciples was going to happen in the very near future? (vs. 31-34)
10. How did the disciples (especially Peter) react to Jesus' prediction? (vs. 35)

81 Matthew: Chapter 26:1-35 – What did it mean to them?

All the Gospels speak of Judas' important role in Jesus' death but none explains what motives prompted his betrayal. He was human, so most likely his motives were mixed: greed, jealousy, perhaps profound disappointment that Jesus was not acting like the Messiah he had expected. In Judas' view, Jesus was acting less and less regal and more and more like a defeated rabbi on his way to death. We know from the other Gospel accounts of the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume that Judas was one of the disciples who were upset at the 'waste'. We also know that Judas was the group treasurer, the one who 'held the purse' of the group. His anger at Jesus' rebuke probably contributed to his willingness to accept such a small amount of money. According to Zechariah, 30 pieces of silver is the value of a slave accidentally gored to death by an ox.

Passover was an important celebration for the Jewish nation. It was the time when they recognized God's salvation from slavery. The term 'Passover' itself was a reminder of the final plague that released them from Egyptian slavery: when the Angel of Death passed through Egypt, those households that had the blood of a lamb painted on their doorframes were spared from the loss of the firstborn child. In the meal that marked this salvation, there would have been special foods served. Though we don't actually know what they would have been, we can be certain of the unleavened bread and wine (which are mentioned in the Scripture). Other food on the table would probably have included cholent, a stewed dish of beans cooked very low and slow, olives with hyssop (a herb with a mint-like taste), bitter herbs with pistachios and a date charoset (a chunky fruit and nut paste). It is also possible that they had roasted lamb, though this was normally reserved for wealthier people. We know from Jesus' actions during the meal that he was sitting in the place reserved for the father of the family. It was his responsibility to speak the words of ritual. The words Jesus used in his Passover meal were significant. When he 'blessed and broke' the bread, he was doing something familiar—except that now the bread was to represent his body, rather than any roasted lamb that had been sacrificed. During the time of the ritual words spoken over the wine, he added new words to mark the new covenant being created.

Just as the first Passover looked forward not only to deliverance from slavery but also to settlement in the promised land, so the Lord's Supper looks forward to deliverance and life in the fulfilled kingdom. The disciples will keep this celebration till Jesus comes; but Jesus will not participate in it until he sits with us when he comes again.

82 Matthew: Chapter 26:1-35 – Application Questions

1. The religious leaders seemed to have no interest in whether Jesus was truthful or right. They seemed to care only to maintain their doctrinal beliefs. How important is it to hold on to our religious beliefs? How can we tell if we are simply holding on to them because we like them, instead of holding on to them because they are true?
2. There seems to be a conflict between Jesus' words earlier about caring for 'the least of these' and his willingness to let this woman use very expensive perfume on him. How can we reconcile these two things?
3. There are many theories about why Judas betrayed Jesus. Is it possible to have a good reason to betray someone?
4. The additions that Jesus made to the Passover Feast were probably startling to the disciples. Are there advantages to changing up our Communion to make it new? What would be the disadvantages?

83 Matthew: Chapter 26:36-75 - Scripture Questions

1. How was Jesus feeling when he went to pray? (vs. 38)
2. What happened to Peter, James and John while Jesus was praying? (vs. 40-43)
3. What did Jesus want to happen? (vs. 39, 42)
4. How did Judas betray Jesus? (vs. 48, 49)
5. What did Jesus say could happen, if he called on his Father? (vs. 53, 54)
6. Why did Jesus not call on God to save him? (vs. 54, 56)
7. What sort of results did the chief priests and Sanhedrin get when they were looking for false evidence against Jesus? (vs. 60)
8. What finally happened to give the leaders the verdict they wanted? (vs. 65)
9. How did Peter react to the recognition he received during Jesus' time with the Sanhedrin? (vs. 69-74)
10. What happened when Peter remembered Jesus' prophecy about his betrayal? (vs. 75)

84 Matthew: Chapter 26:36-75 – What did it mean to them?

The pain and anguish suffered by Jesus at Gethsemane is not something to read over lightly. Three times he begged his father to be saved from his fate. He went to his death knowing that it was his Father's will that he face death completely alone, as the sacrificial Passover Lamb. In agony, he prays for an alternative: though he is supernaturally strengthened (Luke 22:43), he learns only that the Cross is unavoidable if he is to do his Father's will.

Gethsemane was a garden located somewhere on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, in which there were olive trees and olive presses. It seems to have been a comforting spot for Jesus, since there are several times when he and his disciples used it as a place to be alone.

Judas most likely received payment for information about where Jesus could be arrested in a quiet setting, with little danger of mob violence. The 'large crowd' with him was probably both temple police and Roman soldiers. During the feasts, the Romans took extra care to ensure public order, so a request for a small detachment from the cohort would probably have been quickly granted. Because this request would have gone through Pilate, he probably had some idea of what was happening from the beginning.

The Sanhedrin was made up of three groups: leading priests, teachers of the law, and elders. There were seventy members plus the high priest, but they only needed twenty-three for a quorum. Jewish law required at least two witnesses in a capital case, and the two men who came forward may or may not have been paid for their testimony. Desecration of sacred places was almost universally regarded as a capital offense in the ancient world, and the leaders could (in a stretch) take Jesus' words as a threat to desecrate the temple.

When Caiaphas demands a response from Jesus under oath, Jesus is compelled to answer. If he affirms that he is Messiah, then because of their preconceived ideas about the Messiah they must find him to be lying. Jesus does answer, of course, but he explains that he is not to be primarily considered a political Messiah but as the one who, in receiving a kingdom, is exalted at God's right, the position of honor and power. This combines revelation with threat. He tells the members of the Sanhedrin that from then on they would not see him as he now stood before them, but only in his position as undisputed King Messiah and sovereign Judge.

85 Matthew: Chapter 26:36-75 – Application Questions

1. Jesus' grief was so great, Scripture says it brought him to the point of death. How do you deal with this kind of grief and sorrow? What do you do to help you get through it?
2. As much as Jesus wanted to be able to avoid his coming death, he did not resist or try to change the events. What does this teach us about dealing with the difference between what we want and what we have? Should we simply accept what comes to us? Is it wrong to try to make things happen differently?
3. The Garden of Gethsemane seems to have been a place that Jesus and his disciples sought out for rest and refreshment. Where do you go for comfort or rest? To whom do you go when you need comfort and support?
4. Jesus said "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak". Paul said something similar, so this is evidently a common problem. What does the phrase mean to you? How do you attempt to overcome the problem?

86 Matthew: Chapter 27 - Scripture Questions

1. What did Judas do when he saw that Jesus was condemned? (vs. 3-6)
2. What happened to the money that Judas threw into the temple? (vs. 6-10)
3. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, the governor, how did he respond to the accusations made against him? (vs. 11-14)
4. Pilate knew something about the motives of the chief priests. What was it that he knew? (vs. 18)
5. What did Pilate's wife tell him to do? (vs. 19)
6. Who accepted the guilt for Jesus' blood? (vs. 25)
7. How did the governor's soldiers treat Jesus? (vs. 27-31)
8. After he was crucified, what happened to Jesus' clothes? (vs. 35)
9. What were the insults hurled at Jesus? (vs. 39-44)
10. What amazing things happened after Jesus 'gave up his spirit'? (vs. 51-54)
11. Who was given charge of Jesus' body? What did he do with it? (vs. 57-60)
12. Why were the chief priests and Pharisees still afraid? What did Pilate do for them? (vs. 62-66)

87 Matthew: Chapter 27 – What did it mean to them?

Pontius Pilate was the prefect (governor) appointed by Tiberius Caesar in A.D. 26. Prefects held the power of life and death, apart from appeal to Caesar. Sources outside the Bible show Pilate as a cruel, imperious, and insensitive ruler who hated his Jewish subjects and took few pains to understand them. He stole money to build an aqueduct; and when the population of Jerusalem rioted in protest, he sent in soldiers who killed many people. He defiled Jerusalem more than once. Both the Sanhedrin trial and the trial before Pilate were necessary for capital punishment. Without the Sanhedrin, Pilate would never have taken action against Jesus unless he had become convinced Jesus was a dangerous Zealot leader; without Pilate the Sanhedrin might whip up mob violence against Jesus, but it would not be a legally binding death sentence.

Matthew's primary interest in recording Judas' death is to continue the fulfillment theme—not only regarding Jesus' death but also regarding the major events surrounding his crucifixion as prophesied in Scripture. Judas' remorse is not necessarily repentance. He recognizes not only that he is guilty of betrayal but that Jesus was actually innocent. The Jewish leaders' callous response condemns them. He betrayed innocent blood; they condemned innocent blood.

It is possible that Barabbas was the son of a famous rabbi—his name literally means “son of the father”. Barabbas was probably an insurrectionist, and a well-known one. Revolts and bloodshed fostered by guerrilla action were common, and Barabbas had been caught. In the eyes of many of the people he would not be a notorious villain but a hero. It may also be that the two who were crucified with Jesus were co-rebels with Barabbas, for Matthew uses the same word for their offense as for Barabbas. The fact that three crosses had been prepared strongly suggests that Pilate had already ordered that preparations be made for the execution of the three rebels.

The crowd's response to Pilate's choice is understandable. They were probably there to demand Barabbas's release. Both Jesus and Barabbas were popular, but the crowd followed their leaders. Jews often confronted the Roman authorities with a large and noisy delegation, and now the mob mentality took over.

As a continuation of Matthew's emphasis on fulfillment of Scripture, the tearing of the veil in the temple shows that the temple ritual and the law governing it were now obsolete. Jesus himself is the New Temple, the place where God and humans meet. Matthew also implies that the earthquake was the means of tearing the veil as well as opening of the tombs. The resurrection of the “holy people” is difficult. It seems best to understand that these people were raised to life at the same time Jesus was, though there is a great deal of controversy over the event.

88 Matthew: Chapter 27 – Application Questions

1. Judas was devastated by the results of his betrayal, and he put himself beyond redemption. Whose crime was worse: Judas or the chief priests? Why?
2. Pilate's wife (who was not Jewish or a believer in Yahweh) learned in a dream that Jesus was innocent. How is it possible for truth from God to come through non-believers? Do you know of any time this has happened in our day? What should we do with these truths?
3. The Roman soldiers didn't know who Jesus was. Did they bear any responsibility for his death? What about today: should people who don't know who Jesus is, or those who are complete non-believers, be held responsible for the way they live?

89 Matthew: Chapter 28 - Scripture Questions

1. When did Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb? (vs. 1)
2. What had happened at the tomb? (vs. 2-4)
3. How did the angel comfort the women? What orders did he give them? (vs. 5-7)
4. What conflicting feelings came to the women as they ran to tell the disciples? (vs. 8)
5. When Jesus appeared to the women, what did he say to them? (vs. 9, 10)
6. How did the chief priests deal with the report from the guards? (vs. 11-14)
7. What were the results of the lies spread by the guards? (vs. 15)
8. Where did the eleven disciples go? How did they react to Jesus? (vs. 16, 17)
9. “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All _____ in heaven and on earth has been _____.” (vs. 18)
10. In the light of his authority, what did Jesus command his disciples to do? (vs. 19, 20)

90 Matthew: Chapter 28 – What did it mean to them?

The Resurrection is central to Christian theology. After all, if Jesus did not return to life after his death, then everything we believe is a lie! Interestingly enough, the writers of the Gospels don't spend much time on the topic: their assumption of the event is rather matter-of-fact.

'After the Sabbath' is a way of telling approximately when the women went to the tomb. Since they would not walk far during the Sabbath, they had to wait until after the Sabbath. But by then Saturday night was coming on, so they went first thing Sunday morning.

Matthew's record of a resurrection appearance in Galilee probably lies in the combination of two themes that have been throughout his Gospel. 1) The Messiah comes from a despised area and first brings light to a despised people, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit. This is probably also the reason that Jesus appears first to women whose value as witnesses among the Jews is worthless. 2) "Galilee of the Gentiles" matches with the growing theme of Gentile mission in this gospel, and prepares for the Great Commission.

The description of the way that the chief priests tried to head off the story of Jesus' resurrection may be Matthew's explanation of a lie that had made the rounds of the Jewish communities. This story was still common among Jews as late as 100-165 AD. He may also have been making a contrast between the bribes paid by the chief priests as a way to spread lies, while the resurrected Jesus used the promise of his presence to commission his followers to spread the truth of the Gospel.

The mention that some who saw Jesus had "doubts" or "hesitation" is not necessarily a problem. It may be best to think of this as pointing out that Jesus' resurrection did not instantly transform people into spiritual giants. It is possible that the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was necessary to create sturdy faith.

During Matthew's Gospel, he has heavily stressed the authority of Jesus. Here, in the Great Commission, Jesus proclaims that his authority is not only present on earth but also extends to the entire universe. This is the turning point, the place where Messiah's 'kingdom' has dawned in new power. It is the new age of messianic authority, and in this new age his disciples are called to bring all people to accept Christ. They are to hear, understand, and obey Jesus' teaching.

91 Matthew: Chapter 28 – Application Questions

1. When the women came to the tomb and they found out that Christ had risen, they immediately hurried away to tell everyone. What great things about your faith, your church, or your fellow Christians would you be willing to tell people? Why?
2. The chief priests paid off the soldiers to tell a false story. There are people today who have a twisted view of what it means to be Christian. They have taken in false stories and made them the basis of their lives. How do we deal with this issue? How active should we be in opposing these false stories?
3. When they met Jesus in Galilee, they worshipped, but some still hesitated. How do we deal with our doubts or hesitations?