

## October 15 : Scriptures Matthew 17-19

### SUMMARY

Hey, sorry about the length of the last seven days of *Cruisin' Through the Bible*. You'd think I studied and preached through Matthew's Gospel for two and a half years. Oh, wait! I did! I guess I'm going to have to write a book rather than cram all the information in this Bible reading and commentary. I'll work hard to give you the synopsis and nuggets. Maybe.

Okay, chapter 17. Why the Transfiguration now? Consider this: Jesus' identity, His mission, and His promise of the Kingdom were just revealed. Now Jesus' hidden divine nature is revealed. The Transfiguration 1) confirmed Peter's declaration, "You are God's Messiah/You are God, Messiah," 2) affirmed Jesus was no ordinary person facing death, and 3) unveiled the Son of Man (as described in Daniel 7) and the coming reality of the kingdom. The inner circle disciples need to know these things even during the horrible crucifixion.

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to a high place. Since the previous event happened in the vicinity of Caesarea Phillipi, then the most logical high place is somewhere on the summit of Mount Hermon, the highest peak in Israel. It's so high in winter there's snow on the summit and a ski resort today. No kidding! The snow melts as the weather warms. It trickles down, around, and through the mountain, and the underground water pressure forces the cold, crystal-clear water up through the ground at Mount Hermon's base as the headwaters of the Jordan River. From there, the Jordan flows down to Lake Huleh (aka Hulah), the Sea of Galilee, and ends at the Dead Sea. The word "Jordan" comes from the Hebrew "Yarden," which means "to descend."

There's a point to this. At His Transfiguration, Jesus is about to reveal His divine nature to His closest disciples. The Transfiguration is the highest revelation of Who Jesus is short of His resurrection. From this exalted point onward, Jesus begins to "make His descent" up to Jerusalem to die. Jesus, as the God-Man, humbles Himself to death. When He has completed His mission, His Father will resurrect Jesus' body through the Holy Spirit's power and restore Him to life in a glorified state, the same state we will receive when we get to the promised resurrection of the righteous.

So, for Jesus, the way to up (glorification/exaltation) is down (humble humiliation). Jesus starts high (Mount Hermon) and goes "up" to Jerusalem (as travel to the city is referred to), so He can go down (to Sheol), so His Father can raise Jesus "up" and then place Jesus

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in the highest place (His ascension to heaven at the right side of His Father's throne). Got all that?

Here's a lesson: If we want to be exalted, we must humble ourselves before God. If we want to be brought low, we just have to lift our heads in pride. Jesus' example of humility is the one to follow.

Jesus reveals Himself to His disciples so they will learn and share it with the other disciples and followers later, as we see in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

Once the four men reach the right place, Jesus' divine glory shines forth. Then Moses and Elijah show up. What? How can that be? Moses died, but his body was never located. Elijah was transported to heaven via a fiery (God's glory) chariot. Moses could never enter the land physically (Deuteronomy 31:2), but God didn't say Moses' spirit couldn't. And who knows? Maybe Moses and Elijah were in their glorified bodies already.

So why did they appear with Jesus?

- 1) The Law (represented by Moses) and the Prophets (represented by Elijah) speak of Jesus's death.
- 2) It's a fulfillment of Malachi 4, showing that the Day of the Lord has come – God intervening in human history for His purpose (to create salvation through Jesus).
- 3) Moses' work was to deliver God's people. Elijah's job was to call God's people back to God. Jesus' job was to do both, to deliver God's people from the kingdom of death through repentance.
- 4) Finally, both are prophets of salvation. With Jesus, we see a trifacta of God's salvation.

It's no surprise that Peter wants to stay in that beautiful, glorious place (17:4), but the Father has other plans. As God's glory covers the scene (like His glory passing in front of Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 34:5), the Father speaks three things, all related to scripture. "This is my beloved Son (Psalm 2:7), with whom I am well-pleased (Isaiah 42:1). Listen to him! (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19)". Did you catch that? Another trifacta! The Father affirms Jesus by referring to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings – *summing up the entire Hebrew scriptures in one sentence.*

The spectacular event concluded, and as they descend from the high place, the disciples ask about Elijah coming to announce the Day of the Lord. After all, they just saw Elijah.

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Yes, Jesus replies, "Elijah" did come (referring to John and his ministry of preparing the people for God's Messiah), and people did to him what they pleased. It'll be the same with Jesus (17:11-13).

Jesus and the Three meet up with the other disciples who have failed to drive a demon out of a child. The father shows sense because he recognizes Jesus and immediately runs to Him for help (17:14), explaining what the demon does and what the disciples can't do. As you read, you can feel the frustration in Jesus' voice. Notice He calls the disciples an "unbelieving and perverse generation," not "evil and adulterous," as He addressed the spiritual leaders. Why? The two words indicated their lack of trust and confused thinking about God and His power, causing them to fail. "Oh, you faithless guys with your wrong-headed thinking!" What do they need? Solid faith and right thinking! But now isn't the time to correct that. There's a boy to rescue, which Jesus does with a rebuke. Simple. He's God, you know.

The disciples wonder why they failed. Jesus says their small amounts of faith left wiggle room for doubt, enough to undercut their use of God's authority and for the demon to resist them. At their level of trust, their faith in the demonic problem was greater than their trust in God to use them. This is ridiculous. It's not about us. It's about God! God is always bigger, and Jesus proved it. In truth, the disciple's problem was more *quality* of faith (diluted vs. full strength) than *quantity* (amount). Even the tiniest amount of full-strength faith is enough to accomplish the impossible per God's will (17:20)!

We then come to Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> death prediction (17:22-23). Although this is a concise section, it's profound. What is Jesus doing? He's preparing them for the coming traumatic events and doing it in small doses. Jesus doesn't push His disciples. He leads them, warns them, and will be with them. He knows they don't understand what He's telling them, and still, He encourages them with an "I'll meet you on the other side" spoken as "I'll rise again."

One more thing as it pertains to the Son of Man title. Again, this comes from Daniel 7. In Jesus' day, many Jews believed that Yehovah would send His agent to execute vengeance on Israel's enemies, one leader in particular (the little horn), and reward the righteous. They believed the Son of Man would come from heaven with clouds surrounding him as a grand manifestation of God's glory. This will happen. However, Jesus *is* His Father's agent who will do this only at the End. Jesus' first arrival was through His birth on earth, not zooming down from heaven with clouds. When Jesus tells His disciples that the Son of Man will be killed, this shook up their theology as much as learning about the Son of Man is likely shaking yours up right now.

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Know this: Jesus is the Son of Man. As the Son of Man, He had to die to create the way to salvation, and He rose to show His Father accepted His sacrifice. He ascended to heaven "with the clouds" (Acts 1) and will return "the same way He left," i.e., with the clouds as it was shown to Daniel.

Okay, back to everyday life in Matthew's Gospel. As Peter is out walking around, he encounters the Temple tax collectors. Every Jewish man is required to pay the half-shekel Temple tax per the Torah (Exodus 30:11-16). The money is used to support the Temple's services and staff. As Jesus usually does, He uses the occasion as a teachable moment for Peter. Even though the Torah says all Jewish men must pay the tax, Jesus claims it doesn't apply to Him *because He's God's Son*. The point is not tax-evasion. Rabbi Jesus' lesson is that He is God's Son and isn't subject to the tax, just as a king's son is not taxed by his father. However, not everybody has this revelation. For the sake of the Torah and for those who could use it to attack Jesus, even though He *could* claim His Sonship exemption, He pays anyway (but in a miraculous way, which I find rather funny, 17:27). "Alright, Rabbi Jesus. Cough up the tax," and Jesus has a fish do it.

Remember when we had our Mount Hermon "the way up is down/the way to be exalted is to be humble" talk? Chapter 18 carries the humility theme as it pertains to Jesus' community of followers, and there are five reasons why humility is essential for Jesus' disciples:

- 1) (18:2-3) To get into the kingdom,
- 2) (18:4) To determine what real greatness in the kingdom is,
- 3) (18:5-14) To prevent offenses,
- 4) (18:15-20) To address offenses,
- 5) (18:21-35) To forgive offenses.

All these require humility! Keep this in mind as we cruise through it.

1) First, the disciples want to know who is the greatest among the 12. After all, they all follow Israel's Messiah. They're pretty special, as everyone knows. Well, they're not that special, according to Jesus. (Hey, another teachable moment!) The disciples ask about who is greatest, and the word used refers to "rank." Peter, James, and John are Jesus' inner circle. Which of them is at the top of the heap? Jesus' response? "Forget about rank. You won't even get into heaven with that attitude," as in, "Unless you turn and become like little children, *you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*" (18:3).

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“Forget maneuvering for rank or esteem in My Father’s kingdom. You won’t even be a part of the kingdom unless you humble yourselves because getting into the kingdom is about putting God’s will before your own. What is His will? “For this is the will of My Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40). Our place in our Father’s kingdom starts with us submitting to His will as to the entry point – Jesus. After humbling ourselves, we are raised to live in the kingdom!

Humility is essential to our Heavenly Father. Without it, we won’t even get *into* God’s kingdom. To enter His kingdom, we must humbly trust that the Father’s only plan of erasing sin and making us right with Him is only through Jesus’ atoning work. To agree with God that we can never be good enough to cancel our sin takes humility.

2) Humility determines true greatness in God’s kingdom (18:4).

3) Jesus’ disciples need humility to prevent offenses (18:5-14). How we treat Jesus’ people, fellow believers, is how we treat Jesus. Do we treat other Christians pridefully and arrogantly as if we’re dealing with a “lesser”? If we do, we’re treating the King’s representative with contempt and, ultimately, the King as well. Or do we accept other disciples with humility and honor as we acknowledge them as fellow servants? Sadly, our attitudes can make other disciples hate Jesus and His people. That’s *us* causing *them* to sin (18:6). The solution is to take radical measures to prevent us from causing another to sin, i.e., fall away. The most radical way is to be radically humble toward another person.

Here's Jesus’ blunt warning: “See to it that you don’t despise one of these little ones, because I tell you that in heaven their angels continually view the face of my Father in heaven” (18:10). The Greek word for “despise” means “to condemn (view with contempt), despise, think little or nothing of, disparage, to treat with disdain.” Who *don’t* we treat this way? Those we esteem, look up to, and regard as “great.”

From where does this attitude come? When we think we’re more significant than others, it eventually comes out in our words and actions. When we look down on our fellow disciples, we’re placing ourselves above them, making ourselves “great” in the kingdom of God. Surprise! *An attitude of pride doesn’t make us great in God’s kingdom. It makes us small. A humble servant attitude is what makes us great in God’s kingdom.*

Why does Jesus use the illustration of shepherd and sheep? Everyone back then knew how much a dedicated shepherd cared for every one of his sheep. This illustration would

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hit people in the gut. God cares for ME (single), and God cares for YOU (single). A loving shepherd would go to extreme lengths to find one straying sheep and rejoice that he found it. How does this relate to being humble? A proud shepherd wouldn't care about one stray sheep, especially if that sheep were a sickly, lame, skinny, worthless sheep or one causing problems in the fold. The proud shepherd is still the master over 99 healthy ones, right?

But that's not God's attitude. He focuses on the sickly, lame, skinny sheep because it needs His merciful help more than the others. A proud shepherd ignores His charge. The Good Shepherd humbles Himself by going out of His way and enduring difficulties to find and restore that lost and isolated sheep. Guess what we should do if we're Jesus' disciples and represent the Good Shepherd? We're not to despise the person who is weak, broken, and immature, the one that's not so competent, gifted or talented, unsuccessful, or struggling with sin. We're to humble ourselves to mercifully retrieve and help them. That's what Jesus is going to teach about next. But without the attitude adjustment in this section, we wouldn't reach out to the straying disciples correctly, much less care about them wandering off.

4) We need humility to address offenses (18:15-20). So, what should we do for the little one, the sheep that's wandered off from the family/flock? Go git em! This wayward person scenario is challenging because it's not us who sins against another. That takes a special kind of humility. This teaching is about a person who sins against us. Shouldn't *they* humble themselves and come to us to ask for forgiveness? Wrong. Jesus says we're to go to them personally, one on one (18:15). The purpose is to reconcile, and the goal is to restore. If they don't listen, we return to the person with two or three others as witnesses. The witness team protects *both* sides to confirm or deny what takes place in the 1-to-1 effort, not to gang up. Again, the purpose is to reconcile, and the goal is to restore (18:16).

At this point, the conflict has become a "family of God" matter (18:17). Keep it in the family, not confronted in public, and the purpose still is to restore. This gathering is now *community humility*, reaching out to the sinning person because what affects one affects all. The assembly is told the situation, and proper steps are taken to pursue and reconcile the wandering sheep/little one/disciple to the sinned-against person. Does the congregation throw the stray out? No. It's implied that the community speaks to the person and appeals for repentance.

If the offender refuses to cooperate, are they removed from the assembly or shunned? No. What does it say? Let him be to you like a Gentile or tax collector. How were Jesus'

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disciples supposed to treat a Gentile or tax collector? A Gentile is a person who needs God. Therefore, keep pursuing them until they come to God. A tax collector was a Jew regarded as unrighteous, a turncoat, and backsliding. Keep pursuing them in love. Is there ever a time to cut someone off from the congregation? Yes. For willful, offensive, gross unrepentant sin.

5) We need humility to forgive offenses (18:21-35). When do we stop pursuing the sinning sibling? When is it enough? Never. There is no limit to our obligation to forgive others! What is the single point of the parable? Jesus warns us about not being humble by refusing to forgive people for their offenses against us, even if it's big sins. Their debt to us is *never* as large as our debt to God. Since God has forgiven our unpayable load of sins against Him when He had every right to extract the complete and ultimate payment for them, how much more does He expect us to forgive our brothers and sisters for their sins against us? THAT takes humbleness!

None of us is more significant than another, and none of us has the right not to forgive another, especially when asked. There is no limit to extending forgiveness, whether invited or not. Here's a blunt take-away from Jesus: *Follow your Father's example or face your Father's discipline.*

We need humility to forgive sins, and it's really needed to forgive repeated sins. Pride says, "Thus far and no farther. I now have the right to punish you! I will not forgive you for what you've done." Humility says, "I surrender my right to punish you. All's forgiven. Let's start again."

Chapter 19 is the start of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and the tests from the Pharisees just keep on a-comin'. Now they test Rabbi Jesus for His take on divorce. They start with a simple question, "Is it lawful, allowed by the Torah, to divorce one's wife *on any grounds?*" (19:3).

This is an interesting question because there were two schools of thought from about 100 years before Jesus. It comes from how one interprets Deuteronomy 24:1, "If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds *something indecent about her*, he may write her a divorce certificate, hand it to her, and send her away from his house." The more conservative School of Shammai interpreted this command narrowly, saying that adultery is the only cause for a legitimate divorce. The more liberal School of Hillel interpreted this command very broadly that "something indecent" can be *any cause* that the husband finds objectionable. Hillel's ruling was called "Any Cause" divorce. So,

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the Pharisees asked if Jesus held the conservative (limited) or liberal (unlimited) position for divorce.

Jesus, as usual, starts with His Father's intent (19:4-6). God designed marriage to be a lasting relationship that He sanctions and upholds. God intended marriage to be a united, harmonious, life-long commitment. Therefore, the question should really focus on marriage, not divorce. Now the Pharisees think they have Jesus trapped. "God doesn't want divorce, huh? Then why did Moses command us to give the offending woman a certificate of divorce?" (19:7). Did you catch that? Pharisees: "Moses *commanded*," Jesus: "No! Moses *allowed*!" (19:8). Why?

Divorce happens when one or two hearts become so stubborn, set, or hardened that one or both spouses refuse to forgive each other and work toward reconciliation/restoration. Given the four commands for marriage, which we've combined into marriage vows – faithfulness, food, clothing, and intimacy – even if these are not provided, couples are still encouraged to work it out to preserve their marriage and work on it. But divorce proceedings begin if there remains no repentance for broken vows and it's evident that one or both partners have left the relationship. God allows divorce only when there is a breaking of the marriage vows and a refusal to repent.

Jesus follows that immediately with His interpretation of the "something indecent/any cause" clause. After affirming marriage as God designed it, Jesus clearly states that "Any Cause" divorce is invalid. Only adultery (and later, abandonment, per Paul) is allowed as a just cause. If there's no legal cause, then there's no divorce. Hence, the adultery decision. But does that mean a person lives in perpetual sin after an "unlawful" divorce? No. There is only one unforgivable sin, and this isn't it. Jesus' ruling is His answer to the Pharisees' question to ensure a divorce is granted for the right reasons and not an opportunity for a husband to unload his wife for any reason.

When asked about this, Jesus' reply to His disciples (19:10-12) can be boiled down to this: Although God designed the marital relationship as a key part of His plan, marriage is not for everyone, and that's okay. But celibacy is not the norm. Marriage is, even with the risk of relationship breakdowns.

Onward! It was customary for parents of Jesus' day to bring their children to a "righteous man" for him to bless them (19:13). But Jesus' disciples took exception to this happening at that moment. But if imparting a blessing is good, why would the disciples rebuke those pressing forward to have Jesus pray for their kids? Perhaps the disciples assumed that Jesus was too important and busy for mere children. It could be that the disciples were



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watching out for Jesus after an exceptionally long day of teaching and ministry or after a Sabbath service. It turns out that the conflict with Jesus isn't about the kids themselves. It's about the disciples' reaction to the kids, which Jesus points out. In a sense, Jesus is saying, "Don't turn the kids away from Me. It's people *like* these kids that make up My Father's kingdom" (19:14). Jesus points to something about a child that makes them fit for God's kingdom, something we all should have – simple trust in God.

The phrase, "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these," and Jesus' prerequisite of childlike faith contrasts the next guy, the Rich Young Ruler. He wants to know, "what good must I do to have eternal life?" (19:16). Isn't it interesting that Jesus points the man to the foundation and summary of the Torah, the Ten Commandments (19:17-18)? But the guy says he already keeps them. Hmmm, really? Do you think the rich young man was sincere about righteous walking before God? I think so. But the Rich Young Man's next question exposes his life with God. "What do I still lack? What am I missing? Where do I fall short?" (19:20). He's obviously taking His faith seriously and *wants to make sure nothing is between him and eternal life*. So, if the Rich Young Man has the outward forms covered, what do you think Jesus will put His finger on? Right! His heart! Jesus says the guy should give up the things his heart is set on, that sit where God should sit. The man's response? "He went away grieving, because he had many possessions" (19:22).

The situation is more stunning when we realize that Jesus called him to give it all up at that moment. That's the first hard thing. The second is to walk away from it all and follow Jesus. Sadly, we never know what the Rich Young Man decided after he walked away. But Jesus uses it for another teachable moment. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (19:24).

Jesus uses a rabbinic style of ridiculous exaggeration to make a simple point. It's tough for people heavily tied to this world – wealth, things, relationships, whatever – to willingly surrender it all for eternal life. I understand that. Again, this is a heart issue. Some wonderful Christians are incredibly wealthy, but their hearts aren't tied to their stuff. You can see it by how they live (e.g., the Ten Commandments and the rest of God's ways). The cost of following Jesus is being willing to give up anything and everything that gets in the way of our relationship with Him.

The disciples' question and its cultural implication are reasonable. "In the face of the overwhelming cost to follow Jesus, who can be saved? If it's so tough for the wealthy, whom we regard as 'blessed and highly favored of the Lord,' how is salvation even possible for others who don't seem so blessed and highly favored of the Lord?" Simple. God can do anything, *even dealing with a heart issue which is the point of this whole teachable*

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*moment*. The one who built our hearts and gave us our passions can just as easily fix them through the power of His Holy Spirit in us. Who can be saved? All who invite God to do His work in them! Jesus' reply here answers the Rich Young Man's question: "What good deed must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" *Surrender* because God must do the good deed *for* you.

Peter's follow-up question in 19:27 goes like this, "Okay, we've already done what you asked the rich young ruler to do. As a rabbi's disciples are expected to do, we left our jobs, homes, and families to follow You. What do we have coming? What's our reward?" Jesus tells them His original disciples will sit alongside Him in the Messianic Kingdom. Generally speaking, Jesus tells us what we surrender for His sake will be given back to us in even greater measure, *plus* eternal life, something people in this life won't get if they won't surrender to Jesus. For now, they'll have their stuff but lose it all *and* their eternal lives. It's a lousy trade-off, don't you think? And Jesus' tagline? He warns us about being prideful for what we've sacrificed for the Lord.

This verse joins the end of chapter 19 to the beginning of chapter 20. Erase the dividing lines. Jesus is about to tell a parable to illustrate how equal everyone is before God regardless of how much we sacrifice, how much we serve, and how long we walk with Him in this life.

### INSIGHT

Why is humility so essential for us as disciples? Humility starts our everlasting life and shapes us for God's eternal kingdom. Humility neutralizes pride. Growing in humility is part of renewing our minds to help us think God's way. If we're talented and capable, humility tempers us. If we're not so gifted and skilled, humility helps us acknowledge our limits and encourages us to keep serving the best we can to achieve our best for God's glory. We can *all* do that!

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## October 16 : Scriptures Matthew 20-21

### SUMMARY

Welcome to the continuation of chapter 19. In chapter 20, Matthew closes out Jesus' ministry as He makes His way to Jerusalem.

Yesterday we concluded chapter 19 with commentary on "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (19:30) with "This verse joins the end of chapter 19 to the beginning of chapter 20. Erase the dividing lines. Jesus is about to tell a parable to illustrate how equal everyone is before God regardless of how much we sacrifice, how much we serve, and how long we walk with Him in this life." We start with the Parable of the Vineyard Workers, which again reveals another facet of Jesus' coming kingdom.

Have you ever driven by a Home Depot, Lowe's, or another home improvement store and seen day laborers waiting to be hired for manual labor? Day laborers are nothing new, and this parable could be renamed the Parable of the Day Laborers That Were Hired To Work In A Vineyard And How Their Boss Treated Them. (Now you know why the Bible translators didn't choose me to write their headings.)

It's a simple scenario. A vineyard owner needs workers during a big harvest (let's say July/August in Israel). He agrees to pay the first wave of workers a day's wage (20:2). As for the successive waves, the owner promises to pay them what is right (20:4). Of course, this leaves things open-ended, right? At the end of the day, the owner calls in the workers to settle with them. He starts with the last hired and pays them a day's wage for a few hours of work (20:9). What's the mindset of those hired earlier? "So, when the first ones came, they assumed they would get more" (20:10). When they object, the owner calls them out regarding his terms. He's paying rightly and fairly for what they agreed to (20:13). Nobody was cheated. They all got the same. The workers delivered more or less time and effort to the owner.

What's the point of the parable? Remember how Peter seemingly showed pride that he and the other disciples gave up all for Jesus' sake? Jesus is telling them not to get cocky and proud and think they're above others (represented by the "they assumed they would get more" line). "Just as the landowner was free to dispense his wealth as he saw fit, God is free to dispense His grace as He determines.... There are those who will think they should get more reward from God for all they've done for Him. There are others who will live sacrificially but will be rewarded far more generously than they expect to be" (Study Bible commentary). Let's not focus on what we have or haven't done for the Lord

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and base our assessment of ourselves on that. We have a job to do, each in our own way, for our time on earth. Let's be happy with what we give Jesus and leave all else to Him.

We come to Jesus' 5<sup>th</sup> prediction of His death (12:40, 16:21, 17:12, 22-23). Jesus adds more details each time, again preparing His disciples for what's to come. It also affirms Jesus knew what was coming and nothing was accidental.

Speaking of pride, position, and jockeying for greatness, the inner circle brothers (James and John) have a mom who's more than a little interested in making sure her boys make good. She only wants them to be 2<sup>nd</sup> to Jesus in His kingdom, that's all. (Has no one been listening to Jesus?) To be seated on either side of King Messiah means to hold a position of power and authority second and third only to the King Himself. The right hand was the primary power, and the left was second in line. Why would anyone want this? Duh! Authority, power, prestige, fame, perks, and self-indulgence – all things that feed our pride. Kind of the opposite of a child-like approach to the kingdom.

So why does this come up? Because Jesus is heading up to Jerusalem to present Himself as Israel's King Messiah. Sounds like a star *you'd* want to hitch your wagon to, right? And now would be a *great* time to stake a claim for future positions in Israel's restored kingdom! What mom wouldn't want that for her boys? But why did *she* ask instead of her sons? Did the guys put her up to it? This maneuver is reaching for *greatness* and all that comes with it!

Jesus' "drink the cup" question to James and John is an idiom for sharing in someone's fate. The brothers hear, "Are you able to share my power and authority under my kingship?" What Jesus means is, "Are you willing to go through what I'm about to go through," as in condemned to death, mocked, whipped, and crucified? In other words, "Are you ready to suffer and die as I will?" Their response? "Sure!" Do you think they had *any* clue what they were saying? Likely not. James and John were focused on *greatness*, not *what's required for greatness*. They saw the end, not the path to the end. Jesus assures them, "Oh, you will share my fate, just not how you think." What happened to the boys? Did they achieve their dream of co-ruling with Jesus and enjoying "their best life now"? Tradition says James was killed by Herod Agrippa 14 years later, and John was greatly persecuted, exiled to Patmos, and was the last of the 12 to die.

Jesus gives it to them straight. Granting authority, power, and position isn't up to Him. That's not in His job description. That's up to the Father. Even though Jesus is *the* Son of Man, He'll only gain His place of power and authority through His Father's grant (read

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Daniel 7). Therefore, the Father alone will decide who will sit on either side of Jesus, and I have the feeling the Father already has that worked out.

When the rest of the disciples hear about James and John's request, they get hot! Why? Likely because the boys beat them to the punch! Remember this! What had Jesus just promised? They would be sitting on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel, while Jesus ruled the earth, Jews and Gentiles. Maybe they were hoping for more from Jesus or closer to the King.

*Here we get to the core.* Jockeying for position and lording over people may be the fallen world's way, but that's not how things work in the Father's kingdom. "Do you want to be first in rank, stature, level, or order in God's kingdom? Then you must become a servant, like a server, to wait on others, care for their needs, and place someone else's needs and comfort above your work in active work and service. Furthermore, if you want to be chief, you must become a slave, willing to completely assign all personal rights over to the authority and will of another person; your will swallowed up in the will of another and sporting an attitude of total submission.

The higher you want to go in God's kingdom, the lower you must become because greatness isn't found in a position. It's found in humble service, and Jesus will show them how it's done. (\*mic drop\*)

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem on the road up from the Jordan River Valley, He and His entourage pass through Jericho, where two blind guys cry to Jesus to heal them. They call Jesus by His messianic title, "Son of David" (20:30-31). Notice Jesus doesn't correct them. He affirms it by healing their sight (20:34). The King is ready to enter His city.

Chapter 21 is a *major* break in Matthew's Gospel account. It's been about three and a half years since Jesus launched His ministry, selected His disciples, and spread the word about God's kingdom coming to Israel in a new way. Having completed His preparation work, Jesus committed Himself to His purification work.

Chapters 21-23 cover Jesus' messianic declaration and a grand series of tests – God tests the leadership, and they test Jesus. Chapter 24-25 is Jesus' End Time seminar and prophecies. Chapter 26-27 covers the plot, Passover, Garden prayer, torture, and execution. Chapter 28 is about Jesus' resurrection and the disciples' commissioning. Are you ready?

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Jesus starts His entry into Jerusalem in the town of Bethphage (meaning “house of unripe figs”) on the summit of the Mount of Olives. His Father presented Jesus to Israel as their Messiah at His baptism. Now Jesus presents Himself to Israel as their Messiah. There is no doubt about that because Jesus chooses a donkey for His mode of transportation. Israel’s kings rode donkeys, and Zechariah prophesies that Israel’s Messiah would appear to His people, riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Why did Jesus start in Bethphage? Because that city was regarded as Jerusalem’s eastern gate and the city’s easternmost limit. A subset of the Sanhedrin (Israel’s 70-member Supreme Court) had their courtroom in Bethphage, and part of their duties was to determine if an elder (or leader, teacher) should be disciplined, even executed, for getting off track and teaching the people in a way that would turn them away from God. By selecting a donkey in Bethphage for His royal ride, Jesus proclaimed Himself Messiah and invited the Sanhedrin to examine Him and His claims (21:1-7). Little does the leadership know, but Jesus will be examining them and their claims of their faithfulness to God.

The crowds recognize what Jesus is doing and immediately give Him a kingly welcome using palm branches, just like flags would be used. Their cry, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” is a clear messianic proclamation, and the word “Hosanna” is the Hebrew *hoshianah*, “Save us, we pray/Save now, please!” (21:8-11). Jesus’ teaching and miracles have identified Him as God’s prophet, and the people are ready to embrace Him as their King.

This kingly parade is not what the Romans want to hear and watch. Passover was a time when the crowds in Jerusalem swelled to over a million people. The Feast is about God freeing His people from Egypt’s oppression and making them His kingdom with Moses as the leader. About 1500 years later, the Jews lived in their land with the Romans as their occupiers. Great messianic fervor would rise every Passover, and it was a convenient time for Messiah wannabes to announce their “candidacy.”

Jesus was just another trouble-making insurrectionist to the Romans, and the last thing the Romans and Pontius Pilate wanted was a riot to break out. Therefore, the number of Roman guards around the city and the Temple increased considerably, and it wasn’t uncommon for the Romans to use brute force to put down trouble. You can imagine what a tinderbox Jerusalem was during Jesus’ last Passover.

According to Matthew, after Jesus completed His triumphal entry, He went to the Temple and caused an uproar (21:12-13) by throwing out the “money changers and those selling

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doves.” Why were these financial guys and merchants in the Temple? Because visiting Jewish worshipers needed to exchange their local currency for the Temple currency to pay their taxes and purchase sacrifices. If a Jew had to travel a long distance, it was ridiculous to drag along a sacrificial animal or bird. Being Passover, a Jewish family needed to purchase a lamb for the Passover ritual and meal. So, once a Jew arrived in Jerusalem, many would head to the Temple area to make arrangements. However, some moneychangers and merchants took advantage of the people, something the Torah forbade any businessperson to do, much less in the Temple. So, Jesus “cleaned house” by throwing them out and restoring the sanctity (the holiness, the unique special-ness) of the Temple as God’s house of prayer for seeking Him, not money.

Here's a *big clue* about what’s happening during Jesus’ Temple tirade. According to the Torah, if mildew forms on the walls of a house, it *must* be dealt with (Leviticus 14). The process is simple. The homeowner asks for a priestly inspection. The priest inspects the spot and closes the house for a week if the spot on the wall is suspicious. After a week, if the discoloration hasn’t spread, no problem. If it has, the plaster and underlying stones are removed and replaced. The mildewed material is thrown in the dump. If the mildew returns, “it is harmful mildew; *the house is unclean. It must be torn down* with its stones, its beams, and all its plaster, and taken outside the city to an unclean place. *Whoever enters the house during any of the days the priest quarantines it will be unclean until evening.*” (Leviticus 14:44-46, italics author).

Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and future High Priest, has begun His inspection tour. He’s examining two houses – God’s house, the Temple, and God’s “house,” the nation, especially its leadership. Jesus found “mildew” (corruption) in God’s house/Temple and removed it. Now Jesus will inspect to see how far the corruption has spread in the rest of “God’s house.” Keep this in mind: If the corruption is too deep and widespread, *the whole house must come down.*

Speaking of eliminating corruption, Jesus performs “kingdom signs” to confirm His credentials. As He heals the blind and lame, the children run around excitedly, repeating what they had just heard their parents exclaim, the welcoming messianic declaration. Well, this becomes too much for the chief priests and the scribes that are part of the Temple staff. A Messiah parade? Upsetting the Temple exchange? Unauthorized healing? And now unruly children yelling about King David’s descendant? All of this is going to bring down Roman wrath for sure! Even though the leaders point out to Jesus what the kids are yelling, Jesus refuses to quiet them because they’re not wrong. Jesus even quotes scripture confirming that they’re telling the truth about Him (21:16). With that, Jesus

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heads out of Jerusalem to the east and spends the night in Bethany, near Bethphage, just outside of Jerusalem. End of the first day (Sunday).

The next morning, as Jesus and His disciples walk back into the city, Jesus sees a fig tree and looks for fruit on it. Finding none, He curses it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" (21:19). To understand this, we need to know more about fig trees. "The fig tree sheds its leaves in winter, at the end of which, even before the tree is covered with leaves, the *paggim* ("green figs," Song 2:13) begin to develop in the form of small fruits, which are really tiny flowers covered with a soft skin, and which continue to grow during the summer months. Hosea (9:10) compared the young nation of Israel in the heyday of its glory to *bakkurot* ("first-ripe figs"), which are delicious and eagerly sought after (Isa. 28:4; Jer, 24:2). Not all the *paggim* reach the ripened stage, some falling off or withering (Isa. 34:4). Figs that ripen at the end of summer have an inferior taste (Micah 7:1), as do those that burst when overripe" (Jer. 29:17). (encyclopedia.com/plants-and-animals/plants/plants/fig)

What's happening here in this seemingly weird and insignificant account? 1) Passover occurs in the spring. 2) Since there are leaves on the fig tree, there should be *paggim*, *unripe figs*. They can be eaten, but they'll have a bitter taste. 3) For Jesus to find no figs means the tree will remain fruitless for that season. 4) Fig trees are used as a metaphor for Israel, as seen in the prophets' quotes above. Therefore, this fig tree account is a metaphor for what will happen over the next three days.

Jesus began His "fruit inspection tour" in Bethphage, *Beth Paggim*, the House of Unripe Figs. His purpose? As a final act of His ministry, *Jesus will inspect the house of Israel for spiritual fruit, lives that glorify God by living His way. Leaves mean the nation exists, but fruit means it exists in a good relationship with God. Jesus is looking for fruit in that generation.* If Jesus finds that His fellow Jews are receptive to Him and His Father's plan, the nation of Israel will survive. If not, something will end it for that generation or more, like a house being torn down due to incurable mildew/corruption.

The fruit inspection begins. The first thing to be established is the Fruit Inspector's qualifications, His authority to conduct such an inspection. When Jesus enters the Temple complex, the chief priests and elders (the authorities) approach Him and ask by what authority Jesus is teaching, healing, and clearing out the Temple. By way of a question, Jesus claims it's the same authority in Whose name John the Baptist worked. "Did John's baptism come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" (21:25). If the authorities say, "Heaven," then they have to admit Jesus is functioning with God's authority. Suppose they answer "human origin" to avoid recognizing Jesus' authority as from God. In that



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case, they smear John as an illegitimate prophet, and the people would go nuts because they believed John was a real prophet. The authorities refuse to answer out of pride. Jesus' authority was already established *because John Himself declared Jesus as the Messiah and the Father and Holy Spirit affirmed it*. The leaders know John's authority from God, and thus Jesus comes in the same authority. Therefore, they refuse to answer (21:25-27).

Now it's Jesus' turn to question their obedience to God's authority. It's not the son who says he'll obey, but the one who actually obeys, the son who obeys his father's will. It's not the leaders who are the ones who obeyed God because they just gave lip service of repentance to Him. The "tax collectors and prostitutes," sinners who believed John and repented, did God's will (21:31-32). That puts the sinners in the lead for entering God's kingdom ahead of the leadership.

Jesus addresses them again. In the following parable, the landowner is God, and the vineyard is Israel with Jerusalem and the people. The tenant farmers are the leaders to whom God entrusted His land, city, and people. When the time came for Israel's leaders to give God a righteous land, city, and people, the leaders kept it for themselves to exploit. When God sent prophets, they killed them. Now the Father has sent His Son to collect what's due. The leaders reject Jesus (and will kill Him) because the Son threatens what they've usurped from God – the land, city, and people. Therefore, the Father will remove their trust from them and give it to other Jews who will produce holy lives of spiritual fruit (21:41).

Jesus also drops two hints. 1) Jesus reveals who He is – God's literal Son/God is His Father (21:37), 2) He will be killed but will live (39), and 2) He will be Israel's Messiah, the "Son of God" (21:42). Nothing they will do can stop that. Jesus will prevail, but they will be destroyed (21:42-44). *This parable makes the leadership angry, but they don't dare do anything because they would risk a massive riot during Passover, which isn't good.*

## INSIGHT

Who owns you? The Lord does. He is the landowner (remember, we're made of the dust of the earth). He's also put you in charge of your land (\*pointing to your body\*). What fruit are you producing, meaning what good are you doing to bless and glorify Him? Or do you think your life is yours to do with as you please? If you take that attitude, you could be the one that's broken to pieces or crushed, i.e., lost, while Jesus lives forever.

*"Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce*

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*fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned."* (John 15:2-6, italics author). Sometimes we need a tough word to get us back on track. But take heart. As long as we stay tight with Jesus, we will bear fruit. That fruit would be good works like helping others, which He gives us to do to glorify Him.

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## October 17 : Scriptures Matthew 22-23

### SUMMARY

This section starts with the 3<sup>rd</sup> parable that Jesus tells to indict the leadership of their sin. Parable #1 is the Parable of the Sons (Obedient vs. Disobedient). *Jesus' point is it's not those who say yes but obey that are commended as doing the Father's will.* The "sinners" started by saying no but turned and walked toward God's kingdom by obeying God's call. The leaders claimed to say yes to God but have refused God's call to walk in repentance and receive His coming kingdom through Jesus. Why? Because of Parable #2, the Parable of the Tenant Farmers. The leaders want what belongs to God for themselves! *Jesus' point is that He is the sole heir to His Father's Vineyard, Israel, and though the leaders will kill Him, Jesus alone will prevail, and they won't.*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Parable of the Wedding Banquet is about the leadership's refusal to accept God's invitation. The king is the Father, and those invited are the leaders. The upshot is that the Father will invite everyone, and a great many will respond, *but those for whom the invitation was specially intended (the leaders) will miss out (destroyed) due to their refusal (22:5-7).* The leaders are so preoccupied with the present day, set on their desires, or disinterested that they have no concern for the Father, his Son, or the Kingdom of God.

Let me be blunt. *Are you making a lame excuse for refusing God's invitation to eternal life with Him?*

So, the Father will bypass the leaders and invite the "sinners" who are willing to come into His kingdom, but they still have to meet God's requirements to be in it (i.e., repentance), as illustrated by the man not dressed for the wedding (22:12-14).

Now it's the Pharisees' turn to address Jesus. They're trying to be clever by having their disciples ask Jesus a question that will maneuver Him into a no-win situation. The Pharisees' disciples schmooze Jesus first and then slip Him the question when they think He's off guard. *"Teacher," they said, 'we know that you are truthful and teach truthfully the way of God. You don't care what anyone thinks nor do you show partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'"* If Jesus said yes to taxes, The leaders would accuse Jesus of supporting the Roman occupation, turning the people against Jesus as Messiah for siding with their oppressors. If He said no, that would be grounds to accuse Jesus of treason against Rome.

But Jesus isn't falling for it. He calls them out for being hypocrites, pretending to be one thing (genuine), but being another (schemers). Jesus asks for a denarius (referred to by

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former tax collector Matthew as a *nomisma*, a “state coin”) and asks them whose image and inscription are on it. Jesus’ point is that the image on the coin determines to whom it belongs – Rome.

When the Pharisees’ disciples first asked the question, they said, “*pay taxes.*” Here, Jesus changes the word from *didomi*/pay to *apodidomi*/pay back. The difference is this. The government is not reclaiming something it gave to you first, *it’s simply claiming something you received from another source. So, give the coin with its idolatrous image and inscription to whom it belongs; Rome.* You’re not swearing allegiance to Rome when you pay taxes because the coin belongs to them anyway. It doesn’t represent you. It’s simply passing through your hands.

On the other hand, *you* are marked with God’s image, and *He does indeed own you.* Jesus separates Caesar from God in His statement by saying what He said. He openly slams the idolatry of the coin while He proclaims the truth about Israel’s God being the only God at the same time. Jesus also seems to add a jab at the Pharisees. He asked the Pharisees’ disciples for a coin, and they produced a denarius, *proving they had accepted Roman rule by using the idolatrous “state coin.”* Evidently, they weren’t so concerned about resisting their Occupiers.

Caesar demands his tax. God demands they pay Him His tax, living their lives wholly for Him as a sign of His rule and authority. The answer to their question was standing right in front of them! As God should be honored above all rulers, so should His representative, Israel’s rightful King, Messiah, whose authority they challenged! Jesus implies to the Pharisees’ disciples that God is calling in His “coins,” God’s people who are stamped with God’s image, at that time, and the Pharisees better deliver.

And now it’s the Sadducees’ turn. This confrontation (22:23-33) is challenging to understand if you don’t know more about the Sadducees. They were a sect of Judaism that came from aristocratic priestly families. These few wealthy families bought the High Priesthood from the Romans annually because it was a great source of income, and the Romans would use the Sadducees to help pacify the Jews. As priests, they ran the Temple services. They believed only the Torah was God-given scripture, not the Prophets or the Writings. They also rejected the more spiritual beliefs of the Judaism of their day, such as the resurrection, the afterlife, God’s power, miracles, and angels. Jesus addresses all of these in His answer, showing the Sadducees just how ignorant of the things of God they were.

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The Sadducees' question is a hypothetical one. Suppose a woman's husband dies. According to the Torah (the law of levirate marriage), the husband's brother is to step up and marry her to produce a son who will preserve the family's land inheritance. The brother dies without producing offspring, so she moves on to the next brother, and the same happens. This pattern continues down the line to the 7<sup>th</sup> brother. Their question is, "*In the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had married her.*"

Jesus' answer? "You are deceived." Bam! Jesus hits 'em hard! Deceived means "wander off the path, venture into error, depart from the truth." They are deceived "Because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God." Why does Jesus say they don't know the scriptures? Because they accepted *only* the Torah as authoritative for doctrine and not the Prophets or Writings, especially End-Time stuff like Daniel. Their question is meant to mock the Pharisees' belief in the resurrection of the dead. But had they accepted the book of Daniel as inspired scripture, they would have had to accept one of the most explicit revelations of the resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:2-3)! When you ignore any part of God's Word, you don't have the complete revelation of God's Word, and therefore you don't have all the information about God and His power! Jesus blames their *partial* knowledge coming from a *partial* acceptance of the scriptures.

And then Jesus goes to town on their theology. 1) There *is* going to be a resurrection of the dead. 2) There *are* angels. And, as a bonus revelation, 3) The resurrection of the dead will introduce a new age where Jesus will set up His Father's kingdom that will be reordered – there will be no death and marriage relationships. *The Sadducees' question is invalid since there will be no marriage in the age to come.* As a final knock-out punch, Jesus affirms the reality of life after death *because the Torah that the Sadducees affirm as valid says so; God is the God of the living, not the dead* (22:32; Exodus 3:6,15–16).

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they didn't send their disciples on their behalf. They came in person. It's a good guess that the Pharisees were at least a little delighted that Jesus shot down the Sadducees and, in the process, backed up their theology regarding the afterlife. The question they ask Jesus is not a trap. The question is an important and very legitimate one, "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?" (22:36). Asking this question of a teacher was a common practice. The Pharisees are asking, "Rabbi, please summarize the Torah in the simplest of terms, terms encompassing every command in the Torah." This question was asked to test a rabbi's skill in interpreting the Torah.

From our perspective on Jesus, this situation is kind of funny. An "expert in the Torah" is genuinely asking a Torah question of Jesus *and not realizing He's talking with the Torah's*

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*Author.* Jesus' answer is the bedrock of Jewish belief, the Shema, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) although Matthew leaves out the first part of the verse. Jesus goes on to weld Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself," to Deuteronomy 6:5 to sum up all scripture – "Love God, love neighbor."

At the grand finale of Jesus' fruit inspection tour and the leadership's cross-examination, Jesus asks two final questions. The first is "Whose son is the Messiah?" In the natural, the answer would be just as the Pharisees answered, "David's son" (21:42). Now Jesus throws them a curve. "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'" (21:43). Don't miss this. Using "inspired by the Spirit" places David's declaration as God's word, so if the Pharisees dispute what David said, they'd have to take it up with God. God cannot lie or make a mistake.

And the Pharisees are stuck. If the Messiah is David's descendant, how can David call Him "Lord," a title due to a *superior*, the reverse of what was done in ancient days? How can a son be a superior? Even more, for David to call the Messiah "Master" implies that his Lord and Master is already alive. And yet David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is saying that His Master is yet to be born. So how can David's Lord be *both* alive and not yet, present *and* future? Answer: *Only if David's Lord is divine (existing during David's life) as well as human (arriving generations later in David's line).* If that's the case, then this descendant-of-David-Messiah can reign forever!

Jesus wins, and the leadership fails. The fig tree (Israel) has been examined, and it has leaves, but Jesus found no fruit. Leaves without fruit draws the Lord's judgment.

Chapter 23 is challenging. Jesus levels His divine curse on Israel's leadership, which will also affect the nation's future. First, Jesus speaks to the people (23:1-12), then to the leaders (23:13-36), and finally, Jesus prophetically declares that the axe will cut down the fig tree (23:37-39).

Jesus tells the people that the Pharisees and scribes sit upon the "seat of Moses." This idiom means they represent Moses as they teach the Torah. It was also customary for a teacher to sit as they taught, such as when Jesus sat down when He taught His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1).

Because their leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, teach the Torah that Moses delivered to Israel, Jesus' disciples are to do *what Moses tells them*. But notice Jesus doesn't say, "*What the Pharisees and scribes teach about what Moses said.*" Jesus tells His disciples to learn and

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observe the Torah and do what *Moses* said. But Jesus also tells His disciples, “don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach” (23:3). The scribes and Pharisees weren’t practicing the Torah the way they taught it.

Besides their hypocrisy, Jesus condemns their teaching. Jesus has already pointed out how the scribes and Pharisees misinterpreted and misapplied the Torah through laws and traditions they created to guard against violating God’s word. So Jesus’ word is “Learn Moses, live Moses. However, don’t learn or follow the Pharisees’ teachings; don’t be hypocrites like them by not practicing what you claim to follow. Their hypocrisy is appalling because they take their laws, make them a yoke for other people’s shoulders, and don’t even try to make it any easier for their followers to live by them (23:4).

After addressing the Pharisees’ and scribes’ teachings and hypocrisy, Jesus addresses their pride revealed through the ostentatious display of their marks of honor; large phylacteries (small boxes with tiny scrolls worn by faithful Jewish men on the arm and forehead) and tassels (made of white and blue threads on the four corners of a robe to remind the wearer of God’s Torah). Some Pharisees lengthened their tassels to demonstrate how pious they were (23:5). In their pride, these leaders enjoyed honored treatment (23:6) and titles (23:7). Jesus tells His followers not to seek honorifics but to maintain an attitude of humility (23:12).

And now comes the big stuff – the curses, also known as the “woes.” After you read them, you’ll say, “Whoa,” because the woes are so scathing.

The first woe comes because the scribes and Pharisees discouraged people from following Jesus, who was bringing God’s kingdom in a new way through the New Covenant (23:13-14). The second woe comes because their teachings and practices resulted in false converts (23:15). The third woe was for legal malpractice. The system of oaths and vows had become corrupt through “loopholes” and justified lying (23:16-22).

The fourth woe was for their upside-down priorities. They majored in the minors, like tithing tiny seeds, and minored in the majors, such as ignoring fundamentals of the Torah like justice, mercy, and trusting God (23:23-24). The fifth woe is for being more concerned with external purity than the purity that really matters, purity of heart and soul (23:25-26). The sixth woe was for corrupt people, making themselves appear godly while they were hypocrites and Torah-breakers (23:27-28). And finally, (whoa!) the seventh woe was for the leaders’ murderous nature. Jesus knew precisely what they were planning to do to Him for getting in their way and not submitting to them. They admitted their murderous heritage by claiming they were descendants of those who killed God’s

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previous messengers. "So, all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you," meaning, "All the persecution and murder that was committed against God's servants will come down on you *because you have rejected and will kill the greatest of all God's servants. That's what's coming down on this generation of leaders and the nation* (23:29-36). Wow. Take a breath.

All those woes are Jesus' verdict. Now He renders His judgment – destruction and desolation have been decreed (23:37-39). The nation's leaders have failed inspection. Therefore, they will be stripped of their position as shepherds of Israel's sheep. As for the nation, the leaves will be stripped from the fruitless tree and wither as the natural fig tree did earlier (21:19).

Even though God gave Israel every chance from their beginning at Sinai, His people were prone to rebel. Moses even taught a song to Israel just before they were to enter the Promised Land, warning them that they would soon turn away from God after the people settled in the Covenant Land. What? After walking 40 years in a wilderness with God? Impossible! But Moses said they would "kick at God" in rebellion as an animal kicks at its owner (Deuteronomy 32:15).

Throughout Israel's history, her leaders often opposed God's representatives, the prophets and others, whom He sent to correct them and get them back on the path where He could bless them. But they had grown so resistant to God that the leaders and the people had no problem murdering God's messengers to silence God's voice rather than turn from their rebellious ways. The only remedy in those earlier years (722, 586 B.C.) was for God to turn them over to their enemies and exile them (Assyria, Babylon).

Now Israel was in the same situation. As Israel had done in the days of the Kings, just before God punished the nation through the Babylonian army, so Israel was doing now – kicking and rebelling against God. Only this time, it included the Father's Messiah. True to God's covenant curse, there could be but one outcome – judgment by God's hand through an outside force (Rome, 70 A.D., forty years later).

Jesus' lament is heartbreaking! He cries out to His people in love! God wanted His people so very much. He wanted to hold, embrace, comfort, and bless them, but they rejected Him in their prideful blindness and rebellious independence. How often have parents felt this way about their children, "How often I've wanted to embrace you, but you would not?" And when facing discipline, children mocked their parents' words, "This is going to hurt me more than it does you." But when children become parents, they learn the ache of that saying. It takes a brutally hard heart not to care about your child's suffering,



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especially when you know it's coming and you could stop it if they would only relent and repent.

Sadly, Jesus announces Jerusalem's destruction, the what and why. Jerusalem will become desolate, solitary, lonely, and uninhabited. The word desolate is also used for a woman neglected by her husband, from whom the husband withholds himself. The nation has rejected their king so that the king will take away His protecting hand. Because the wife has rejected the wooing of her husband, the husband will withdraw his presence. In other words, "You want me to leave you alone? Then be desolate."

What does Jesus mean by your "house" is left to you desolate? Could it be the Temple, God's house? Perhaps. The Romans did destroy it, and the Temple's destruction was so complete there's no telling today where it precisely stood.

Did he mean Jerusalem? Perhaps. The city was torn apart, cast down, and plowed under after two rebellions against Rome.

Could Jesus mean the House of Israel, the Jewish Nation itself? Yes, including all the Lord had given them – the temple, city, and people. When the Romans attacked in A.D. 70, the leaders and the people were either killed or sold into slavery, and only a few remained.

Sixty years later, after the Bar Kochba rebellion, the Second Jewish Rebellion (A.D. 135), Jerusalem was further desolated, and the Romans forbade any Jews from living in it. Jerusalem was renamed *Aelia Capitolina*, and the land was renamed "*Philistine*" – *Palestina* in Latin, *Palestine* today – just to rub the Jewish nation's face in their defeat and humiliation. So, not only did the leaders lose their temple, city, people, nation, and land, but they lost their name – Israel.

And for a final sad note, Jesus says, "For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (23:39). After Jesus was raised from the dead, He didn't appear to Israel's leaders. He appeared only to His disciples. Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven to remain there until His Father sends Him to defend and rescue His people, Israel, on the Day of the Lord. The nation of Israel will not see their Messiah until they are ready to embrace him with those words. Until then, the only Jesus the Jewish people will see is through Jesus' people.

## INSIGHT

The fig tree had been carefully tended for three years but failed to respond. It bore no fruit, so the Divine Court ordered the axe to fall, and the tree cut down. But there's good

news! Israel was taken down but not taken out. Why? Because Yehovah has many promises for His people that He has yet to fulfill! Although the nation of Israel ceased to exist for almost 2,000 years, during that time, the people of Israel never ceased to exist (Jeremiah 31:35-37). Yehovah will bring them home (Ezekiel 37:21-22), and He will make them one people with one king (Ezekiel 37:22, 24-25).

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## October 18 : Scriptures Matthew 24-25

### SUMMARY

We now move into another challenging part of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' End Time discussion with His disciples. It starts because of a shocking thing Jesus says to His disciples. It likely took place on the Wednesday of Holy Week, as we call it. Jesus had made His grand entrance and conducted His fruit inspection tour, which the leadership failed. Now Jesus and His disciples were wandering in the magnificent 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple that King Herod had upgraded in astounding fashion.

Jesus and the disciples were no strangers to Jerusalem. All Jewish men were required to go up to Jerusalem three times a year for the Feasts of Passover (March-April), Shavuot (aka Weeks, May-June), and Tabernacles (September-October). The Temple impressed the disciples. But Jesus said, "Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down" (24:2). Yup. That would get a Jewish disciple's attention, especially after Jesus declared Jerusalem's destruction just a few verses back. That prompts a lot of questions: When would this all happen? In our lifetimes? Another generation? On the Day of the Lord? What part would Jesus, the Son of Man, have in it? Inquiring minds wanted to know. "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (24:3). Amazingly, Jesus tells them!

Now, I know people have a lot of differing views about eschatology, the study of the End. What follows is my take on it, and I certainly don't claim to know everything spot on. I'll give you my thoughts, and you can do your research. And hey, if Jesus' return happens in our lifetimes, we'll all know, right?

Jesus seems to answer the three questions with a prophetic telescope looking at near future, in-between, and distant future events in one line. This list also gets confusing because some of these events seem linked to what Jesus predicted about Jerusalem's destruction. Because of that, some scholars believe this was all fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. There's only one *tiny* problem with that interpretation. *Jesus didn't return.* So, some of this seems to be for the near future of Jesus' day, the interim times, and definitely the End Time. Why the End Time? Because the End *will* see the Son of Man's return and the start of God's kingdom on earth, as Daniel prophesied (Daniel 2).

*Near-future signs.* If we look at the apparent near-future signs, we see messiah wannabes who will deceive and get Jews to follow them, wars and rumors of wars,

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international/inter-kingdom conflicts, famines, and earthquakes. Jesus says, "All these events are the *beginning* of labor pains" (24:8). *That's an important marker.*

So, let's talk about labor pains. "Labor pains" is an idiom referring to events leading up to the End Time Day of the Lord. It relates to Jeremiah 30, where the prophet describes a terrible time in Israel's future called "The Time of Jacob's Troubles." How bad will it be? Check it out. "We have heard a cry of terror, of dread—there is no peace. Ask and see whether a male can give birth. Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach *like a woman in labor* (labor pains) and every face turned pale? *How awful that day* (the Day of the Lord) *will be! There will be no other like it!* It will be *a time of trouble for Jacob* (the Time of Jacob's Troubles), but he will be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:5-7, italics author).

In evangelical Bible-believer terms, what we call the Tribulation is the Time of Jacob's Troubles. It's called that because the End Time events per the Bible, while affecting the entire world and the cosmos, Israel and the Jews are the focus. That's because Jesus is Israel's Messiah returning to establish God's kingdom on earth with Israel as the head of the nations and the transition process involves a great struggle. You could say the "church age," where the Gospel has focused on the Gentiles, is the "pregnancy," and from A.D. 70 to 1948, the world experienced metaphorical Braxton-Hicks contractions.

For those who don't know, a woman experiences Braxton-Hicks contractions during pregnancy. "Braxton Hicks contractions are a tightening in your abdomen that comes and goes. They are contractions of your uterus in preparation for giving birth. They tone the muscles in your uterus and may also help prepare the cervix for birth. Braxton Hicks contractions don't cause labor and aren't a sign that labor is beginning" ([pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/braxton-hicks-contractions](http://pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/braxton-hicks-contractions)). When Israel became a nation in 1948, and the Jews took back Jerusalem in 1967, those are significant signs that the labor pains of Messiah are approaching (the End Times. See also the Insight).

It seems Jesus' interim signs are those Braxton-Hicks-type contractions of turmoil where Jesus says, you (the 1<sup>st</sup> c. disciples) will be persecuted, killed, and hated by all nations because of My name (24:9). Then Jesus' focus seems to expand to include His disciples through the interim time. Many of Jesus' followers will abandon Him, betray and hate one another. Many false prophets will appear and will deceive many. Torahlessness (rejecting God's morality and laws) will cause people to become cold and callous toward others. But hang in there. "The good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world *as a testimony to all nations*" (24:9-14). Why is a testimony to all nations needed? Because a judge allows all the evidence before he reaches a verdict and makes his

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judgment. The Gospel's worldwide spread is the sign that marks the end of the interim and the beginning of the End (24:14).

Jesus then gives His disciples (applying to those disciples at the End) a key sign, the *big sign* – *the abomination that causes desolation*. What is that? Matthew tells us that it was “spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place” (let the reader understand)” (24:15). Daniel spoke of a future leader who would stop the sacrificial service in the Temple by prohibiting the Tamid or “Daily” sacrifice (the 9 am and 3 pm sacrifice) that opens and closes the Temple sacrifices. After stopping that particular sacrifice, the leader will defile and desecrate the Temple. Not long after Daniel's day, this ungodly leader was Antiochus IV, “Epiphanes” (meaning Manifestation of God). He proclaimed himself a god and set up a statue of Zeus in the Temple. He also sacrificed a pig on Yehovah's Bronze Altar.

*Jesus is clear. According to Daniel's prophecy, what happened before will find another similar fulfillment. The Temple service will be stopped, and the Temple Mount will be defiled by one who exalts himself and will worship an idol god.*

Some raise “the Romans” objection. Didn't the Roman army stop the daily sacrifice and bring an idol image into the Temple precincts when they tore down the Temple in A.D. 70? Yes, to an extent. But did the End come with the worldwide appearance of God's geopolitical kingdom, Jesus' return, and the return of all Jews to Israel? No. Instead, the Romans dispersed the Jews. Therefore, what happened with Antiochus IV and the Romans *will happen again*, making it a three-fold fulfillment of the same prophecy!

So, assuming the Abomination that Desolates the Temple Mount is still in the future and signals the final years leading up to the End, what should those in Jerusalem do when they see it? “Git outta town, fast!” (24:16-18). Things will get so rough the mass exodus out of Jerusalem will be tough on women with offspring slowing them down. Jesus also tells His followers to pray it doesn't happen in winter (inclement weather) or on the Sabbath (unprepared) (24:19).

How will we know it's the End? Because the upheaval, destruction, cataclysm, and catastrophe of those days will be unlike anything seen on earth ever (24:21-22), and that echoes Jeremiah 30:7, “How awful that day will be! *There will be no other like it!* It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.” That's really scary! Think of all the wars, genocides, pandemics, and worst natural disasters in history; nothing will compare. In fact, Jesus says if His Father doesn't step in, no one will survive (24:22). Yes, many people will die. Be prepared.

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Jesus warns us that people will try to tell us who or where the Messiah is (24:23-26). Don't buy it. Jesus' return will be obvious, and you won't miss it (24:27-28).

Just as Jesus pointed to Daniel's prophecy about the sign of the end (the Temple and the Desolator), He refers to Daniel about his return as the Son of Man with the clouds (24:30; Daniel 7:13), and Jesus isn't alone! Angels will gather His elect to be with Him. *This verse clearly teaches that the Rapture will happen after the Tribulation and during Jesus' return.*

So, what are the signs that we're nearing the Tribulation, the labor pains of Messiah, the Time of Jacob's Trouble? 1) The fig tree will get tender and sprout leaves. That means Israel, the withered fig tree (21:18-19, 23:37-39), will come to life, which officially happened on May 14, 1948. 2) And yet, with all the indicators, we won't know the day and the hour (24:36-44) even though we might know the year and the season (the Feasts of the Lord gives us a blueprint of Jesus' first coming and return). Sadly, many people, including Christians, will be caught unaware. They'll probably be attributing the global calamities to climate change, natural pandemics, or political struggles that have always gone on. You'd think they would get a clue from how extreme those events will get, but even the leaders of Jesus' day missed the Lord when He stood nose-to-nose with them. So be prepared! Despite the turmoil of the End that will swirl around us, if we're "blessed" to live during the End Time, we will need to keep working for Jesus. The reward is great for the faithful, and the punishment is severe for those who aren't (24:44).

As we move into chapter 25, ignore the chapter break. Before the Son of Man comes, Israel will "leaf out" and return to life as a nation. That's one of the two signs of the End Time generation. Jesus' return will catch some by surprise. Because of that, some will be prepared to be gathered in the air (the Rapture, 24:31), and some won't. Therefore, we're not only to be ready but hard at work for the Lord when it happens.

Three parables about God's kingdom, Jesus' return, and rewards/judgments follow: The Parables of the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep vs. Goats. The Parable of the Ten Virgins teaches us that being prepared means being ready to respond when Jesus' return is announced (the trumpet call, *shofar blast*) despite a delay. The Early Church thought Jesus was going to go away and come right back. It's been almost two thousand years, and our Messiah still hasn't arrived. In the meantime, His kingdom has grown, and many Gentiles and Jews have entered it through faith, so we can see a purpose in Jesus' delay. We should pray for as much time as needed to see as many people as possible come to the Lord. But when the delay is done, Jesus' disciples must be ready for His sudden appearance.

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The similarity between Jesus' teaching about His return and this parable is the bridegroom's sudden arrival (Jesus' unexpected return) and the shouted announcement (the trumpet) (25:6). Much is made of the unprepared vs. prepared young women of the bridal party. Some say the unwise virgins are those who won't be saved because Jesus says, "I assure you: I do not know you." Others say they represent unprepared, worldly Christians who have "fallen asleep." I'm going to let the Calvinist and Aminian theologians wrestle with that. Jesus' point is to be ready despite His delay.

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30) is about what we've done for the Lord with our God-given gifts and talents while Jesus was away. The faithful servants use what they've been given responsibly to increase God's kingdom. They will be richly rewarded. But the irresponsible, evil, lazy servant refused to put his God-given resources to work for his Lord. He slandered his master even though how the master treated the other responsible servants proves him a liar trying to excuse his rebellious failure. That wicked servant will be punished severely. Jesus' point is despite His long delay, we're to remain at work and strive to be as productive as possible for Him by using our gifts, talents, and abilities to do good works for His glory.

Finally, the Parable of the Sheep vs. Goats (25:31-46) is a mix of figurative and literal teaching that tells us what kind of good works we should do while our master is away. Do you see how all this fits together? In short, this parable tells us we're to show compassion and feed those who need food, give water to the thirsty, house those in need of lodgings, clothe those who need clothing, care for the sick, and visit those who are alone and isolated in prison (isolated from society for their crimes). Be assured if we do it for them, we metaphorically do it for Jesus, and vice versa if we don't. Most Christians use this as their guide for serving Jesus in our world today, and it's not a wrong application. The Lord wants us to love everyone, and the best way is through humble, compassionate care for those who need it.

However, there's another level here. This parable's context is the final judgment when the Son of Man finally arrives after His long delay (25:31). But note that nations, not people, are gathered before Him (25:32). The sheep nations are nations that used their resources for acts of humble and compassionate care for "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (25:40). The goat nations are those nations that didn't (25:45). Who are these "least of these brothers and sisters of mine?" Brothers and sisters could mean Jesus' followers, the Jewish people, or both because the two groups are Jesus' siblings spiritually and physically.

**INSIGHT**

Ever wonder WHY the Charismatic movement kicked in around the late 60s? Here's my take (for what it's worth):

- 1) God's kingdom was "conceived" IN people at Pentecost/Shavuot.
- 2) The intervening years (A.D. 70-1948) experienced waves of rest and revival, much like Braxton-Hicks contractions prepare a woman's body for birth. The contractions often get stronger as the woman nears labor.
- 3) The "contractions" (waves of troubles) grew intense during the 1900s - two world wars, pandemics, and increases in natural disasters. There were also the Azusa Street (1906-08) and Healing revivals (the 40s-50s).
- 4) In 1967, Israel took back Jerusalem. THAT'S WHEN THE "WATER" BROKE, and the Living Water of the Holy Spirit flowed in gushers over denominational walls, drenching everything. No one could stop the water, and it continues today. Blood and water (Jesus' salvation and the Holy Spirit's cleansing/power) precede birth.
- 5) The point of delivery is God's Kingdom manifesting geo-politically with Messiah's "birth," Jesus' return. Jeremiah 30: "We have heard a cry of terror, of dread — there is no peace. Ask and see whether a male can give birth. Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor (the labor pains of Messiah) and every face turned pale? How awful that day will be! There will be no other like it (the Day of the Lord, Jesus' return)! It will be a time of trouble for Jacob (the Time of Jacob's Trouble), but he (Israel) will be saved out of it."

I believe the Charismatic movement was the initial sign that we have reached the point of labor's onset (transitioning from one stage to the next with signs increasing in frequency and intensity).

To us, delivery (Jesus' return) seems to be a long time in coming. However, having watched my wife in labor four times, most people think labor is waaaayyy toooooo long, then suddenly, the baby arrives.

We're faced with some of the most significant troubles the world has ever seen (and that's saying something!): the constant threat of nuclear war, world powers vying for control (WEF's Great Reset/Russia/China), manufactured plagues, natural disasters, etc., and labor's pushing (Tribulation) hasn't even started yet, but I think it soon will.



Keep your eyes on Israel and the Jews. When God works with that body of His people, He releases parallels in His Body of believers.

I think we're about to be wheeled into the delivery unit. I wonder if we can ask the Lord for an epidural.

## October 19 : Scriptures Matthew 26-28

### SUMMARY

Having completed His teaching, Jesus prepares His disciples for the Passover celebration in two days which will also be the most traumatic day of their lives. Since Passover fell on the day before the Sabbath (Saturday), then Passover was Friday, which means it began on Thursday evening, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John seems to have adjusted the date one day earlier to line up Jesus' death with the time the Passover lambs are killed and prepared in the Temple for the family Passover celebrations. Therefore, Jesus likely completed His teaching on Wednesday.

About that same time, the ticked-off chief priests and elders meet in the palatial estate of the High Priest, Caiaphas, to discuss the Messiah-wannabe troublemaker who refuses to cooperate with them. Jesus has outright opposed them, marking Him as a Rebellious Elder, subject to trial for heresy, and leading the people away from God (26:3-5). They know they have to kill Jesus because His insolence and craftiness could lead to an insurrection against Rome, and previous actions provoked a lot of bloodshed. The crucial part of their plan is not to dispatch Jesus during Passover because tensions are already high. So, they conspire.

Across the Kidron Valley and just over the Mount of Olives, Jesus stays at the home of His beloved Mary, Martha, and the formerly dead Lazarus (26:6). As He speaks, a woman whom we'll identify later comes up behind Jesus and anoints His head. Oiling the hair was an act of honoring a guest. The oil was often perfumed with myrrh which filled the vicinity with a wonderfully aromatic fragrance (26:7). However, such oil was also costly, which Jesus' disciples recognize (26:8-9). They weren't wrong that the oil could have been sold to help the poor, and Jesus would have likely approved that. But the woman's anointing had a far greater significance than anyone except for Jesus knew (26:12).

Jesus knew His sacrificial death was nearing, and dead bodies were anointed with aromatics and wrapped in cloths for burial. Oils, aromatics, spices, and perfumes would help cover the body's decay and decomposition stench. To the disciples, the woman's act was a waste. To Jesus, an extravagant act of love, devotion, and honor foreshadowed His crucifixion. It was a selfless act that Jesus Himself would honor in return (26:13).

The woman's act of honor is immediately followed by Judas' act of great dishonor, arranging to betray Jesus to the authorities. After paying the betrayal fee, all the authorities needed was a convenient, out-of-the-way place and time to arrest Jesus. They

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didn't want it to happen on Passover because of the crowds. But while the leaders had their plan, the Father was in *total* control of the timing of Jesus' death.

It's now Thursday afternoon, and Jesus' disciples are looking for a room to celebrate Passover, commemorating the Israelites' salvation and exodus from Egypt (26:17). The Jews had celebrated Passover on and off (mostly on) since c. 1440 B.C. Since Passover preparations are being made, this occurs mid-afternoon on Thursday. "But Jay, if it says 'on the first day of Passover,' wouldn't that mean Friday?" You would think that. However, since the preparations for Passover begin in the afternoon before the sunset start of the Feast, the final hours of Preparation Day (mid-afternoon to sunset) are regarded as part of the first day of Passover.

Jesus sends His disciples to a certain man (who probably knows about Jesus) to request a large room, which he grants. Hey, who wouldn't want a famous miracle-working rabbi as a guest for Passover? Later, while Jesus was reclining at dinner (because Passover and its meal are enjoyed lying on one's left side around a table), Jesus drops the bomb – "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me" (26:21). Of course, such news would rock the disciples. Still, Jesus had already warned them repeatedly of His impending crucifixion. In Matthew's Passover account, it appears Jesus reveals that Judas is the betrayer, and you'd think the other disciples would throw him out. But evidently, Judas' identity as Jesus' betrayer was known only to Jesus and himself, even though Jesus had indicated that the culprit would be someone close to Him. Actually, the betrayer was right next to Him at the table! (26:23). We'll fill in more details with the other Gospels because they all have their perspective.

As they are eating (Judas having left "for supplies" per John's Gospel), Jesus tells His disciples that Passover was His Father's long-established illustration of His plan for the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. Jesus reveals that the piece of unleavened bread that represented Moses and the coming Messiah finds its fulfillment in sinless Jesus (26:26). The cup of red wine that represents the blood of the Passover Lamb will be fulfilled by Jesus' spilled blood during the crucifixion (26:28). Jesus' spilled blood would be the sacrifice that seals the New Covenant with any person who would accept it. The New Covenant would soon replace the Sinai/Moses covenant as the only way a person enters into a relationship with God and His kingdom forever. For Jesus, this would be the last time He would drink from the Passover cup until the start of His Father's kingdom on earth (26:29). After supper, Jesus and the disciples conclude their Passover with the traditional Psalms 113-118 (called the Hallel) and head out of the city to overnight on the Mount of Olives.

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Along the way, Jesus warns His disciples that they'll all abandon Him on His account. Matthew refers to Zechariah 13:7 as the prophecy that explains what's happening to Jesus and the disciples. The prophecy reveals that God strikes the shepherd, which scatters the sheep. Even though Jesus' arrest and crucifixion come from human hands, His Father is in firm control. The Father must strike the Shepherd to complete His plan of redemption. As I see it, the Father scatters the sheep not to hurt them but to protect them until the Good Shepherd returns to gather them together.

I've read through these sections repeatedly, and I'm still amazed that Jesus knew exactly what His disciples would do and told them in advance even though, like dumb sheep, they didn't understand. After they abandoned Jesus, I'm sure they felt terribly guilty. But for now, Jesus comfortingly tells them, "I'll meet you all on the other side" (26:32).

Ah, impetuous Peter! Like his outburst on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter loudly declares that he will *never* abandon Jesus. Even if he were the only one, he would remain by Jesus' side. "Not so, Peter," Jesus replies. "You, too, will deny me before dawn breaks." But Peter resolutely declares his faithfulness along with the rest of the guys.

The place Jesus chose to prepare Himself for the next 12-15 hours was in an olive grove. How do we know this? Because it's called Gath Sh'mene, Gethsemane, the Olive Press. Olive presses were built in olive groves to make the processing more immediate to harvesting. Here, Jesus' will be pressed to His limit. Will He or won't He surrender to His Father's will? And now we see the finale to Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will... My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (26:39-42).

Judas arrives with his entourage (26:47), and one little kiss is all it takes.

When one of the disciples tries to defend Him, Jesus rebukes him. Jesus doesn't need any human to protect Him. He has a heavenly army that's able to do the job. But Jesus refuses to call for help because His arrest is part of His Father's plan (26:54). As Jesus predicted, the disciples scatter as their shepherd is apprehended.

Jesus now faces High Priest Caiaphas, the scribes, and elders, with Peter hiding in the background, as close as he can get, without being identified and arrested as a co-defendant (26:57-58). Like other kangaroo courts with a victim but no crime, they try to drum up anything to condemn Jesus. That's tough to do when trying an innocent, sinless man. Eventually, two men step forward with "a confused understanding of Jesus' statement in John 2:19. Since both 2 Samuel 7:13-14 and Zechariah 6:12 portrayed Messiah

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as One who would build a temple for God, the high priest regarded the statement about building the temple in three days as a claim to messiahship" (study Bible). This accusation must have sounded delicious to Caiaphas. If Jesus couldn't do what He said He could do, He was no Messiah.

We reach the "pinnacle of the Temple," where Jesus proclaims who He is before He is "thrown down." Caiaphas pulls out the big gun, which He believes will "force" Jesus to answer truthfully and thus condemn Himself. "*I charge you under oath* by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (26:63, italics author). Side note: "Son of God," in this case, doesn't refer to God as Jesus' father. "Messiah, Son of God," is the same title repeated. King David was God's son in the covenant sense that he was the "lesser king under a greater king." Therefore, Caiaphas asks Jesus if He is Israel's long-awaited Messiah who will restore the Davidic royal line.

It's suicide for Jesus to admit this because the leadership will quickly turn a potential insurrectionist over to the Romans and prove their loyalty to Rome. Who knows? They may even get a little something in their pocket from Rome for keeping the peace during a volatile Feast celebration.

But Jesus is under the High Priest's oath, and according to His Torah, Jesus must answer truthfully, which He would do anyway. Jesus answers, "You have said it." In other words, "It's just as you say. I am Israel's Messiah" (26:64). But now Jesus throws Caiaphas a *giant* curve ball! "But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man (Me, Jesus) seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Directly to High Priest's face, Jesus declares His divine nature.

To remind you, the Son of Man is the Ancient of Day's agent who will bring God's kingdom to earth and judge the world (Daniel 7). Jesus says to Caiaphas: "I am Israel's Messiah, and I will restart David's kingdom with the people of Israel. I am also the divine man from heaven who will start God's kingdom on earth. *You sit there judging Me, but you will stand before me in the future as I judge you.*"

*Mic drop.*

Jesus' reply is too much for Caiaphas. He has Jesus on insurrection and blasphemy. The verdict is "guilty," and the execution process begins.

Meanwhile, Peter is busted listening in on the proceedings. Three times he's interrogated about his affiliation with Jesus, twice by a woman (a woman!). Peter's Master affirmed

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Who He was by an oath. With an oath, Peter denies the one he declared he would never deny. The sorrow is too much for Peter. His guilt and remorse begin when the rooster crows (26:69-75).

That was a lot, huh? Well, hang in there. Chapter 27 is Jesus' crucifixion. As Jesus is led away for His Roman trial with Pontius Pilate, Judas' guilt is too great for him. There's been a lot of speculation about Judas' motivation for betraying Jesus. Some say it was for the money (which is most likely), and some say it was to force Jesus to take Israel's throne. While Satan used Judas (see John's Gospel) to try to push Jesus ahead of His Father's plan or get rid of Him, the Father used Satan to accomplish Satan's demise. Jesus' death conquered Satan and Judas was Satan's tool that set the wheels in motion for his downfall.

By returning the money, it seems like Judas is trying to reverse the course of events and get Jesus released. Realizing there is no hope, Judas ends his suffering by hanging himself (27:5).

I find it disgusting that those who claimed to be righteous and had broken Torah by framing and condemning an innocent man to death are now concerned about violating the Torah via "blood money." Jesus' curse on them was rightly earned (27:2, 23:35-36).

At Jesus' Roman trial, Pilate tries to give Jesus "an out." Pilate knows the Jews can't execute anyone except in a few instances with Roman permission. If Pilate says no, then no-go. Pilate asks Jesus if the charges are accurate or not. Jesus willingly remains quiet per His Father's plan and will.

Pilate then looks for another way out of his predicament. Jesus won't cooperate, so maybe the crowd will. He offers them a choice – the accused insurrectionist, Jesus, or the real insurrectionist, Barabbas (27:17). Surely the crowd isn't that stupid to pick Barabbas! At the same time, Pilate's wife tries to tell Pilate to let Jesus go. But to no avail.

As Pilate's trial continues, the leaders rile up the crowd into asking for Barabbas' release and Jesus' execution (27:20). Faced now with the threat of an actual riot that could lead to a real insurrection, Pilate "washes his hands" of the matter and turns Jesus over for crucifixion.

Sadly, the Jewish leaders' statement, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (27:25), has stoked horrible antisemitic attacks against Jews. This is *so* wrong! So why did Jewish Matthew write this? I believe it goes back to Jesus' curse on that particular generation of

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leaders and people who rebelliously rejected the Father, His kingdom, and His Messiah (23:35-36). I believe Matthew sees the statement as an affirmation of Jesus' words out of the peoples' own mouths.

Even though Jesus is mocked as Israel's Messiah (King) by the Roman guards, the irony is thick. Had the soldiers known what kind of King they were dealing with, they would have run and hidden. But to fulfill prophecy, they abused the One who created them (27:27-31), the very King before whom they'll be held to account.

Jesus is led outside Jerusalem to *Golgotha*, likely near a heavily-traveled major street so that Jesus would serve as a warning to any further insurrectionists. Don't forget, this is on the day of Passover, and there are about a million people in Jerusalem, mostly Jews. Public crucifixion was Rome's usual graphic warning in case anyone got any ideas.

Just before He is crucified, Jesus refuses sedation (wine mixed with gall), likely to stay as clear-headed as possible even though it means enduring excruciating pain. Jesus is stripped naked for added humiliation and brutally fixed to the cross with nails through His wrists and ankles. In another ironic act, Pilate posts, "This Is Jesus, the King of the Jews," above Jesus' head. What Pilate intends as mockery proclaims the truth to the world, even as those around Jesus openly sneer at His pain and suffering.

At noon darkness sets in over the land as the Light of the World grows dim. At 3 pm, Jesus receives the entirety of His Father's wrath for sin, causing Him to cry out with the excruciating yell, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (27:46; Psalm 22:1). Why does He do that? I do not doubt that Jesus' Father could not be near His Son as Jesus became sin for us as the scapegoat does during the Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16:21-22). It's likely Jesus also did this to fulfill Psalm 22 and point the people's attention to the Psalm to understand what was happening.

At 3 pm, right when the special Passover Lamb sacrifice is killed in the Temple on the Day of Passover, the *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* surrenders His spirit,

And dies.

Under the weight of God's judgment, the earth shakes. The massive Temple curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place tears from top to bottom (not done by man's hand), and rocks split, including those that covered tombs. Many recently dead righteous people return to life like Lazarus did but curiously, they wait in their tombs

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until after Jesus' resurrection (27:52-53). Only after Jesus' died and the wonders happened did some people realize that Jesus really was God's Son.

One of Jesus' disciples, Joseph from Arimathea, asks Pilate for Jesus' body and hurriedly prepares it for burial because the Torah commands that executed criminals be buried on the day of their execution before the sun sets (Deuteronomy 21:23). So, Jesus dies and is in the tomb on Friday (Day 1).

The Jewish leaders come to Pilate to ask that an official seal be placed on the tomb's stone to seal it against opening because they recall that Jesus said He would rise on the third day. They want to make sure none of Jesus' disciples perpetrate fraud by stealing the body (27:64). Pilate agrees and adds some guards to the equation *just to make sure*. Right. That'll work.

Saturday, day 2, passes.

Sunday morning, day 3, dawns. According to biblical reckoning, the third day started at sundown on Saturday. It is now the third day, and things have begun to happen. Nothing much. Just an earthquake, an angel opening the tomb and sitting on the stone, Roman soldiers fainting, women standing in amazement, and Jesus' absence from the tomb, that's all!

As the excited women run back to the disciples to tell them the news, they encounter the risen Jesus! He tells them He will meet up with His disciples in Galilee (28:10). As we know from the other Gospels, Jesus will greet them before that in Jerusalem.

News of Jesus' resurrection reaches some of the priests and elders of the Sanhedrin. They bribe the soldiers to keep their mouths shut and promise to keep them out of trouble should the news reach Pilate.

Meanwhile, sometime during the intervening 40-day period after His resurrection, Jesus meets His disciples in Galilee at the prearranged mountain. Some worship Jesus, and, incredibly enough, some still doubt (28:17). I wonder if Thomas was still struggling with the whole death and resurrection thing.

At the end of Matthew, Jesus commissions His disciples to take what they've seen and learned to the nations. Jesus' mission to His people, the Jews, is finished. Now it's time for His Jewish disciples to take the Good News to Jews and Gentiles everywhere. Jesus reassures them that He's not sending them out alone. He'll be with them, along with all



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the authority and power that His Father has entrusted to Him. As they go, they're to make disciples, not just converts. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is the conversion part, and "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" is the teaching, training, and maturing part.

There! We've completed our first Gospel. Now let's see what Mark has to say.

### INSIGHT

In today's summary, I mentioned that Jesus died at the same time the special Passover sacrifice did – at 3:00 pm. Let me explain more in light of Jesus' Passover.

According to the Torah, lambs are selected four days before Passover. They're kept in homes (because many homes had small courtyards for animals) and examined to see if they're unblemished and qualified for the celebratory meal. If they pass, they're killed and prepared for the Passover meal about 3-4 hours before the festivities. Preparing the lambs would have occurred on Thursday afternoon during Jesus' final week.

In Jesus' day, a special Passover Lamb was selected for a Passover Day Temple offering. This sacrifice was called the *chagigah*, "the voluntary sacrifices offered with the paschal lamb at the Passover and on other festivals by Jews on their pilgrimages to the temple at Jerusalem" (Merriam-Webster dictionary). This special Lamb was chosen and then paraded from the town of Bethany across the Kidron Valley and into the Temple complex. The special lamb was examined to make sure it was unblemished. If judged unblemished, it was tied to the Bronze Altar at 9 am on the Day of Passover. It was on display until 3 pm. At 3 pm, the High Priest would pull its head back and cut its throat to collect its blood and splash against the Altar. As the High Priest bled the Lamb, he would look into the Temple toward the Holy of Holies' curtain (the *parochet*) and declare, "It is finished!"

Do you see who fulfills the picture of the Special Lamb and the High Priest?

## October 20 : Scriptures Mark 1-3

### SUMMARY

When I was a kid, I liked comic books (I still do). I would go with my dad to his workplace (a pharmacy) and read comic books all day long. They were action-packed! The heroes went from frame to frame and page to page, fighting the forces of evil and saving the helpless.

Welcome to Mark's Gospel, the action Gospel! Seriously, I'm not kidding. Mark's Gospel is one of the best to start new Bible readers. Mark writes as if Jesus were running from one event to the next. He uses "immediately, after, as, and then" to move the action along rapidly. But once Mark gets to chapter 11, he slows down to track Jesus' final days. Much of what he writes is, of course, like the other Gospels, just in a more condensed form.

The author is John Mark, who was Barnabas' cousin. Barnabas and Paul went on their mission journey with John Mark, but a disagreement arose, and Barnabas and Paul parted company. Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas to Cilicia. Over time, the relationship improved between Paul and John Mark. Toward the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy, "Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). It's always fun to hear about such reconciliations. Tradition has it that John Mark traveled to Egypt, where he planted churches.

As I wrote before, all the Gospels have a particular target audience. Mark's target audience was the Roman Christians (Jews and Gentiles). The Gentile believers are why Mark's Gospel is simplified. As you read through it, you'll see some notes that have made their way into the text to help explain Jewish customs and references. These may or may not have come from Mark, but it doesn't mean Mark's Gospel isn't God's inspired Word.

To Mark, Jesus is the divine Son of God. We see that right away, and Mark helps the reader understand who Israel's Messiah is and what He's supposed to do – die and rise again. Finally, Mark packages his Gospel in three distinct units – Jesus' Galilee mission, His walk to Jerusalem, and His Jerusalem ministry times.

Bam! Mark starts big, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). And we're off. John the Baptist pops up in the wilderness with his repentance ministry as prophesied by Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. See? No fluff with Mark. John is immersing people. He wears a garment as Elijah did, people are coming to confess their sins and declare their repentance, and John announces someone greater than him is coming. This person will immerse people in the Holy Spirit. Bam! Bam! Bam!

And then Jesus shows up. No birth, childhood, or teenage narrative, *ala* Matthew and Luke. Jesus is baptized, anointed with the Holy Spirit, and affirmed by His Father. *Immediately*, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, succeeds, and angels begin to serve Him. John is arrested, and Jesus starts preaching repentance to prepare for the coming kingdom and chooses His disciples. Simon and his brother Andrew are chosen first and *immediately* join Jesus. (What? No goodbye hugs for mom and dad?) James and John, Zebedee's boys, are chosen next. *Immediately* they leave everything behind and join Jesus. Why did Jesus' disciples leave their work immediately? Because their new rabbi, the Son of God, has the authority to call them to follow Him into their new lives. See how Mark clips along?

Okay, let's slow down just a bit. As you would expect from a rabbi, Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum, His base of operations. If you visit Capernaum today, you'll see the remains of this synagogue. We know it's the same synagogue where Jesus taught because it's the only one in town, and you'll see a foundation of black basalt underneath the Roman-style synagogue built of limestone. The dark lower layer is the foundation of the synagogue Mark refers to in 1:21. It's awe-inspiring to stand where Jesus taught!

As Jesus teaches, the people sense His authority. We all know when we hear God's authoritative truth and when we're being fed bland baby food based on theological guesses. Well, Jesus' authority wasn't just noticed by the people but also by a demon. See? Even demons go to worship services! What's astonishing is demons know more about Jesus than the people do. "What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? *I know who you are — the Holy One of God!*" (1:24). The answer to the demon's first question is "Yes. Jesus has come to destroy them" but not the final destruction of evil. The demons know about that, too. Jesus drives the demon out with a single commanding rebuke. It's evident from other scriptures that driving out demons was practiced. But apparently, it wasn't all that easy because the people note how quickly Jesus did it through a single authoritative command (1:27). Of course, word would spread about an itinerant rabbi who heals people and casts out demons. True to form, Mark highlights Jesus as the Son of God via His authority and power.

"As soon as they left the synagogue" (there's Mark's immediacy again), Jesus goes to Simon Peter and Andrew's home to heal their mom. The fever leaves here as soon as Jesus takes her by the hand. Mark reveals Jesus' authority extends to His teaching, deliverance, and healing ministry. No wonder people crowd the door for help. The same thing would happen today because illness is such a terrible part of our human condition. Also, Jesus doesn't allow the demons to speak because they know Him. Why? Because Jesus' actions

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and teachings speak for Him. He doesn't want people to push Him ahead of His Father's plan. Jesus' messianic identity will be revealed soon enough but only in His Father's timing.

Jesus begins His day communing with His Father. While we don't know what He talks to His Father about, we can guess it probably has to do with the day's events, how to deal with people, what He is to teach, etc. Since this is what the Son of God with authority and power needs to do, how much more do we need it as clueless and frail as we are? In this case, it seems His Father directed Jesus to expand His outreach and influence to the neighboring towns and villages.

"He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons" (1:39). This verse stands out to me because Jesus did all these things in Galilee synagogues. The last time I toured Israel, I visited the town of Magdala on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. The town's name may sound familiar because of Mary of Magdala, Mary Magdalene (Mark 15:40), who was one of Jesus' closest female followers/disciples. Magdala has a *beautiful* church building and some fine 1st c. archeological excavations, including the only synagogue in Magdala. As the archeologists excavated the site, they found the pedestal and its top where the synagogue scroll was placed for reading on the Sabbath. That's right. We were standing just feet from where Jesus very likely stood. Again, how awe-inspiring! *If you haven't been to Israel, you need to go because it makes the Bible come to life!*

We've already covered the account of Jesus healing (i.e., cleansing) the leper in Matthew, along with His command to show Himself to the priests. Mark's account is different because Jesus tells the man, "See that you say nothing to anyone" (1:44), which the very excited, recently healed man ignores. Jesus has authority, but not over a person's zeal. (No disrespect intended. Just a little humor there.)

In chapter 2, Mark continues exploring Jesus' authority as the Son of God. This account concerns the paralytic lowered through the roof so Jesus can heal him. To better understand this, houses had flat roofs made of timber, wood, stone, and clay. The paralyzed man's wonderful friends went to the trouble of damaging someone's home to get their friend to Jesus. So, what would *you* do to get someone to Jesus? Something to ponder.

Per Mark's perspective, Jesus exercises His authority as the Son of God to proclaim the paralytic's sins forgiven. Of course, the attending scribes questioned "in their hearts" about Jesus' authority to forgive sins *because no one can do that except God* (2:7). Wow, what

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a setup for Jesus! He knows their thoughts (ooh, busted!), calls out their question, and sets the condition. "If I have the authority to heal this impossible case which you see with your eyes, then I have the authority to forgive sins you can't see." Bam! Jesus does it. The man *immediately* gets up, and the crowd goes crazy, "We have never seen anything like this!" (2:12).

Next, Jesus calls Levi, the son of Alphaeus (aka Matthew), to join the band of disciples, and Levi takes Jesus to his home for dinner with his friends. Naturally, Levi/Matthew's friends are fellow tax collectors and other "sinners," people who aren't so committed to God. While the Pharisees distance themselves from the backsliders to protect their separation unto God (Pharisee is from *P'rushim*, meaning "separated"), Jesus pursues the backsliders to help them separate from the world back to God.

Now, I'm not writing this in a condemning way, it's just a statement. The Pharisees wanted to see people spiritually cleaned up and reconnected to God before they fellowshiped with them. The way to do that was to follow the scribes' and Pharisees' ways of godly living, such as how to fast and other spiritual disciplines. Jesus starts with the backsliders' hearts and then expects their behavior to follow. This difference in approach is Jesus' new teaching vs. the Pharisees' old teaching, leading us into the new patch on old cloth discussion.

Jesus' new teachings and practices are incompatible with the Pharisees' older teachings and practices, primarily due to the difference between God's intent versus man-made interpretations. The new wine in old wineskins reference is about Jesus' new teachings in "old," unregenerated, set-in-their-sinful-ways people. Jesus knows people will have to be remade (the New Covenant) to accept God's Torah that the Holy Spirit will "write on their hearts." They have to be flexible (teachable) to adapt their lives to the Spirit's work within them, making them mature disciples. Jesus knows that putting His teaching into unprepared (unregenerated) people will only lead to frustration because the "old wineskins" don't have the spiritual capability to change as God wants them to under the New Covenant. Thus, they'll eventually give up and be lost, as in, "I've tried that Jesus/Church thing, and it doesn't work for me. It's just rules and regulations that I can't do." Have you heard that before? That's old wineskin talk.

Chapter 2 closes with the "going through the grainfield on the Sabbath" account we looked at in Matthew. Mark's point is that Jesus' authority as the Son of God (literally, God's Son and as Messiah) also applies to Jesus being His Father's Son of Man (literally, a human being and also as the future Judge of the earth). What does Jesus rule about the Sabbath question? 1) The Sabbath was made for people's benefit, not people made to

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serve the Sabbath. 2) As the divine human being (Son of Man), Jesus has authority over the Sabbath and has the final say about what can or can't be done on the Sabbath.

In chapter 3, Jesus is again on the move and attends another synagogue service. As in Matthew, the account of the man with the shriveled hand is an extension of Jesus' Lord of the Sabbath declaration at the end of chapter 2. The Pharisees held that healing constituted work, so practicing medicine on the Sabbath was prohibited. 1) Jesus is practicing mercy, not medicine, and again, 2) He alone determines what violates the Sabbath. Bam! He, therefore, heals the man (3:5).

This act shows Jesus' direct challenge to the Pharisees' authority to determine proper *halachah*, Jewish law defining how Jewish life should be lived. Mark notes that even at this early stage, the Pharisees (to be fair, only some of them) see Jesus as a threat to their "turf" and realize they're going to have to eliminate this threat (3:6). Mark also notes that the Pharisees worked with the Herodians, Jews who supported the Herod family's kingship over Judea under Rome's authority. Therefore, Jesus' exercise of authority is viewed as a challenge to the religious *and* political leaders.

Jesus' influence is growing. By this point in Mark, His reputation has reached Jerusalem, which is expected because the Galilean scribes and Pharisees have reported on this new miracle-working rabbi who is drawing people to Himself. With such a reputation, the title "Prophet" likely was floated (the Prophet that Moses predicted would arrive), and even "Messiah," the coming King who would deliver Israel from her enemies and call all the Jews back to their God-given land. Jesus' reputation has reached the region of Idumea (to the far south, home to the Herodian family), to the far eastern side of the Jordan (where Jewish and Arab territory meet), and so far north, Jesus is known in the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon (3:8). Jesus reputation is so widespread, crowds force Him to preach from a boat lest He is crushed by the crowds yearning to be healed. Jesus likely would have preached in stadiums today and online across the globe!

Now that His reputation is established, Jesus selects His A-Team, the disciples, according to Mark. He's spent enough time with them that they're prepared to preach and drive out demons by His delegated authority (i.e., in His name). We get a little slice of Jesus' relationship with His disciples when Mark tells us Jesus had nicknames for James and John, the son of Zebedee, who were apparently loud and brash like their father may have been ("Boanerges" which means "sons of thunder," 3:17). Mark points out Judas as Jesus' betrayer.

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One thing to note here is “Simon the Zealot.” Who were the Zealots? “Generally speaking, a zealot is anyone who fervently supports a particular cause... In the context of the New Testament, the Zealots were a party zealous for Jewish independence and throwing off Roman rule. They hoped to accomplish this by inciting the people to rebellion, driving the Romans from Israel, and establishing a Mosaic theocracy. They were also known to target Jews who were sympathetic to Rome” ([gotquestions.org/Simon-the-Zealot.html](http://gotquestions.org/Simon-the-Zealot.html)). With Jesus drawing these kinds of followers, it’s easy to see why the Jewish leadership and Herodians saw Jesus as a significant threat.

Mark comes to the “house divided” account we saw in Matthew. Again, Jesus’ point is that He’s working in God’s kingdom, not Satan’s kingdom when He drives out demons because a kingdom that fights against itself will ultimately implode. Therefore, Jesus’ deliverance ministry is a manifestation of Yehovah’s kingdom. Those who speak against and resist Jesus speak against and resist God’s kingdom, from which comes a person’s only hope of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Three-in-One God through whom the revelation of salvation and God’s power is released. Therefore, the Holy Spirit manifests God’s kingdom as He works on people and against demons, and this was how Jesus accomplished His Father’s works.

Finally, Jesus’ comment about His family being “whoever does the will of God” is not a slam on His human family. It simply expands the idea of familial relationships to make all believers part of Jesus’ family.

### **INSIGHT**

Jesus’ comment about who His family is brings out a profound point, which is vital from an ancient point of view. As His Father’s firstborn Son, Jesus is responsible for caring for His family as His Father’s representative. Let this sink in. Jesus’ loving responsibility is to care for you and work for your benefit. He’s not our master nor our servant. He is our loving Elder Brother who cares for all His siblings!

## October 21 : Scriptures Mark 4-6

### SUMMARY

As we move into Mark 4, Jesus launches out in a boat to teach a string of parables that we've read in Matthew 13. Jesus' teaching is about us letting our light (God's revelation) shine in our lives through our godly actions and words. For brevity's sake, I'll let you go back to Matthew 13 and the commentary to consider the Parable of the Sower, more accurately, the Parable of the Soils, because how receptive to God's word we are determines how productive we are for His kingdom.

I want to point out that in the illustration of being a light, revealing God to others around us, Mark adds, "And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear. By the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and more will be added to you. For whoever has, more will be given to him, and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him'" (4:24-25). This is a beautiful encouragement for us. When Jesus opens our minds to understand His words, we get a revelation about His kingdom. The "light comes on," so to speak. If we're open to His words (Parable of the Sower/Soils) and respond, He'll give us more revelation. Sadly, some of Jesus' hearers won't listen; if they don't respond, the revelation will fade.

The Parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed teach that God's kingdom grows because it has power in itself, and all we have to do is receive it, and it takes off within us. Also, God's kingdom starts small but grows in influence and effect over time; Jesus > disciples > early messianic community > the worldwide body of believers (4:26-32).

Regarding the parables, Jesus' customarily taught in parables which showed "who got it" and who didn't. But to His disciples, He taught privately to make sure they understood what He was teaching.

In Mark's account of the winds and the waves (4:35-41), he again notes the extent of the Son of God's authority. This incident is the first time we see that Jesus' authority extends to all creation! (4:41).

In chapter 5, Jesus and His disciples sail across the Sea of Galilee and arrive on the eastern shore, the region of the Gerasenes (aka Gadarenes/Gergesenes). Matthew has a shortened account of this in Matthew 8:26-39; two guys living in the cemetery, the demons recognize Jesus for who He is, and the demons leave the men and inhabit a herd of pigs who rush down the slope and drown in the water. The pig herders report to the townspeople, and the townspeople beg Jesus to leave, likely for fear and possibly economic reasons. Our



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clues as to why are 1) Jews don't eat pork and 2) that means Gentiles inhabited the region, and perhaps they saw a Jewish rabbi trying to wreck their livelihoods.

However, Mark gives us some additional information. He recalls there was only one demonized man, not two. The demons recognize Jesus *after* He commands them to leave. Jesus asks the name of the demon, who reveals that they are really a collective of demons who call themselves Legion *because there is a whole army of them in the guy*. Creepy, right? Like Matthew, Mark tells us that demons don't like to be disembodied. In other words, they are at home in physical bodies and don't like being "naked," existing only in their spiritual form. After Jesus clears the demonic entourage from him, the sane man wants to come with Jesus. However, Jesus sends him back as a testimony to the region. This ending makes me smile because the people wanted Jesus to leave but couldn't get rid of the testimony about Jesus (5:17, 20).

After that, Jesus departs and moves to the other side of the Sea. Mark shares the "woman that can't stop bleeding/dead girl" account that Matthew does in Matthew 9. Again, Mark has details Matthew doesn't. The leader that came to Jesus is Jairus, the head of the local synagogue whose daughter is dying (5:22). Along the way to Jairus' home, the bleeding woman pushes through the crowd to get to Jesus. Remember, ritual uncleanness transfers by touch, so this bleeding woman is taking a massive risk because someone might recognize her and rebuke her harshly, driving her away for "contaminating" others, especially the renowned rabbi, Jesus. If so, she might lose her only chance to get healed. She knows Malachi's "sun of righteousness with healing in his wings/touch the prayer shawl tassels" prophecy, so that's her secret goal.

She touches the fringe on Jesus' garment and feels instantly healed. Jesus also feels something. He feels power being pulled from Him. Isn't that interesting? The woman's trust *drew healing* from Jesus. Rabbi Jesus spins around to find out, "who touched My clothes?" (5:30). Of course, the disciples miss what Jesus is saying, "But everyone is touching you, Rabbi." Jesus sees the woman and knows it was her who did it. She confesses to Jesus what she has done. With great compassion, He affirms her healing (5:34).

Understand this – even though ritual impurity can be transferred by touch, Jesus' utter holiness and purity transfer to the woman and overrides her impurity. This event gives us a foreshadowing as to what Jesus' death on the cross will do for sinners.

While Matthew recounts that Jesus is informed about the young girl's death when He arrives, Mark says Jairus and Jesus are informed along the way. Jesus didn't respond,

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“Oh well. Sorry I couldn’t have helped.” No. He says, “Don’t be afraid. Trust Me” (5:36). Jairus does, and they arrive at his home, where people are already grieving. Mark and Matthew point out that the mourners laugh at Jesus for suggesting the little girl hasn’t died but is asleep (5:39-40) but don’t know what Jesus means. Of course, Jesus knows she’s dead, but “asleep” is a biblical idiom that speaks of death as temporary. The girl will live again, either at that time or in the resurrection of the dead on the Day of the Lord.

Earlier, Jesus could do no works in His hometown because they refused to believe Him (Matthew 13:58). Refusal to trust God causes Him to move on, so to speak, to those who are ready to receive Him and His work. This principle is related to the Parable of the Soils’ point. The mourners at Jairus’ home mocked Jesus, but Jairus trusted Him. Therefore, Jesus shoos away the unbelievers but retains the trusting ones, the girl’s father, mother, and disciples. Jesus says, “*Talitha koum,*” which Mark tells us is Aramaic for “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” The girl instantly wakes up, but Jesus tells those who witnessed the girl’s resuscitation from death to say nothing. Why? Do you think healing people drew a crowd? Imagine people streaming to Jesus to ask Him to raise their loved ones from the dead!

There are some interesting parallels between the two accounts of the bleeding woman and the dead girl. In both cases, Jesus treats them as “daughters” needing help. Jesus represents the Father who sees the need of the individual, even if they are the most unnoticed persons, a twelve-year-old girl, and a hopelessly sick woman. The Father sees His daughters and knows their need for Him. Also, both accounts rely on simple trust. Trust activates God’s compassion and action. Trust can even “pull” a response from the Lord. The woman “pulled healing” from Jesus and Jairus’ trust opened the door for Jesus to pull his daughter back from death. May we all cultivate such faith in the Lord!

Speaking of Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth, we come to it in Mark 6. Why did they reject Jesus? Wasn’t He their simple hometown boy who made good? Yes, He was. But His refusal to do miracles at their command caused them to be offended at Him, according to Luke (Luke 4:23). Their offense prompted their rejection of Jesus and turned off the spigot of God’s grace, except for a few blessed people who were healed (Mark 6:5).

At this point, have you noticed the similarity between the two Gospels? That’s because the writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were either eyewitnesses or gathered the recollections of those who were. This similarity has led many scholars on the quest to determine which writer wrote their Gospel first and whose writings were used as source material by other Gospel writers. It’s a fascinating study if you’re interested, and I just thought I’d mention it.

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Next, in Mark's action Gospel, Jesus dispatches His disciples on their "King is coming" tour, followed by Herod Antipas beheading John, Jesus feeding the five thousand, Jesus' stroll on the water, and Jesus healing many people. Whew!

Matthew has more details about the disciples' commissioning. However, I noticed the disciples used anointing oil to heal people versus Jesus' commanding healing (Mark 6:13). Why is that? The Holy Spirit's power hasn't yet been released to people, which can only happen after Jesus is crucified, resurrected, and ascended to the Father. According to John's Gospel, Jesus said all that is needed before the Holy Spirit can arrive (John 16:7).

Regarding John the Baptist's beheading, Mark gives us some interesting background information about why Herodias, Herod Antipas' wife, wanted John dead and why Herod hesitated. "Herodias *held a grudge against him* and wanted to kill him. But she could not, because *Herod feared John and protected him, knowing he was a righteous and holy man*. When Herod heard him, he would be very perplexed, and *yet he liked to listen to him*" (Mark 6:19-20).

As for the walking on the water incident, Matthew records Peter's involvement. Mark leaves Peter out of it and focuses on Jesus calming the environment (6:51).

Finally, Matthew and Mark point out one of the great messianic signs we've already discussed – touching the edge of Messiah's garment will heal people (Mark 6:56; Matthew 14:36).

## INSIGHT

When I first saw a dead body, I was a child at a relative's funeral. It seemed so strange. It looked like the person was asleep, yet there was no movement. There was no breathing and no twitching. She was as still as stone. But I can see how people equate death with sleeping.

"Asleep" as an idiom for death runs throughout the Bible and has a profound implication. Daniel says of the dead, "*Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, and some to disgrace and eternal contempt*" (Daniel 12:2).

Paul says, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning *those who are asleep*, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, *God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). Also, "Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all *fall asleep* (die), but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised incorruptible*, and we will be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Did you catch the connection regarding the temporary state of death? Though all people die (except those who will be alive when Jesus returns), all dead people will eventually live again. For those who trust Jesus for their eternal lives, they will live with the Source of Life, Jesus. Those who refuse to trust Jesus for eternal life will live without the Source of Life in eternal separation, the death of all death. What's your choice?