

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

## NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS MATTHEW



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Daniel Webster has been serving as a missionary in Ghana, West Africa since 2004. Previously Daniel worked as a Certified Interconnect Designer (CID) listed with IPC (Association of Connecting Electronics Industries). His electronics career spanned fifteen years working in Canada for the Department of National Defense, as well as spending five years designing advanced electronic communication equipment for the Avionics industry. Daniel is from British Columbia, Canada, and came to know the Lord at the age of twenty-five. He is married to Priscilla, and has a daughter living in Canada. Since 1994 Daniel has been involved with bible teaching and preaching to Christian audiences in both Canada and the USA, and also through various ministries in Ghana. Daniel developed this series of New Testament lessons during a five-year study of the New Testament. The Lessons were prepared as part of an on-going radio ministry in Ghana, where the lessons were broadcast on a national FM radio station in Kumasi from 2010 to 2015.

Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

### Bible Quotations:

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the New King James Version.

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## RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



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### KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

**SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES**

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

### THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,  
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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## **Preface**

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster  
Oct. 2015







# LESSONS IN MATTHEW

Denarius Coin with Caesar Augustus inscription



Courtesy of [wildwinds.com](http://wildwinds.com) and Gemini III Auction

“RENDER THEREFORE TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR’S, AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD’S.”

MATTHEW 22:21

LESSON 1  
**Genealogy of Jesus Christ**  
MATTHEW 1

The first chapter of Matthew, and of our New Testament, presents to us the story of Jesus. Jesus is the most important individual who has ever lived in our world. He is someone each of us needs to learn about, and come into a personal relationship with. Our first introduction to Jesus is the historical record of his family tree, a list of his forefathers all the way back to Abraham, who lived about 2000 years before Jesus.

This list is given to us so that we can know Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The prophets had foretold of a deliverer for Israel that would come and redeem them. With the many prophecies of the Old Testament, also came promises made to Abraham, and also to King David. God promised these men that one of their descendants would be the promised Messiah sent from God. This is why Matthew is careful to mention both Abraham and David in his genealogy of Jesus, proving that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies throughout the Old Testament period.

While the Old Testament would reveal how sinful man is, and how much he is in need of God's forgiveness and mercy, the New Testament will introduce us to the way which God can forgive men, and extend his mercy to all. The answer is to be found in the revelation of Jesus the Christ, God's Messiah.

His birth was miraculous, as he is the only one to ever be born of a virgin. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and Mary gave birth to him without ever having physical relations with a man. When Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant he wanted to privately end his marriage engagement with her, but God revealed to him in a dream that he should not fear to take Mary as his wife, for the child she carried was not another man's, but was from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew is careful to begin his gospel writing, with details about Jesus lineage and his miraculous birth, so that the Jewish people would understand that he was their promised Messiah.

He is pointing our eyes towards Jesus, and asking us to consider whom this person is, and what significance He can have in our lives. We will be very wise to pay careful attention to the message concerning Jesus, as we continue to learn about him in our lessons through the gospel of Matthew.

Do you know Jesus? Do you accept by faith the revelation of God's Son given to us in the record of the New Testament? Your eternal destiny is dependent upon what you think and believe about Jesus, so I hope that you will take time to carefully consider Him.

We will be reading each week in the gospel of Matthew and searching the scriptures, to learn more about the wonderful Savior of mankind, His name is Jesus, and His name is above all other names!

May the Lord help you to know who Jesus really is, as you think about these words from Matthew's gospel:

*"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."  
Matthew 1:21*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about who Jesus really is. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know that what the bible is teaching about Jesus and salvation is correct?"

If we are to believe in Jesus as our Savior and have confidence that we have eternal life, we must first have confidence that the testimony of the bible is true. Many critics and skeptics have tried to discredit the bible, or find fault and contradictions in the bible. The reasons people do not like the bible, are not so much because the bible contains errors (for it does not), but because they do not want to live under God's authority, and therefore it is necessary for them to discredit the bible, so they can enjoy their sin.

About 40 different men wrote the bible, over a period of about 1500 years. All of these men were directed by the Holy Spirit to write the exact words that God wanted to speak to men. The words spoken often are directed to a particular group of people, such as the Hebrew people, but we can all find important teachings to help us understand the mind and will of God, and man's responsibility, in every passage of the bible.

The bible can be trusted for several good reasons.

1. The bible is prophetic. That is it foretells what will happen in the future. Many of the prophecies in the Old Testament have been fulfilled. In fact the bible has so many prophecies fulfilled, and with such clarity and accuracy, that anyone can find much evidence to believe the bible was given to us by God.
2. The bible is historically accurate. That means that students of history and archeology can validate the events, people, and places in the bible, through other sources, to prove that the bible does not convey to us just fiction, but authentic history.
3. The bible is internally consistent. This means that all the men who wrote the bible, do not contradict each other in what they teach, or the facts and history they share. It is really a remarkable testimony, that so many men over such a long period could produce a book with such thorough agreement on every page, about God, about man, about sin, about judgment, about salvation, or any subject that it discusses. This is tremendous evidence, which should give us all confidence that the bible is God's word.
4. The bible claims to be of divine origin. This means that throughout the bible, the writers are expressing their words as coming from God. They do not hesitate to say, "Thus says the Lord", or "I received from the Lord". This confirms to us also that the bible is God's word.
5. The bible transforms lives. This means that people throughout history have been changed by the message of the bible. When people read and accept the message of the bible, they turn away from evil, and practice righteousness. Not all who profess to be Christians behave well, but when we discount all those who have abused and misused Christianity for their own gain, then we still find a vast host of people from all cultures, and nations who have been changed from sinners to saints.

In view of these evidences we can have sure confidence in the bible, and know that Jesus can bring us safely to heaven, when we place our trust in Him.

*"Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven!" Psalm 119:89*

LESSON 2  
Worship of Jesus  
MATTHEW 2

In our second lesson, from Matthew chapter 2 we learn of the wise men that came from the east to find the baby born to be King, and to worship Him. We cannot be certain how these men discovered information about the birth of Jesus, and how they knew He was to be a King, but undoubtedly God blessed them with this knowledge, because these men desired to know and worship the true King sent from Heaven.

Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled, when they heard this news of another king. They likely wondered who this king could be, and how would this affect them and their nation. Herod certainly did not want any threat to his own position as king, and so gave orders to kill all the young male children in the region around where he thought this future king might be. It is typical of men who have been given authority and a position of power, to use their power to protect their own interests, and to put down any possible opponents.

Sadly this is the way most of humanity lives, with an interest in self-promotion, and greed. But there are those who genuinely seek after what is good, just as the wise men, saw in that little baby a great king, and were not threatened by the thought of his greatness or authority to rule over men. Because they were humble in their hearts, and only sought to honor the one whom God honors, they brought their gifts and worshipped before this young child. We would not expect grown men to bow before a young child, but in this unique case, these men recognized that this was no ordinary child, but was destined to rule over men.

Although Herod was ready to kill the baby born to be king, He was not able to harm this child, for God in his sovereignty was watching over Jesus. He spoke to Joseph in a dream, warning him to take the baby and his mother and flee to Egypt. This teaches us, that while man makes his own plans, he will never be able to resist the plans of God. God rules over all, and when all is said and done, God will have the last word, and His will shall be accomplished. It is best to submit to God now, for it is just foolishness to try and resist God's authority. Pharaoh tried to resist God's authority, and lost his country, army, his son, and reputation. King Nebuchadnezzar imagined that it was by his own power and greatness that he ruled, and God judged him, causing him to act as a mad man, eating grass like an ox. Herod tried to destroy God's chosen king, and died a horrible death. There is no authority that can resist God, so it is only wisdom to submit to God's authority, before we also are judged.

I wonder if you recognize that Jesus is destined to reign as King? Have you surrendered yourself to His rule over your life? Or are you like king Herod, and the people of Jerusalem, and troubled by the news that someone else wants to rule over you? Pride in our hearts, and our sinful nature cause men and women to refuse to submit to this king, because they want to rule over their own lives. If you are afraid to come to Jesus, for fear that you will have to submit to His ways, and to His rules, then you are just like Herod and the others who want to kill and destroy any threat to your own plans and pleasures. Perhaps you love your sin too much to give room for this good man to rule over your life. Jesus was taken to Nazareth, where he grew up in a despised town, because the people of Israel did not receive him with gladness.

Are you like those wise men, who saw Jesus as their future king, and were ready to follow and worship Him? Or are you more like Herod and the people who rejected the idea of someone coming to rule over them, and change their comfortable lives? My advice to you is not to be like the crowd, who want to rule over their own lives, and enjoy their sin, but be wise and seek out Jesus as the true King of your life. Seek Him, Adore Him, and Worship Him, for He most certainly will be the ruler and king in a coming day.

May the Lord help you to submit to the true King, as you consider this verse from Psalm 2:

*"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." Psalm 2:12 (NKJV)*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about worship. Someone might ask the question, "What is worship, and why is it important?"

There is much misunderstanding today, by those attending church gatherings, about what worship really is. Some have come to understand that worship is when we sing our songs of praise to our God, or perhaps when we pray to God with praise. Certainly these have some relationship to worship, but they do not give us the full understanding of what worship is. Worship may mean to bow humbly before God, but it also conveys the idea of sacrifice. Worship comes from the root word "Worth", and is used really to ascribe something or someone with worth. If we value a car, then we might choose to spend much money to purchase the car for ourselves. Because of the value we saw in the car, we were willing to sacrifice much money to possess the car. In the same way, when we worship our God, we make sacrifices of our time, of our money, of our skills, and devote them to God. This is how we show that we value God, and our relationship to Him. To give into the church offering, takes faith, and it is a sacrifice, and this expresses our worship to a greater degree than singing a song before God, which did not really cost anything. When Abraham offered his precious son Isaac on the alter of sacrifice, He was telling God how much he loved God, and how much he was willing to give up for his God, and this was his worship. We should not think that by singing a few songs on Sunday morning we are worshipping God, when we have failed to put something into the offering, or given any of our time to serving the Lord.

Worship is important; because it is something that only belongs to God, and it is something that God is very pleased with. God wants us to learn to love him, and enjoy His greatness and His goodness, and that will always lead us to worship Him. Too often we give our worship to other things like money, fame, or pleasure, but that is idolatry, for God alone is to be worshipped, and not the things that he gives to us. The Devil was willing to give all the kingdoms of the world away, if Jesus would bow before him and worship him. This shows us how much the Devil coveted the worship which belonged to God alone. If we could understand how much it pleases God for us to be worshippers of our God, then I think we would make more effort to bring our offerings to Him.

*"But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'" Hebrews 1:6*

LESSON 3  
**Baptism of Jesus**  
MATTHEW 3

John the Baptist was baptizing, and many people came to him to be baptized. When they heard John preach about the kingdom of God, and about righteousness, they had confidence that He was sent by God to proclaim a message of repentance to Israel. Along with being baptized the people freely confessed their sins. Although the baptism of John did not make a person a Christian, it did prepare them for the coming Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world.

When the Pharisees came out to see John, they were perhaps curious about him, but did not submit themselves to his baptism, nor did they learn and follow the teachings of John. They held themselves above this messenger, and did not regard his message of righteousness. John had some condemning words for these Pharisees, calling them a generation of snakes. He exposed their hypocrisy and sin, and spoke of God's coming judgment upon them.

In contrast with the self-righteous Pharisees, Jesus, the lowly man from Nazareth, came to John to be baptized by him. At first John resisted, realizing that Jesus was much greater than himself, and that he ought to be baptized by Jesus, instead of the other way around. Jesus insisted that John baptize him in order to fulfill all righteousness. It was not that Jesus needed to confess his sins, or repent, for he was a sinless man. Jesus was baptized to acknowledge the righteous message that John was preaching, and to identify with John's ministry, as being from God. Jesus demonstrates humility, and a love for righteousness when he was baptized. God opened heaven, and spoke on this special occasion and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

Not only is God the Father pleased with His Son Jesus, the righteous one, He will also find pleasure in all those who follow the way of righteousness, by learning from, and following Jesus. We need to make a decision of whether we will follow the path of righteousness, by confessing our sinfulness before our God, and accepting His Son Jesus, as our Savior. We might choose to be like the proud Pharisees, who thought they were too good to submit to John's baptism, for they did not see themselves as sinners. The bible tells us that we are all sinners, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" Rom 3:23. The first step in salvation is to admit that we are sinners, and deserving of God's judgment. It was people who knew that they were guilty sinners, which came to John to be baptized, expressing their faith in God's message, and His messenger.

While baptism does not save the soul, it is an outward expression of a person's faith in God, and their trust in the Lord Jesus. Only when a person accepts Jesus Christ by faith, can they find forgiveness for their sins, and eternal life. Once a person has received Jesus as their Savior, then they should be baptized to identify themselves publicly as a Christian, and to obey the Lord's command. It is only the blood of Jesus Christ that can cleanse us from our sins, because on the cross He suffered, bled, and died to pay the penalty of our sin.

If you have trusted in Jesus as your personal Savior, and you know that your sins have been forgiven, then be sure to also obey the Lord by being baptized. If Jesus thought that He should be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, then we need to follow His good example and do the same. A person, who refuses to be baptized, is just like those proud Pharisees, who thought they were too good to submit to God's message, and God's messenger.

In today's message, I hope you have understood clearly the gospel message, and the importance of humbly submitting yourself to God. Admit you are a sinner, trust in Jesus as God's provision for your sin payment, and once you know you are born-again then also obey the Lord in baptism, and show the world that you want to be identified with Jesus Christ, as one of His followers. Here is a verse for us to consider:

*"But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness". Then he allowed Him." Matthew 3:15*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about baptism. Someone might ask the question, "Why do I need to be baptized?"

There are several reasons why the Christian should be baptized.

1. Firstly, if you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior, you have confessed that He now is the ruler over your life. If He is in charge, and he commanded his followers to be baptized, then you must do what he commanded. If you fail to do His commands, then calling Him Lord is rather meaningless. It is rather a simple test of whether He really has become the Lord of your life. If you do what He says, it shows that you have indeed given Him his rightful place as Lord, but if you refuse to obey Him, then it is clear that He is not your Lord, even if you say or think He is.
2. Secondly, baptism is a public testimony of your faith in Jesus Christ. It is the way you tell the world that you have now decided to follow Jesus. This is important so others can also learn about Jesus, and what it means to be a Christian. If no one ever publicly declared their faith in Jesus, how would the world know who the Christians were? This is why it is important that baptism is a public event. It is a good idea to invite family, friends, and anyone who might benefit from your testimony, to your baptism, so they can also learn about following Jesus.
3. Thirdly, baptism is symbolic of what has happened to the new believer. When being baptized, a person is immersed in water to symbolically represent that they have died with Christ. This means that as a Christian they have given up their old sinful life. When the person comes up out of the water, it symbolically represents that they have been raised up to a new life with Jesus, just as he rose from the dead. While baptism is purely symbolic, it does reinforce the important change in the new believer, that he is new creation, and that old things have passed away.
4. Lastly, the bible does not even contemplate a believer who has not been baptized. If you look carefully through the New Testament, you will not find one instance of a believer who resisted or refused to be baptized. The longest period between conversion and baptism was about 3 days, and that was the case of Paul when he was converted on the road to Damascus, and he was struck blind by a vision of the Lord. He waited in Damascus about 3 days before Ananias was lead by the Lord to find him and baptize him. It is clear from the bible that baptism was immediate upon a person's confession of Jesus as their Lord and personal Savior.

LESSON 4  
**Temptation of Jesus**  
MATTHEW 4

In Matthew chapter 4 we learn about the Devil trying to tempt Jesus to sin. But the Devil had to realize that Jesus was sinless, and could not yield to sin. He tried three times to get Jesus to do wrong, but in each case, the Lord Jesus proved his sinless character, and His desire to please His Father in heaven. It is interesting to note that Jesus always used the bible as the way to resist the temptation of Satan. He quoted from the book of Deuteronomy three times, and used the words of scripture to defend himself against these temptations. Even when the Devil quoted some verses from Psalm 91 to trick Jesus, He still would not yield to Satan, or to sin.

This shows us that it is important not only to know God's word, but also to understand it correctly. When you or I are faced with some temptation to sin, we shall overcome the temptation when we have hidden God's word in our hearts. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Ps 119:11*

We learn from this passage that Satan wants to tempt us to sin. This is because Satan hates God, and wants as many as he can trap in his snare to turn away from God. The Devil is very crafty, and also much stronger and wiser than you or I. That is why we need the help of the Holy Spirit to resist the Devil. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives inside of you, and the bible teaches us that, *"greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."* **1 John 4:4.** What this means is that the Holy Spirit has greater strength than Satan, and while the Holy Spirit lives inside the Christian, He will protect the Christian from the attacks of Satan. The Christian simply has to obey God, and His word, resisting the Devil by the word of God, and then the bible assures us the Devil will flee from us. You can find this at James 4:7.

Not only do we learn about Jesus sinless character in this chapter, we also learn about the men who became his followers. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him. These men were fishermen by trade, but when Jesus called them to be His disciples, they immediately left their own work, to do God's work. We all know that a man ought to work, so he can earn money, and feed his family. That is being responsible, and what is expected of men. Some men are called to work for God, and when they are called, they must be willing to leave all behind, and trust in God for their support. It might mean they will never be rich in this world, but it will bring them riches in heaven, if they are faithful to serve God well.

Also in this chapter we discover that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy found in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of a great light being seen by those in darkness, specifically those living in the border areas of Zebulun and Naphtali. The great light was a reference to the coming Messiah, and the healing and teaching ministry he would bring to that area we know as Galilee. As Jesus traveled through Galilee teaching, preaching and healing, his fame began to spread, and people came to him from the surrounding regions to hear or be healed by Jesus. Because of His great works, and His powerful teaching, the people were attracted to Him in great multitudes. Perhaps some were just curious, or some just wanted to get something from Him, but among the crowds were those truly seeking to follow God's righteous path. Jesus did not come just to heal people, or teach them things that would help them be successful in life. He preached to them to repent, and place their faith in God. He taught them about a kingdom of righteousness, and we shall learn more about this in our next lesson.

I wonder if you are seeking after Jesus, and for what reason would you seek after Him. Are you looking for some miracle? Are you hoping He will give you some wealth, some job, some advantages in life? Or are you seeking Him, to find forgiveness for your sins, to seek God's mercy and grace. The thief who died on the cross beside Jesus, was not seeking for a better life, for he knew his life was over, He sought Jesus to gain forgiveness of his sins, and Jesus promised him a home in Paradise. I hope all who are listening today are seeking after Jesus for the right reason, to be forgiven of your sins. He will gladly receive you and forgive you, if you come to him in faith. As we finish today's bible lesson, let's remember these words:

*"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4*



### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about how the Devil tries to trip us up, by tempting us to sin. Someone might ask the question, "Is the devil the one who causes me to sin?"

Actually, the Devil can tempt us to sin, which means he puts the idea of sin before us, and tries to entice and draw us toward sin. This is what happened to Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Devil convinced her to do wrong, by persuading her that it was okay for her to disobey God's word. However, though the Devil may tempt us to do wrong, it is still our choice whether we shall listen to Satan, or to the word of God. The Devil does not cause me to sin; he only tempts me to sin. Each sin I commit is my own choice, and therefore I am guilty because of my own choice to disobey God. Someone might say, "Well the temptation is just too strong for me, and I cannot help but sin". This is why we need to repent and place our trust in Jesus to save us from sin. Jesus not only died to pay the price for our sins, but also to give us power to overcome sin, so that sin will no longer rule over us. He gives us this power through the word of God, and through the indwelling Holy Spirit. As we abide in God's word daily, we are washed clean, and our minds are led in the path of righteousness, the Holy Spirit teaching us, and guiding us on this good path.

If a Christian sins, he may still find forgiveness, when he confesses his sins before God. We must remember that if a pig rolls in the mud he will become dirty, because of his environment, but also because of his nature. The pig likes rolling in the mud. The Christian has a new nature, that no longer finds pleasure in sin, and who prefers an environment where he does not have to encounter or be tempted to sin. We might say he no longer enjoys rolling in the mud, but prefers to be clean and walk in holiness.

If sin still has power over you, then I encourage you to seek the Lord for forgiveness, and his cleansing power to free you both from the penalty and the power of sin. Even if we cannot overcome sin, we know Jesus can, and so you just need to turn to Him in faith, and ask Him to cleanse you and give you a new nature, that hates sin, and loves righteousness.

May the Lord help us all to follow his perfect example of resisting the Devil, and fleeing from sin.

LESSON 5  
**Teaching of Jesus (Part 1)**  
MATTHEW 5

In Matthew chapter 5 we learn about the kingdom of God. That means all those who belong to Jesus and own him as King. The chapter will teach us about the blessings and behavior of those who belong to the kingdom where Jesus reigns as King. There will be a coming day, when Jesus will return to earth, to set up His kingdom, and Matthew 5 will help us to understand what His kingdom and reign will be like.

Even today, as Christians bow in obedience and servitude to King Jesus, they are included in His kingdom, for His kingdom is realized in all those who gladly obey His voice and serve Him.

Now this important part of our bible, teaches us about the blessings of the kingdom, in what is commonly called the "Beatitudes". Jesus teaches in verses 3 to 12 that in his kingdom things are much different than in the world and its kingdoms. In Jesus kingdom, we find comfort for those who mourn, mercy for the merciful, inheritance for the meek, joy for the persecuted. We also find great spiritual promises to the humble, the peacemaker, and pure in heart. These shall belong to the Kingdom of Jesus, and are sons of God, and they shall see God. The blessings of belonging to Jesus kingdom are far greater riches than anything the kingdoms of this world can offer, and they are eternal blessings for His kingdom shall never end.

After talking of the blessings of His kingdom, Jesus will talk about the responsibility of the subjects of His kingdom. Those who follow Him are to be salt and light in the world. That means they are to preserve righteousness, and promote the truth. Jesus requires righteousness of His people, and it must be a perfect righteousness if we are to belong to His kingdom.

He explains the righteousness that God requires from law of God is more than just words and rules, but must come from within a man's heart. For instance to look at a woman in the wrong way is the same as committing adultery with her in your heart. Most men would have to admit their guilt about this. He also says that though we may never murder, we are still in danger of judgment when we are unjustly angry. He also teaches that is not right to seek my own, and fight with others to get what I want. It is more important to keep peace, and seek the welfare of others. He would also teach us to have our eyes pure, a strong commitment to marriage, and not make false promises. Purity of life in every area is what King Jesus requires of His subjects, and they must deal radically with any thing that causes them to sin.

In the Kingdom of Jesus reign His followers must not resist evil people, but allow them to mistreat us. If they want our possessions, we should happily supply whatever they need. If they want our time, we should be doubly generous with it. Rather than repay evil with evil, the follower of King Jesus, is called to pray for his enemies, bless them and do good for them. When Jesus' followers behave in this way, then they are acting in the same way the God our Father treats us. He loves us even when we are bad, when we rebel against Him, and when fail Him over and over again. He loves us at all times, and always provides what is best for us. If we are to be God's children, then we are to behave with the same heart and attitude of our Father in heaven. Then we shall be truly God's beloved children, and shining lights in a dark world.

What Jesus calls us to be is not easy, and most of us unfortunately fail miserably, because we find it so hard to even love our neighbor, not to mention our enemies. This takes the power and grace of God to work in our lives, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Only those who have come to Jesus in faith, and have been reborn, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have the ability to behave as children of God.

Perhaps today is the day, you will recognize how much you need Jesus to be King over your life, and you surrender yourself to Him. Remember nothing of any value is free. Jesus paid a great cost for your redemption, but you must want it with all your heart, and see the great need in your soul to seek His love, forgiveness, and acceptance into His kingdom. As we finish consider these words carefully and prayerfully.

*"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the teachings of Jesus and His kingdom, and someone might ask the question, "How is it possible to live in perfect righteousness before God?"

Actually, the fact is that you and I are sinners, and we can never perform in perfect righteousness before our God. We may try to do all the right things. Maybe you go to church every Sunday, and read your bible every day. Perhaps you try to keep all of God's commandments. While you are so busy trying to be a good Christian, thinking this will make you fit for heaven, you have to realize that you can never measure up to God's standard. When we read the words of Jesus, and realize that even a man looking at a woman can be as sinful as the act of adultery, then we must all realize how far short we fall of God's perfect standards. Perhaps you have never stolen even one small coin, but your heart is covetous. You really want to have what others have. That makes you a sinner before God, and under God's judgment. So what are we to do then, if God expects us to be perfect, and we are just not able to? Listen, the word of God says:

Romans 3:10 *"There is none righteous, no, not one"*

Romans 3:23 *"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"*

We need to understand that we can never make it to God's glory in our present condition, no matter how hard we may try. The only answer comes from God Himself. He has provided a way that you and I can become perfect and righteous in His sight. It is not through our own efforts, but through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, He was paying our debt of sin. Jesus was a perfect man, who never did any sin at all. Because He is perfectly righteous before God, and because He took our place in judgment for sin, then the bible teaches us that we may have His righteousness imputed to us. That means God will take the righteousness of His Son Jesus, and give that to you, if you will accept it. It is not through your good efforts that you are made right with God, it is through the love and grace of God, who freely wants to give you the righteousness of His Son. When this happens, God can look at you, and see you as He sees His Son, in perfect holiness before Him, and that is the only way you can ever be accepted before Him, because He is perfectly holy, and can never accept any sin at all into His presence. This should compel us to trust in Jesus as our Savior, and accept the free gift of eternal life. The bible says:

Titus 3:5 *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."*

Phil 3:9 *"And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."*

I hope today, this message has helped you to understand that God's salvation requires a righteousness that you and I can never find on our own, we must accept Jesus' righteousness, through His sacrifice for our sins, if we are to be saved, and on our way to heaven. May God help you to understand this, and accept by faith the free gift of God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Remember we are not saved by our own efforts, but by the efforts of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Is it possible to live in perfect righteousness before God? Yes it is, when Jesus Christ has saved your soul, and by this God gives to you the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

LESSON 6  
**Teaching of Jesus (Part 2)**  
MATTHEW 6

In our last lesson we were studying from Matthew 5, and about the teachings of Jesus, and what His kingdom will be like. Today we are continuing to learn more of the teachings of Jesus in chapter 6, and we will learn more about how to follow Jesus as our king.

In this chapter we will learn about our religious practices and our pursuits in life. Jesus will teach us about how to perform our religious duties before our God, in a way that pleases our Father in heaven, and not like so many religious hypocrites, who use religion for their own selfish gain.

Jesus teaches us to do our good deeds for others, without blowing a trumpet, in other words to show off what we are doing. Have you even been in a church service, where someone makes a big show out of how much they are giving to the offering? This is exactly what Jesus tells us not to do. Our giving or good deeds should always be done with a desire to please God, and not to show off to men how much we can give. Our good works are something all of God's children should do, by helping our neighbor, or giving to a good cause, but it should always be done in secret, with discretion. Sometimes we might want to give to someone in need, but not embarrass him or her by our giving, so we do it very quietly, without anyone even noticing. Some might even choose to give anonymously, so the credit goes to the Lord and not to men.

Jesus teaches similarly about prayer, that it should not be put on display before men, but conducted in private. Most of our praying should be done alone before God, and not for the whole church to hear how spiritual we think we are. He also instructs us not to pray with vain repetitions. This means we should not babble on and on in our prayers, thinking that the more noise we make, or the higher the pitch of our voice the more God will listen to us. God can hear just fine, even when we whisper in our quiet place to Him. All this shouting and repetitive babbling that no one knows the sense of, supposedly a language of angels, and mysteries, is against the word of God, and utter foolishness in the sight of God. The pattern for our prayer is given in the Lord's Prayer. From this prayer we may learn to use intelligence when we talk to God, to set our priorities right, and know our dependence upon God for his care, provision, and protection. As to priorities, we pray for God's kingdom to come, and for His will to be done. This is the first and foremost thing, and is above all of my personal problems and desires. After I have put God's kingdom first, then I may pray for my daily bread, for forgiveness of sins, and to be kept from temptation, and to be delivered from the evil one. I may pray with confidence before God knowing that to Him belongs the eternal kingdom, and all power, and all glory.

Jesus would remind us to forgive one another if we want also to be forgiven by God. He talks to us about fasting. The scriptures do not command fasting, but it was a common practice of those who were seeking out God sincerely, and showing their earnestness, by giving up their food for a season. If you choose to fast, remember not to do so to be noticed, but it is, like prayer and giving, a private exercise between the believer and his God. In fact we should wash our faces, and be sure to conceal as best we can our practice of fasting.

In the last section of this chapter is a very important lesson about what Jesus wants His followers to pursue in life. He tells us not to seek after treasure on earth, for these will all perish in time, but rather to seek treasure in heaven. We can do this by fulfilling His plans and purposes, to lead others into His kingdom, reflecting his goodness and character to others, by the manner in which we live, and helping others to live according to His teachings as well.

When Jesus here speaks about man's heart and his pursuits, he points out clearly that a man cannot serve both God and money. There are many so called preachers who are using religion as a way to make money, and that is exactly contrary to what Jesus is teaching us to do. To be a true follower of Jesus, or one who says he leads Jesus' people, we must seek our treasures in heaven and not on the earth. This is a good way to test the sincerity of a man's heart.

With regard to the pursuits of this life, Jesus taught us that we should not worry. He explains that God looks after all life, from the sparrows, to the grass and flowers, and that He will most certainly care for his creature man, who was made in His image. This must be one of the most difficult things for people to understand, for man is always running after riches and security from wealth and possession. Our security, our life is in God's hands, and we ought not to worry, as though God is not there, or that He does not care about us, or our needs. We must trust in Him. The secret to living without worry is to seek after God's kingdom, and His righteousness, then all these things, that is our daily needs, will be added unto us. If only we could live by this simply precept, it would save us from a life of wasted pursuit and worry.

*"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" Matthew 6:33*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the teachings of Jesus and His kingdom, and someone might ask the question, "How does a person seek first God's kingdom?"

It is important for us to understand, that God's kingdom should take first place in our lives. Even in the Lord's prayer, that we read in Matthew 6 today, teaches us to pray first about God's Kingdom coming, and His will be done, before it goes on to personal matters in prayer. This teaches us that God wants us to care more about His purposes in this world, then even our own daily concerns. You see God is quite able to look after all of our needs. He can feed us; He can clothe us, and provide everything we need. In fact God promises you and I that he will do all this for us, when we seek His kingdom first.

The trouble for most of us is that we simply are not willing to believe what God has promised. If we put His affairs first, then we can know that he will look after our affairs. Do you believe this? I can speak to you, as one who has experience in this area, and I have found God is perfectly faithful. As I place my trust in Him, and seek to serve Him, and put His kingdom first, then He provides for me in everyway. I know plenty of others, who also live by faith in God, and find their needs are always met.

So what does it mean to seek God's kingdom first. It means that what is important to God, will also be important to me. If Christ came and died for the church, purchasing the church with His own blood, then I should also be willing to love the church, and make church the great object of my time and devotion. This means I will invest myself into the care of God's people, and regularly meet with them, to participate in the spiritual activities of the church, such as prayer, worship, teaching, and service. To seek God's kingdom is not possible for those who think Sunday church services are optional, if they feel like going. It also means giving of my time and resources to help further God's kingdom. There is much to do for our master. He wants all souls to be saved, He wants Christians to grow in the relationship to Him, and therefore we must commit ourselves to helping in that important work. Christians who come for one hour on Sunday, to listen to a sermon, are not seeking God's kingdom first. It is much more involved that just be a part time audience to a paid preacher. It involves your heart, and your commitment to follow Jesus, and learn to emulate him. It means taking time to reveal Christ to your family and friends, both by your actions, and also by your words.

All of this seeking first God's kingdom will most certainly require a personal devotion to God, by reading his word daily, and a healthy prayer life. This is the means for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, and build our love for God, for his word, for his people, and for his worship and service. The spiritual life is fostered by drawing near to the Lord, to hear Him speak in His word, and to speak to him in prayer. If we can abide in Him through our devotional life, then seeking His kingdom first, will be a natural outflow of our growing relationship to Him.

Far too many Christians are content to just hear a sermon now and again, and think they are living for Christ, when really they are living for themselves, and the riches of this world. Perhaps you will stand away from the crowd, and choose to be one who puts God first, and His kingdom. Remember what we read:

*"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Matthew 6:24*

LESSON 7  
**Teaching of Jesus (Part 3)**  
MATTHEW 7

In our last lesson we were studying from Matthew 6, and about the teachings of Jesus, and the religious behavior of those who seek His Kingdom first. Today we are continuing to learn more of the teachings of Jesus in chapter 7, and we will learn more about being responsible and real in the kingdom of Jesus.

In this chapter we will learn about not setting ourselves up as judges of others. Jesus says when we judge others, we also will be judged by the same standards. He also points out that most of us are unfit to judge the case of others, because our vision is obscured. When He mentions that we have a plank in our own eye, and we are trying to remove the speck from our brother's eye, it is nothing but hypocrisy. We must first be in a correct moral standing to have any kind of authority to correct others. A man who tells others to give more to God, when he himself is not giving more is a hypocrite, and we know there are plenty of them around.

This passage does not teach us that it is wrong to judge others, for the church must judge at times, but that we must be careful when we make personal judgments, that we are in a proper spiritual state to offer judgment. We do not hire drunks and thieves to sit as judges over our courts, but men of character and integrity, for they have proven that they are worthy to make proper judgments.

Jesus also teaches that His followers should respect what is holy, and not cast precious things before those who have not respect for them.

We learn also that we may ask from our heavenly Father for good things, knowing that he can and will supply them to us, because He is good. That is not to say that every time we ask, we shall immediately get what we want. He knows what is good for us, but we often do not. We think more money in the bank would be good, but He probably thinks that would only do us spiritual harm. When we ask, we should always ask in the name of Jesus, which is not a magical key to open God's treasure stores, but it means to be in agreement with all that the Lord Jesus is, and what He desires. When I pray that some unbeliever would hear the gospel and get saved, then I know I am praying according to the will of God, and can expect that in His time He will most certainly answer that prayer. To pray for a brand new BMW is likely not going to serve God's purposes, and not be in agreement with the character and will of my Lord, so will not likely be granted.

Jesus talks about a narrow gate that leads to life, and a broad road that leads to destruction. Few find the narrow road, while most are traveling on the broad road. This should warn us all that most people fail to find God, and His salvation, and we must be very certain of our relationship to the Lord if we ever hope to go through that narrow gate. There are many false prophets Jesus said, who lead many astray. They look like sheep, but on the inside they are ferocious wolves. What they produce in life, their fruit, will give them away. They will either produce love, kindness, and good works, or they will produce greed, pride, and selfishness, and by this we shall be able to identify them. Be careful not to just hear their words, for the Lord says, there is coming a day when many, who say "Lord, Lord" will be cast away into everlasting destruction.

To know if someone is a true believer, a true follower of Jesus, can be determined by his or her obedience. Do they do what Jesus has commanded? This means that the word of God is the final authority for every true child of God, and that they cherish God's word, and follow it obediently. If they do this, they are building on a rock, a sure foundation that will endure all storms, and bring them safely on their way to heaven. To fail to hear and obey God's word is a sure indication of a lack of faith, and being a false professor. Whatever they build is on a shaky foundation, so that when the winds blow, and the storm appears, their house will fall. They are the false preachers, false Christians, who made a show of religion, but it was never sincere in their hearts, and why they did not obey, and why they could not produce good fruit. Make sure your Christian profession is real, and that you have entered through the narrow gate that leads to life.

One final comment made at the end of this chapter by Matthew, was what he recalls the people saying about Jesus, after they heard him teach these things. They were astonished by him, and said he spoke as one having authority. Yes, the teachings of Jesus carry with them all the authority of God. They are God's message to us, and we will do very well to listen and obey, lest we, like so many others, find ourselves on the broad road that leads to destruction.

*"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" Matthew 7:24*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the teachings of Jesus and His kingdom, and someone might ask the question, "How can I know for sure that I am one of the few that has entered the narrow gate that leads to life?"

Jesus made it abundantly clear that a man's behavior indicates what he truly believes. It is not our good works that save us, for we read clearly in other places that we are saved by grace through faith, and it is not of our good works, lest any man should boast. Our salvation rests entirely upon our faith in Jesus Christ. The bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved". Having said that our works do not save us, we must be careful not to think that our behavior does not matter at all. Though works can never merit our salvation, they are an indication that we have indeed been saved. In other words, our faith produces good works, and these good works manifest that we are truly God's children.

If you say you are a Christian, then can you prove it by your good works? This is what James argues in his epistle. He says, *"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"*. Many who call themselves Christians, do not have much evidence of it through their good works, and therefore may give reason for doubt to others and even to themselves, as to whether they really were ever saved. Faith always produces works. It cannot be otherwise. Faith without works is dead, James would tell us. So the question of how can I know if I am on my way to heaven, can be answered by the works test.

#### Works Test:

Do you have any good works that your faith has produced?

1. Do you give sacrificially to the Lord each week?
2. Do you have a ministry that you do within your church? Are you serving the Lord in some way?
3. Do you try to share the gospel with others?
4. Do you love fellowship with God's people?
5. Do you enjoy reading your bible, and does it make a difference in the way you think and behave?
6. Do you still love to sin?
7. Do you respect and love the others in your life, that God calls you to love?
8. Do you seek your own riches, or God's kingdom?

These are some searching questions that may help you to decide if you have any good works in your life, and therefore whether you are truly God's child.

We must be very serious about this question, because Jesus did say there are only few that find the narrow way that leads to life. Are you among those few? How sad it will be on the day of judgment when many cry "Lord, Lord", but he says to them "depart from me, I never knew you!" Do you know the Lord? Are you really sure of it? Then it should be evident in your life, by the way you hear and follow Him?

Remember you are not saved by good works, but your salvation will not stand upon an empty faith. Only a faith that produces good works is genuine saving faith, and can give assurance of having a relationship with the Lord.

*"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James 2:26*

LESSON 8  
**Power of Jesus (Part 1)**  
MATTHEW 8

In Matthew chapter 8 we learn of the good works of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall also see more of his good works in chapter 9 in our next lesson. As we see the Lord Jesus performing good works among the people of His day, we will notice His power over every situation, and ability to meet every problem that came his way with Divine love, compassion, healing, and guidance.

In this chapter we find that Jesus heals a man who had leprosy. Leprosy was often contagious, and considered unclean, so lepers were banished from society, and not permitted to come near to others. It was a horrible life of isolation, and social alienation. How they must have longed for love and for affection of others, but it was denied them, due to their uncleanness. Jesus we are told touched the Leper, and his leprosy left him. This not only shows Jesus power over the disease, but also that what he touches becomes holy. Where normally a person would be defiled by touching a leper, that was not the case with Jesus. Whatever he touched was blessed and became holy. Jesus could have healed the man by just saying the word, but demonstrates his love and compassion for the man, by ministering to his heart as well as his body. The leper must have been deeply moved by the Lord's willingness to come near and even touch him, when everyone else would reject him and keep their distance. This is just like our Lord Jesus, healing the deepest needs of the human heart by his touch.

Then there is the story of the centurion who asked Jesus to heal his sick servant. Jesus was prepared to go with him, but the centurion understood power and authority, and said all that Jesus needed to do was speak the word, and his servant would be well. In this case it was not the touch of Jesus that was needed, but just a word from a distance. The centurion exhibited great faith, and is a testimony to all of how we can trust in our Lord to do great things, for He has power to heal without great effort, but just a word.

Those who show faith in the Lord are among those who will sit and eat with the great men of faith like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were Jews who believed in God, and also many gentiles will join them in the kingdom, while many of the Jews unfortunately will be cast out by their lack of faith. Matthew would help us to understand that Jesus will accept faith wherever he finds it among the nations, but those who had opportunity to believe, and did not will be cast into outer darkness, with weeping and gnashing teeth.

Jesus also healed Peter's mother-in-law, and she immediately began to serve them. This shows us that God's work in our lives should lead us to return good, by willing serving our Lord. Jesus also healed many that were sick and demon-possessed. This shows his power over the spirit world, and over sickness and disease. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah, would bear the sickness and infirmities of the people, and so Jesus demonstrated through his power to heal diseases, that he was God's prophesied Messiah.

We also have in this chapter some teaching about being a worker for Jesus. Some said they wanted to follow Him that is to come after him and serve in His kingdom. Jesus knew that they did not understand all that it meant to follow Him, and so he tries to prepare them for the difficulties they could face. He explains that while foxes and birds have places to rest, He himself had no home. That means life is not always going to be very comfortable for those who choose to serve the Lord. It means a life of thinking about others and not ourselves, and often lacking what others can enjoy. Also one man said he wanted to first return to wait for his inheritance to come when his parents were dead. Jesus saw a lack of faith in him, and said he should not worry about his inheritance, but trust in the Lord, and follow obediently, letting those without spiritual life bury the dead. This shows us that Jesus had power to see into the hearts and motives of others. He knew many would not follow Him, when they recognized how much it would cost. God's work must always be first, and our confidence in God, and not in uncertain riches to meet our needs.

The final story of this chapter is one of great interest. It tells of the disciples crossing the lake, when a great storm came upon them, and Jesus was sleeping in the boat. They awoke him, and said they were about to perish. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, and then rebuked the wind and the waves, and then there was a great calm. It is interesting to note that even with a fierce storm brewing, Jesus was calmly sleeping. And when he spoke to the storm, there was a great calm. To be near Jesus, and to know Him brings a sweet calmness to the soul. We may rest in peace, knowing that as long as Jesus is with us in the boat, we can sleep soundly through the roughest storm. Life is full of storms; financial problems that threaten to drown us; sickness and death that overwhelm us with fear and sorrow. In all the storms of life, we just need to draw near to the Lord, and know that he can calm the storm, and bring us safely through.

Jesus also demonstrated His power to free a man from Satan's control. He cast out of him many demons. He then gave him a wonderful new job to do, telling others what great things God had done for him.

Jesus has power to heal, and to meet the needs of every human heart. We also know that he has power to speak just a word and perform great things. He has power to give strength and health for serving Him in gratitude. He has power to heal every manner of sickness, and to control the spirit world, giving men a job serving and praising God, rather than being the slave of Satan. He has power to read the hearts of men, and to direct them into God's work, or warn them of the discomforts of being God's servant. He also has power to still the wind and waves, and help us



meet every storm we face with calmness and peace in our spirit. When our faith is strong, then His power is great to guide us on our way.

*""And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 8:11*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about the teachings of Jesus and His power over every situation, and over Satan and demons, and so someone might ask the question: "Can people today be possessed by demons?"

It seems that today many are teaching that we all have demons in us that we need to be delivered from. Many hold services designed to help deliver people from demonic influences. This for the most part seems to be quite contrived and staged. Demons are real, and they do have some influence upon our lives, if we allow them. The scriptures speak of not letting Satan get a foot hold and resisting the Devil, and he will flee from you. Some Christians may get involved in sins, which puts them especially in the way of Satan's attack. But we must be careful not to think of demon possession as we see here in Matthew 8 and in other gospel accounts. We notice in these accounts, that those who were demon possessed, were lead into violent seizures, and super human powers, and were outcasts of society. The man in Matthew 8 was not ever in a normal state of mind, but wandered in the tombs and cut himself, running about with no clothes. This was very anti-social, violent, and self-destructive behavior. I fear that many who would claim demonic possession today, are people who generally live normal lives, and socialize fine with others, but may have been convinced that some sinful tendency must mean they are possessed of some evil spirit. This is leading many to falsely assume that demons are everywhere, and afflicting people, and we given far more credit to Satan than he deserves. There maybe rare cases of demonic possession, but I can assure you, you will likely recognize it rather quickly, because of the very violent and anti-social behavior. I once met a man who violently was shouting, even foaming at the mouth, in opposition to some gospel preaching. When I saw the very violent behavior, and physical hostility to Christ and His gospel, it appeared to me the work of Satan, and perhaps I could go so far as to say the man was possessed of a demon, but I would want to be very careful before making such a claim. We know that men can behave very sinfully, and then blame their actions on the Devil. The fact is that we are all wicked and sinful creatures, and much of our sinful behavior is simply because we have chosen to disobey God, and to fulfill our sinful desires. We ought not to blame the Devil for the poor choices we make, or the weaknesses and sinfulness of our own flesh. Yes, Satan may be an influence, but only if we give way to him. Be careful not to identify demon possession with any and every bad thing that comes into our lives, or that comes from within us. We do not want to make the church services just a circus scene of dramatic displays of demon deliverance, that is nothing more than human emotion, and contrived antics. When Satan is controlling a person through a demon, we shall not even want to be anywhere around that person, for they will be violent, anti-social, and not in a right state of mind. I have witnessed those who apparently are fine one minute, but the next minute they are vibrating around the room, and screeching as though a demon needs to be cast out of them, a moment later they are fine again. This is just a sham, a show to fool the audience. A person possessed would not be sitting in a church service calmly before erupting into convulsions. This is simple showmanship, and is a travesty to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes demon possession is possible, but quite rare today. It was more evident in Jesus day, because Jesus presence brought forth and exposed quickly the work of Satan, who wanted to destroy the plan of God through Jesus Christ. Satan is much more effective at leading people astray through their own lusts, then through demonic oppression. People can become much more susceptible to the influence of Satan, when they are involved in witchcraft, and other evil practices, which God hates.

LESSON 9  
Power of Jesus (Part 2)  
MATTHEW 9

In our last lesson we learned about the power of Jesus in Matthew 8, and today we shall continue to learn about the power of Jesus in Matthew 9. While we review the stories of Jesus power, we will see that the gospel accounts are jammed full of marvelous stories about the miracles and teachings of Jesus. Though we can just go over these stories quickly, it is well worth your time to carefully think about all these things that Jesus did, as it will give you not only a view of God's power in Jesus, but also of the heart of God.

The first story is of a paralytic man that was brought to Jesus. Jesus recognized the faith of those who brought the man, and told him his sins were forgiven. This created a reaction from the Pharisees, for they knew that only God has the right to forgive sins, and because they did not recognize Jesus as God, they thought he was blaspheming. Jesus proved his power and authority to forgive sins, by healing the man in front of them all, thus proving that he was God.

When Jesus called Matthew, a tax-collector, to be one of his followers, he then joined some tax-collectors and sinners for a dinner, and again the Pharisees were upset, for they thought how can this man eat with sinners. Jesus then told them the sick need a physician, not those who are well, and said they should go and learn that God desires mercy above sacrifice. Here we get a glimpse into the heart of God, for though God is righteous and hates sin, he is also merciful to sinners, and willing to forgive them.

When some others asked Jesus why his disciples did not fast as others did, he had to explain that while he was present with his disciples they would rejoice, but when he was gone from them, they would be sad and then fast. Jesus used some illustrations to teach about His new kingdom, in comparison with the old ways under the Jewish Law. His kingdom was different than all the rules and regulations that were required by Jewish Law. In His kingdom men would perform their righteous deeds out of love and joy before God, and not out of mandatory obligation to dead religion. These two very different things could not be mixed. Jesus teaching and kingdom liberated people from the bondage of the law. If a person tried to mix Jesus message of grace with the OT Law, it would be like new cloth sewn onto old garments, which would create an even bigger hole in the garment. He also said that it would be like putting new wine in old wineskins. When this happened the new wine would ferment, increasing the gas in the skin and cause the older skin to burst. New Wine required new wineskins. What Jesus was saying is that in His kingdom, there has to be an entirely fresh start, it would not be mixed with the religious ritualism of Judaism, as that would make it a legalistic system of rules, which men can never keep, no matter how hard they might try, but rather it would be a system of grace, whereby sinners could be healed and freely forgiven, and walk in loving obedience to the ways of God.

Jesus healed a woman with a bleeding disorder, while on his way to bring back a young girl who had died. Though on an important mission of mercy, he still found time to help this desperate woman and heal her. This also shows the kindness of the Lord to share his power and time with those who need it, even though He has other concerns to attend to also. Is it not wonderful to know that Jesus always has time for us?

Jesus heals two blind men, and then tells them to not let anyone know about it, but they go about telling everyone about it. They should have listened and obeyed Jesus, but we can understand why they could not keep quiet, they had just had such a great thing done for them, a mighty miracle, they could not be quiet. This is what it should be like for those whom the Lord has saved, and opened their eyes to his wonderful love and salvation. All who know His gracious healing hand should want to make this gospel known.

When Jesus cast out a demon from a man that was mute, and gave him back his speech, the Pharisees said he was casting out demons through the power of Satan. This was a rather silly thing to say, for why would Satan tear down his own kingdom. It is clear that the Pharisees were envious of Jesus, because he had such power, and because the people came flocking to him for his help. They did not enjoy taking second place to Jesus, and so they tried to resist him, and speak evil against him.

The Pharisees picture for us what the heart of man is like. Because of mans sinful nature, he always wants to take the best place, and push others down, so he can get what he wants. But Jesus is not like that at all. We read near the end of this chapter that he went about healing all sicknesses and diseases wherever he went, and preaching to them the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus wanted people to receive God's blessing, and to be part of His eternal kingdom. His mission was not only to heal people, but also to preach about God's salvation and forgiveness. When Jesus looked on the crowds he was moved with compassion for them, and saw them as sheep who had no shepherd. He wanted to be there shepherd, and be their helper. The message of God's love and grace needs to be spread to the great masses of people in the world, and so Jesus asks us to pray that God would send forth more workers into His harvest. Those who follow Jesus will adopt His compassion for lost mankind, and will desire to labor in His field to see many enter into His glorious and eternal kingdom. I hope you are one of His followers, and if not why not become His follower today, by placing your trust in Him, asking Him to forgive you of your sins.

*"...When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." Matt 9:2*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the teachings of Jesus and His power to forgive sins, and so someone might ask the question: "Why would God forgive me, when I am a guilty sinner?"

Some people think God forgives us just because he is kind and willing to do so, but that is not entirely the whole story. God cannot forgive even one of your sins unless there has been an adequate payment made for the sin. God is holy and just, and would never allow anyone to get away with evil. All sin must be judged and punished. God is only able to forgive your sin, if you have paid for it, or someone else pays for it on your behalf. The trouble is that you and I can never make a payment to God for our sins that would satisfy Him. Our debt is just far too big. Some people try to pay God back, by doing good works, thinking that God will think of them as being good, and thus forgive and accept them, even though they have sinned. This is a terrible lie of the devil, and unfortunately many people who think they are Christians, and on their way to heaven, have fallen to this terrible lie. There is absolutely nothing you or I can do to pay even the slightest amount toward our debt of sin. God will only accept the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross as payment for sins. Jesus was judged and punished in our place, and His judgment was sufficient enough to pay for all of your sins, and for all the sins of mankind. God is so pleased with the payment of His Son, that all he asks us to do is believe in Him, and accept His sacrifice for payment of our sin.

Therefore we should understand, that those who are not believers could only ask God to forgive their sins, if they are willing to accept Jesus sacrifice for them, and thus make Him their Lord. If they are unwilling to place their trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, then they cannot find forgiveness for their sins, and they will most certainly meet God's judgment one day.

All those who have accepted Jesus by faith, and have applied his payment to their account, have been judicially forgiven for all of their sins, past, present and future. Now if the believer still commits some sin, he can confess his sin, and be forgiven, not on the basis of salvation, but on the basis of fellowship. What this means is that the Christian who sins, does not lose his salvation, but he loses his fellowship with God, or his enjoyment of his salvation. Once a person has been saved, meaning forgiven by God through Christ, God will never take back the free gift of eternal life, otherwise it could not be said to be free. The bible teaches us that salvation is the free gift of God to all those who place their trust in Jesus.

Yes, we all sin, and thank God that He has provided a way for us to be forgiven, through the judgment that was placed upon Jesus Christ our Lord. We did not deserve God's forgiveness, but He is able to forgive, because Jesus has paid our debt in full. If you are a Christian, I hope you will thank the Lord today, for the free gift of God's forgiveness through Jesus. And if you are not a believer yet, then please make today the day you accept God's free gift of life through Jesus Christ, and have all your sins washed away.

*"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom 6:23*

LESSON 10  
**Jesus' Disciples**  
MATTHEW 10

In today's lesson from Matthew 10 we are going to learn about the disciple's of Jesus. Among the many that became followers of Jesus, he chose 12 to be his close companions, and through which he would carry out his work. These disciples were called to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, and also administer the power of God in healing and casting out demons. We will also learn about the challenges they would face as the servants of Jesus.

The twelve men that Jesus choose, were not men of great wealth, or status, they were just ordinary working class men. Peter, Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Lebbaeus, Simon, and Judas. Jesus sent these disciples to the villages around Israel, to preach and heal. He told them not to take along money or extra clothing. He wanted to teach them to trust in their God to supply their needs. He said that they should stay with any house that invited them in, but if no one in the town would invite them to stay, they should shake off the dust of their shoes as a gesture of the future judgment that awaits those who reject God's word.

Jesus warns his disciples, that in serving Him and His kingdom, they would surely meet with opposition. Some would appear to be God's people, but they would actually be fakes, and only seeking to devour God's people for their own gain. These he calls wolves in sheep's clothing, and we have plenty of those around today, who use the church as a means to collect money and live in luxury, while robbing the poor.

When Jesus's disciples would be questioned before the courts or men, they would not need to worry about their defense, for the words would be given to them at that time from their heavenly Father. Jesus explains that, even though he was their master, and went about doing good, he was hated, and accused of doing his work by the Power of Beelzebub, or Satan. If their Master Jesus was hated, then his disciples should expect also to be hated. Even though they would be hated and persecuted, they should not lose fear, but willingly proclaim God's message far and wide, since men might kill the body, they cannot kill man's soul.

We might think with all this warning of coming opposition and hatred, the disciples might shrink back and lose courage, but Jesus also reminds them that they are of great value to God, and even the very hairs of their head are numbered. When a man chooses to serve God, and even puts his life at risk to proclaim God's message, then God is very pleased, and will reward that believer with his divine help and protection.

Jesus also teaches that any man, who confesses Him before men, would be confessed to His father, and if any denied Him, He would also deny them before His Father. It is not easy to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior at all times and in all places. When around Christians it is easy to proclaim Christ, but when among those who hate Christians, confessing Christ could cost a person their life. Jesus' call to be a disciple is a very high calling, demanding complete devotion, and a willingness to give up all rights, and even life if necessary, to carry His message of love and grace to the world.

In this great commission to proclaim the gospel, two opposing kingdoms come against each other, the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Satan. When the gospel is preached it separates men into one of two categories those who will submit to Jesus as King, or follow Satan. This will bring division between men, and even into households and families, as one confesses Christ, but the other denies Him. Maybe you live in a home where some are Christians, and some are not. This can create different ideas about what is acceptable and what is not. Some might think it is okay to cheat, to steal or lie, if you can get away with it, but the Christian will not tolerate this sinful behavior. This creates conflict, and sometimes parents and children are divided, or even husband and wife, because of one loves and obeys Christ, and the other does not. Jesus therefore said that His mission was not to bring peace, but a sword. He is looking for all those who will stand with him against Satan and against sin, even if that means separating from our own family members that reject our Savior. To be a disciple of Jesus then means to put Him above all else in our lives, even our own families, and He is worthy of such devotion, for He willing died to save us.

*"...He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Matt 10:38*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus calling and sending out His Disciples, and so someone might ask the question: "Is every Christian called to be a disciple of Jesus?"

When we consider what Jesus says it will cost to be His disciple, some Christians might be afraid that they are not up to the challenge. Certainly none of us has what it takes to be a faithful follower of Jesus, but we know that through his grace and strength, we can accomplish whatever He asks from us. There is no beginners and advanced course in Christianity. Jesus will never settle for anything less than complete devotion to Him, and His will. If you cannot give Him that, then He says you are not worthy to be His disciple. Now that is not to say that Jesus will call all of His followers to be martyrs, but every child of God should be so devoted to Christ as their Lord, so that if necessary, they would even be willing to lay down their life to show their allegiance to Jesus Christ as Sovereign Lord.

To be a disciple is to bear one's own cross. That means to be willing to die to my own life, my own ambitions, and give my life into the service of my master Jesus. So many Christians who are called to be disciples of Jesus, show that they are more interested in being master of their own life and destiny, then in trusting the Lord for the future and giving themselves entirely to follow Jesus. Only one, who learns to lose his life for Christ, will find it, but he who seeks to keep his life will lose it.

A missionary once said these words: "He is no fool, who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose."<sup>1</sup> What he meant by this was, that the secret of success as a disciple of Jesus is to be willing to give up the life, which we cannot keep for ourselves anyway, and so gain a life of following Christ and receiving eternal life, which we cannot afford to lose.

While we might feel this calling is too high for us, we should take time to think carefully about the gains and losses of the choices we make. Be wise, and do not compromise, thinking that you can live for yourself, for your career, or for gain in this world, while also trying to live faithfully for Jesus Christ. You must be willing to give up the one, in order to gain the other. It is not possible to have both.

While we think about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, I would like you to read a prayer, which has much to teach us about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It is called 'Disciple's Prayer'.

#### Disciple's Prayer

*Lord Help me be your disciple  
And always do your will,  
To put your desires before my own,  
Your work to faithfully fulfill.*

*Help me set a good example  
For those who look to me  
To see in my daily living  
What a Christian's life should be.*

*Those who are new in the faith,  
Help me guide and teach,  
And those who are outside your fold,  
Somehow help me reach.*

*Lord, I want to be your servant  
And in everything I do,  
When others might look at me,  
I pray that they see you.<sup>2</sup>*

"Disciple's Prayer" by [Ramona K. Cecil](#), Used by permission of [Dicksons](#)

LESSON II  
**Jesus' Invitation**  
MATTHEW II

In Matthew 11 we shall learn about the judgment that awaits those who do not respond to God's message or messenger. We have also some words about God's messenger John the Baptist, and an invitation to come to Jesus and find rest for our souls.

The chapter begins telling us that Jesus went about the cities preaching. It was God's mercy to man to send forth Jesus on a rescue mission to call men to salvation, but unfortunately even with the many great miracles that Jesus did, men still chose to reject Jesus and his message.

John the Baptist was put into prison, and perhaps he did not understand why he should be closed up in a prison, rather than preaching the word of God. This maybe why he was confused about Jesus and his mission, and sent men to ask Jesus if he was the expected Messiah, or should they expect another. Jesus sent word back to John of the many signs and wonders being done by His hand, which would be the evidence to convince John, that He was indeed the Messiah. Jesus speaks to the crowds about John the Baptist, and says he was the forerunner to prepare the way for the Messiah, and that of all men he was the greatest one born into the world. He said that John was a prophet and even more. He had the unique privilege of preparing Israel for their coming Messiah, by preaching repentance, and turning many hearts back to God.

Although John was a great prophet, many of the people rejected his message, especially the religious rulers, who said John had a demon. They were glad to get rid of him, because his message of repentance was not popular with them. John lived a simple life, and deprived himself of nice clothes and good food. He lived in a manner that reflected the fallen state of man, and the rebellion of Israel, humbling himself before God, and calling on Israel to repent. Jesus also came among the people after John, and he mingled with the sinners, and ate with them, in order to reach them and save them. When the religious leaders saw this, they were indignant, and rejected Jesus as well, saying he was a glutton and winebibber, that is one who eats and drinks too much. So even though God sent two messengers, both in a different manner, but with the same message of repentance and faith in God, the proud religious leaders would not submit. Jesus said they were like those who do not dance to the children's music, or lament with the mourners. They simply refuse to respond to the message being delivered to them. This is like many people down through the ages, who hear the message of Jesus and salvation, but are too busy, or too proud to listen and obey God's message to them. Jesus said to his critics that, "wisdom is proven by her children" (that which it produces).

As Jesus sees the rejection of God's message and messengers, he warns that generation of God's judgment that will fall on them, particularly the cities where he did many signs and wonders. As Jesus performed great miracles, it was evidence of God's working through Him, and should have been enough to convince the people to repent and believe the gospel message. However their hearts were too hard, and they rejected Him, even though God had sent them a great light to shine into their darkened hearts.

Jesus said that if the miracles that had been done in the cities around Galilee by Jesus, had been done in other cities like Tyre, Sidon, or Sodom, they would have repented long ago. These cities had formerly been judged by God, and were swept away in God's wrath. Jesus is saying that the cities of Galilee had even more reason to believe and repent, because of the greater light of Jesus ministry and miracles. Therefore he said these cities of Galilee, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum would suffer a greater judgment than these other cities, which God had judged in the past. This teaches us something very important from the word of God, and it is that God will give a different degree of punishment in Hell depending on the conduct and works of those condemned. For some, Hell will be much more painful, because they had greater opportunity to respond to God's mercy, but they refused it. The bible teaches that in heaven the righteous shall receive different degrees of reward depending on the quality of their service for Christ in this world, and the same principle is also true of the unrighteous in Hell. God is just, and will ensure that everyone is rewarded according to what they have done, and what opportunities they had to turn from their evil ways.

Jesus makes an important statement about the revelation of God. He points out that God could not be known except by revelation from God. As Jesus chooses to reveal the Father to us, then we may come to know Him. This means we should be so grateful that God in His mercy has chosen to open our blind eyes so that we may know Him.

This chapter closes with an invitation by Jesus to, "Come to Him", all those who are weak and burdened, with a promise of giving rest to them. He uses the metaphor of a yoke, and sharing it with him, just like two oxen that are joined together, and share the same burden. Jesus is willing to take your burdens, if you are willing to be joined to Him. He says if you do, he promises that the burden will be lightened, and the yoke will be easy. Jesus wants you to respond to His invitation to repent of your sins, by giving them over to Jesus. He died to bear your burden of sin at Calvary, and all you have to do is acknowledge and believe in Him as your Savior, and he will take away all the weight of sin from you; forgive, and cleanse you, making you a child of God. Do not be like the stubborn cities of Jesus day, which had such a great light shining, but turned away in rebellion. Today, that light continues to shine through the revelation of the scriptures, and as you hear God speak in His word, you will be held responsible for how you respond.

*"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt 11:28*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about responding to God's message and His messenger, and someone might ask the question: "How can I tell if someone is God's true messenger?"

While the religious leaders, who heard John the Baptist and Jesus, rejected the greatest messengers of all, it is clear they were blinded by their own pride, and therefore would never recognize God's Messiah no matter how many miracles he performed before them. Showmanship and miracle working are not God's preferred method of convincing people, for people will easily argue against such signs and wonders. God will normally speak to us through His word. God prefers that we listen to His word, as this is unchanging, and can be referred to over and over again. A true messenger of God will always emphasize the importance of God's word, and seek to share it faithfully and accurately, over and above trying to perform signs.

Another important way we can tell if someone is God's true messenger, is to consider their attitude about, and their use of, money. Many so-called 'men of God', are nothing more than crooks stealing money from the poor. Christianity was never instituted to make preachers rich, but to bring souls to God. When you meet a man whose goal is to reach and help people with the love of God, and any money he has is simply used for that purpose, it reveals that he is seeking the honor of God, and not the honor of men. With this in mind, just think of what the man of God in question, wears for clothing, drives as his vehicle, or lives in as a home. Do you see evidence of sacrifice for the work of God, or is he living for self and his own comfort and pleasure. This can quickly help to determine whether the man is serving God or money. Jesus said that you couldn't serve both God and money, for you will hate the one and love the other.

A true messenger of God will emphasize the Lord Jesus, and not himself. Some signboards in front of churches seem to glory in a man, and exalt the fame of a man, rather than draw attention to Jesus. Glory belongs to God, and men that steal God's glory, are likely not the true messengers of God.

I think the greatest thing to look for in a messenger of God, is how well he handles the word of God. If a man has clearly invested his time into careful study of the word, and uses that knowledge to serve the body of Christ, and bring glory to Jesus, and not man, then the people of God will flock to listen to him, for they know that he is teaching God's word sincerely, and not for wrong motives.

Ask yourself, if the messenger that you are listening to resembles the Lord Jesus, in his character, in his lifestyle, and in his teaching. If he acts proud, lives in luxury, and teaches self improvement rather than repentance of sin, then he is not God's messenger, and you should look for a better shepherd to follow and learn from.

Jesus said: *"...learn from Me, for I am **gentle and lowly** in heart..." Matt 11:29*

LESSON 12  
**Jesus' Opposition**  
MATTHEW 12

In our last lesson we were learning about responding to God's message and messenger, and in today's lesson we are going to learn about the opposition against God's greatest messenger, Jesus. As Jesus went about doing good and healing people, the Devil was not at all happy, and stirred up the proud Pharisees to resist Him. Though Jesus tried to do His work quietly, and honorably, his enemies were not content to leave him alone. In their confrontation with Him, they will learn that He is Master over the Jewish Law, and that His witness is greater than Jonah's, and he offers greater wisdom than Solomon's.

The Pharisees questioned Jesus about picking grain, and eating it on the Sabbath, which they considered a violation of the Sabbath. They also were looking for an opportunity to accuse him when they watched him heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Jesus then has to show them that the Sabbath was not intended to stop men from performing good deeds, and helping serve the needs of others. Jesus lets them know that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is not subject to the Law of the Jews, as man was, for he is the author of the God's Law, to help man learn God's righteousness. He does not need the Law to teach him what is right, for He is the giver of the Law, and the source of all that is good and right and true, and will always act according to the righteousness of the Law. He will help those who need help, when they need the help, for He is merciful and compassionate. The Sabbath had its place for the Jews, but Christians are no longer held under the same restrictions concerning the Sabbath, because the Law, and its principles of honoring the Lord, are written upon the hearts of those who believe in Jesus Christ.

As Jesus healed people, he tried to keep the matter quiet, not wanting undue attention or opposition. This quiet and gentle manner was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, who said He would not quench a smoking flax, or break a bruised reed, meaning he came to help, heal and build, not to tear down.

We again find the Pharisees in confrontation with Jesus, and accusing him of using Satan's power to cast out demons. Jesus said that the Pharisees were guilty of the greatest of sins, when they blasphemed the Holy Spirit, and for this they would not be forgiven. When the Pharisees saw the mighty miracles of Jesus, which in truth was the work of the Holy Spirit, they said it was really the work of Satan. In doing this they were equating the Holy Spirit with the Devil, a very grievous sin before God. This sin cannot be committed today, because we know longer have Jesus present with us, and performing mighty miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus saw how wickedly the Pharisees were acting, he said that they were a brood of snakes, and that their hearts could only produce evil things, for they were by nature evil. Just as a good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit, so the Pharisees were like bad trees that could only produce bad things. Jesus also adds that no words spoken by men are mere idle words, for they are produced from the heart of man, and show how corrupt he is inside. God shall therefore judge every word that men speak, and this should remind all of us to be so careful about the language we use. So often people, even those who are called Christians, use their tongue for all kinds of evil things, like insulting, telling lies, or shouting in anger at others. This is not pleasing to God and will meet with his judgment some day.

The Pharisees demanded to see a sign, thinking this will confirm for them whether Jesus is really the Messiah. Jesus said the only sign they shall have is the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for 3 days, so Jesus would also spend 3 days buried in a tomb, before rising again.

As Jesus tried to deal with these ungodly Pharisees, he tried to help them to see that someone even greater than Jonah had come to them, performing far greater signs than Jonah every did for Nineveh. Jonah preached and people repented, but the Pharisees, wanted signs. Jesus also said that the Queen of the south had sought out Solomon's wisdom, coming from afar, but here was someone much greater than Solomon, but they would not give heed to his words or wisdom.

While Jesus patiently tried to help the blind Pharisees to understand their sinfulness, and their opportunity to be spared from judgment, just as Nineveh was spared, He had to warn them of their great danger. He said that a man who has had an unclean spirit go out of him, is like a house that has been swept clean, but later the unclean spirit will come again and find him empty, and therefore he takes more unclean spirits, even more wicked, and they enter the man, so the state of the man is worse than at the first. Jesus said that this generation (that of his day) was just like this man with unclean spirits. What I believe Jesus is trying to say is that he came to Israel, and cast out Satan, by releasing many from diseases and demons. But instead of inviting the Spirit of God to reign in their hearts, they rejected the Son of God and his power, and therefore were left empty. Then Satan would return and come in much greater strength to control the people of Israel, since they rejected their Messiah, and their condition would become even worse than it had been before Jesus had come to them. This teaches us that it is important to respond to God's offer of mercy while it is available, or else we shall be drawn even further into sin, and the grasp of Satan.

When Jesus mother and brothers come to see him, and he was busy teaching, he does not leave off what he is doing to attend to his family, but rather explains that his true brothers and sisters are those who do the will of God. From



this we learn that the fellowship within the family of God is much greater than the relationships within our immediate family, since we shall enjoy an eternal fellowship with our Christian family.

I hope you are not one of those who oppose Jesus, because you refuse to submit to his teachings and works. Perhaps today you will surrender your heart to him, and make Him the Lord of your life.

*"...Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." Matt 12:50*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about Jesus dealing with those who opposed him, wanting him to perform some sign. Someone might ask the question: "Why doesn't God just give a sign so we can believe Him?"

Jesus said it was a wicked and adulterous generation that sought after signs. God does not need to prove himself to us with magic tricks to impress us. The fact is, that even if we saw some great miracle take place, we could still reason it away, as something besides the work of God. See how the Pharisees treated Jesus when he performed mighty signs and miracles, they said it was not God, but it was the Devil doing it. We are often deceived into thinking that miracles are the most convincing way to bring about faith in God, but it is not so, and many scriptural examples could be given to prove this. When miracles occur in the bible, it is always at a time of national rebellion and departure from God, and is God's way of dealing with his disobedient children. God is not pleased that our faith is so weak, that we need some special miracle to cause us to trust in Him. No father would like his child seeking proof, or a sign, to convince of the sincerity of His words and promises. So we should not show a lack of trust in God, by looking for special signs.

God has used miracles and signs at certain times to a disobedient and unbelieving people, but would rather treat us as loving children who believe His word, and do not need extra signs to support our faith. God's word should be sufficient for anyone to understand the mind and will of God, and to direct our lives.

Someone might ask God to show them a sign, so that they can make the right choice to do this or that. However, it would be better to look carefully at what God has already spoken in His word, and use that as our guide and standard to make our decisions. God may not send you a personal note, email, phone call, or miraculous sign to direct you in your particular decision, but He is fully able to speak to our intelligent minds, when we carefully read His word, and look for those passages that teach us important principles that relate to the decision we are making. For instance if a young person is trying to decide which career to follow, or which person to marry, no need to ask God for a sign, but rather read about things in the bible that relate to a person's work choices, or marriage choices, and with diligent searching and prayer, anyone can be guided to find counsel from God in His word to help them make choices that agree with the will of God.

It is far greater to trust in the sure word of God, than in miracles and signs, for even the Devil can fool you with signs, but a sincere pursuit for wisdom in the word of God is the way in which God can, and does, guide us.

*"A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Matt 16:4*

LESSON 13  
Parables of Jesus  
MATTHEW 13

For Today's lesson we are looking at Matthew 13, the parables of Jesus. Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. Jesus used simple illustrations and stories from everyday experience to teach people spiritual lessons. It was not so easy to understand what Jesus meant, but those who were nearest to him, often would hear Jesus interpret the parables, so that they knew its meaning.

The parables of Matthew 13 all deal with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has several different aspects, and it is helpful to make a proper distinction between each of these aspects of the kingdom. The aspects of the kingdom can be described in terms of their timing, and specific advents of the king. In the Old Testament period the future kingdom, and the coming king are prophesied. In the gospel dispensation, Christ the king was present, and the kingdom was announced. In this period the kingdom of God was said to be "at hand". The next aspect of God's kingdom is the church dispensation, where His followers acknowledge Christ as King, and yet the King is absent, and the church awaits His return. Following the rapture of the Church, and the judgment of the nations, the King will return and establish His Millennial Kingdom on earth, ruling over all nations. Lastly there is the eternal kingdom of God, which is brought in after the final judgment of Satan and all that have rebelled against God. If we can see these distinct aspects of the kingdom of God, when we read our bible, it will help us to make better sense of its meaning.

There are 7 parables in Matthew 13, and for the sake of time we shall only deal with each one very briefly.

1. The parable of the sower teaches us about how different groups of people respond to hearing the word of God. Many do respond, but their response is not sincere, and they fall away when tested by various pressures. Some do not respond at all, but there are those who hear and accept the word by faith. These are the true believers, and we know they are true because their life produces spiritual fruitfulness.
2. The second parable is the parable of the wheat and tares. This describes how Satan comes and adds false believers among the real church. He tries to bring confusion and disharmony, and break down, what God is building. The false believers live among the true believers, and so the true believer should be aware of this, and not be surprised when those who say they are Christians prove they are not really saved. Because wheat and tares look so much alike it is very difficult to tell them apart, but when the Lord gathers up his people many false professors will be left behind.
3. The third parable is about the mustard seed, which though very small grows into one of the largest plants. This parable speaks about the way genuine faith causes much growth, and a drastic change, because the change is clearly of God. When someone trusts in the Lord Jesus, often their lives are radically changed, as they remove sin from their life, take keen interest to learn the bible, and fellowship with other believers. The change is quite evident to all, and all can see that God has done a great work.
4. The fourth parable has to do with leaven that quickly spreads its affects throughout the dough. This parable seems to be telling us about the nature of sin, which can spread quickly among God's people, or in a persons life, and affect every area of life. Leaven is frequently used in the bible as a picture of sin.
5. The fifth parable is about hidden treasure in a field. The man who finds the treasures sells all he has to buy that field to secure the treasure. This speaks of a person who comes to the realization of the great debt of sin he has, and he has discovered the riches of Christ, who alone can pay for his sins, and therefore he abandons all other hopes, and places his trust in Jesus alone to save him. He has found his treasure in Christ.
6. The sixth parable is similar to the last, in that a man sells all that he has to buy for himself a pearl of great price. He sees the value of the pearl, and knows it is worth it to sell everything else, in order to buy it. We might interpret this as we did the last parable, or else see it as Christ purchasing the church as his precious jewel, having expended all his riches to gain for himself his bride.
7. The last of this series of parables is about a dragnet that brings up all kinds of different fish. The bad are separated from the good, just as the righteous will be separated from the unrighteous at the end of the age, which God judges and separates between the true believers, and those who were just fakes.

Jesus spoke in parables, as was prophesied by Isaiah, in order that true believers would learn more about the kingdom, but the proud religious people, the unbelievers, would not hear or understand. God conceals his truth from those who are too proud to listen and learn humbly.

If you want to receive God's salvation, then you must seek after it with all your heart, and humble yourself before God, then he is able to teach you, and give your understanding of the gospel message. Make sure your heart is not hard like the proud religious Pharisees, and that you can hear God when He speaks.

*"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Matt 13:9*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about How Jesus taught in parables, earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. Someone might ask the question: "Why does God hide his truth from some people?"

The parables of Jesus were actually designed to conceal the truth from some people, but why would He hide the truth from certain people. Well it is not that God wants to intentionally keep some people away from His kingdom. Some men are proud, and resist the truth, so God justly rewards them with the consequence of fighting against the truth, and that is to have the truth hidden. God is very compassionate and merciful, and wants to awaken all men to their need of salvation. Even though this is the case, some men are simply too proud to appreciate and seek after God's truth.

God's revelation is a wonderful thing to have given to us. God in His mercy sends forth messengers, and His written word to help man understand and respond to the gospel. God has no obligation to those who rebel against him. It is a great privilege to hear God speak, and God rewards those whose hearts yearn to know God, and be reconciled to Him.

In the story of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19 we find that God choose to speak to Abraham about his coming judgment on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He said he would not hide his plans from Abraham, because he counted Abraham as a faithful believer, and one who sought God's honor. Abraham having learned of God's coming judgment was able to speak to God about it, and even appeal for his mercy to spare the cities for the sake of the righteous persons who lived there.

One of the greatest things that can happen to us is to hear God speak through His word to our hearts. God does this, and wants to do it for everyone; however, many are not able to hear God speak because of their stubborn and proud hearts. They love their sin, and are exalted in their own opinions, and are not able to listen and learn from God.

Jesus actually thanked His Father in heaven for revealing his truth to babes, that is those who are not lifted up with pride through their knowledge. This was good in God's sight.

*At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight." Matthew 11:25,26*

God is able to save the humble sinner, and pass by the self-righteous and proud, and in this He shows that He is a righteous judge.

If you want to be sure to hear God, then you must be willing to come to Him like a humble child, needy and contrite, waiting upon His mercy and goodness. The bible says he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. So if you really want to know God, and be sure of a place in heaven, then you can if you are sincere and diligent to search for Him in His word. May God grant us all ears to hear.

LESSON 14  
**The Provision of Jesus**  
MATTHEW 14

For Today's lesson we are looking at Matthew 14 and how the provision of Jesus improves every situation. Whether it is He who convicts our conscience about sin, or He who supplies our needs, or helps us with our struggles, it is Jesus that always improves our circumstances, and provides what we are lacking.

In this chapter we have the interesting, but sad story, of how Herod killed John the Baptist. As it was Herod's birthday, he invited all of his important friends for a birthday celebration. At the celebration the daughter of Herodias entertained him. Herodias was the wife of His brother Philip, and he had taken her as his own wife. John the Baptist had told him this was wrong in the sight of God, and this made Herodias very angry with John. When Herodias' daughter danced before King Herod, she pleased him very much, so he made a promise to give her anything she wished up to half of his kingdom. She asked for the head of John the Baptist, having been prompted by her mother Herodias, and Herod gave way to her wishes, because he did not want to be embarrassed in front of his dinner guests. He was not happy about it, but his pride made him more concerned with his own image before his guests, than the life of a good man like John. When Herod heard about Jesus, and his mighty works, he thought it was John the Baptist returned from the dead. This shows us that hearing about Jesus awakened Herod's conscience about his sin. It is true that each of us has a conscience about our own sin, and that conscience is stirred up when we learn and hear about Jesus. That may not sound good, but it is actually very good, for it is through our guilty conscience that we come to acknowledge our sins, and seek the forgiveness of our God.

When Jesus heard how John had been killed He went to a quiet place to get away from everyone, but the crowds followed him there. When he saw the crowds he took compassion on them and miraculously fed 5000 men, besides the women and children. He told the disciples to feed them, but of course they could not do it with just a few loaves and two fish. But through Jesus' presence and provision, they were able to satisfy all the people, and still have plenty of food left over at the end. Whenever we come to Jesus, he will help us to provide what we could never provide for ourselves. He is the great provider. He provides for hungry people, and satisfies them. He does not provide all of our greed and covetousness, but he can and does provide for our needs, when we ask for His help.

The disciples were crossing the lake, while Jesus went alone to pray. He wanted to be alone, but the crowds had followed Him, and so he gave them his time to take care of their needs. He was probably very tired, and still sad about John's death, and wanted time alone before His Father in heaven, to share the burdens of his heart. We also need to find a quiet place alone, where we can meet with God and share our burdens. Often after a busy day, the only time we can find, quiet and alone with God, is in the night. While the disciples were struggling in the boat, because of the wind, Jesus came to them, and when he entered the boat the wind ceased. This reminds us that when we have Jesus with us, he can overcome our troubles and make the situation better.

The disciples were frightened, thinking that Jesus was a ghost, for he was walking on the water. This was a strange sight, and it made them very fearful. Jesus reassured them that they should not fear, because it was Himself. Peter found courage, and asked the Lord if he could come to him walking on the water, and Jesus said that he should come. Peter began to walk on the water, but when he saw the waves, he began to doubt, and started to fall into the water. Jesus immediately caught him and brought him into the boat, and told Peter his faith was small. This amazing story helps us to see that Jesus has power to do things for us, that we could never do for ourselves. When we pray and ask for His intervention, he can move mountains, and overcome those things that would cause us to sink in despair. It is a wonderful encouragement to know, that even when our faith is small he is there to catch us, so we do not drown in the trials and difficulties we face. Whenever Jesus comes into the situation, and we look to Him in faith, we can walk above the problems, and troubles that are trying to drag us down.

When the disciples realized that Jesus had been walking on the water, and through his power Peter also was able to walk upon the water, they marveled, and confessed that truly Jesus was the Son of God. This great miracle convinced them and confirmed to them, that Jesus was indeed God's unique Son, sent from heaven. It is a great moment in our lives, when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and our understanding to know who Jesus really is. He is not a mere man, He is more than a prophet, He is God's Son, equal with God, and our Lord and our Savior. When we acknowledge, through faith, Jesus as Lord, then God is pleased to save our souls, and make us His children. I hope today you will place your trust in Jesus as your Savior, and recognize Him as your Lord.

Others recognized him also, and they brought to Him, all those who were sick. They knew that He was able to heal them, and in compassion He healed them all. When we recognize Jesus and his power, then we can bring to him all of our struggles, our pain and sorrow, and He is the one who can heal and make things better. Yes, Jesus is the great provider, and with him we can know conviction of sin, we can find our needs satisfied, and strength and power to overcome all of our trials, for He is above all, and in control of all.

*"Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God".  
Matt 14:33*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about Jesus as the great provider, and how he always improves our situation when we look to him for help. Someone might ask the question: "Why does God not provide for me all the time?"

It may appear sometimes, that God is not caring for our needs, because we have asked for food, or for a good job, or for some provision, and yet we did not get what we asked for. This can discourage our faith, and make us wonder if God really cares for us personally. We might think, that God looks after the rich people, but I am poor, therefore God must not love me as much as those rich folk.

We must be very careful in our thinking, and what we expect our God to do for us. We should remember, that much of human suffering, including our sicknesses, and our hunger and poverty are directly the results of sin. Man is under a curse because our father Adam disobeyed God, and now we have to work with the sweat of our brow to make our food grow, and to satisfy our hunger. God is so compassionate, and tenderhearted towards us, and He does make provision for us. We might think we have so very little, but be very grateful for every little bit that God gives to you, for He does not have to give you anything. He gives out of His love and compassion, and not does give to us because we deserve it. God also expects us to use our common sense, and hard work to provide for our families and ourselves. We cannot expect to sit on a street corner and beg, thinking God owes us a free lunch, when we are not willing to work to support ourselves. Now of course some folks are crippled, and cannot work at all, and they are cast upon God to find their daily bread, and even these God looks after and feeds, through His compassion.

We should not have the false idea, that God promises us a good and prosperous life that is the reward of our faith. Many are preaching this message, but you will not find it in the bible. The bible does not promise the Christian, even those of great faith, prosperity in this world. Often Christians are called to suffer, and sacrifice, so that they can testify to the world about Jesus. Jesus suffered, and He made the greatest sacrifice of all. He became poor, so that we could be made rich. Christianity, that is following Christ, is not a matter of comfort and riches, it is rather a path of pain and loss, bearing our cross, and feeling his rejection, and his sorrow, for a world that is lost and in rebellion against God.

If we think biblically, then we will not expect that God must give us what we think we should have. We will be grateful that He even gives us our next breath, and our next meal, no matter how small that meal maybe. For we brought nothing into this world, and because of sin we certainly do not deserve the kindness and care of God, and yet He not only provides for us a home in heaven through Jesus Christ, but also, in compassion He feeds us. He loves us, and can and will provide for us, but not always according to what we think is best, but according to what He knows is best, and that might mean some suffering, and even going hungry. I know that does not sound very popular, but I speak to you the truth, and you can see it for yourself in the scriptures. Sometimes the medicine is bitter to the taste, but health to the body.

*"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."  
Philippians 1:29*

LESSON 15  
**The Compassion of Jesus**  
MATTHEW 15

In Matthew 15 we discover Jesus is compassionate towards the needs of others, and that true religion is not based on man's traditions, but faith in Jesus. Although some people present themselves as religions leaders, they are nothing more than the blind leading other blind into a ditch. We also will learn that sin comes from within a man, and not from outside the man.

In this chapter we find the scribes and Pharisees again contending with Jesus, this time about their traditions. They thought it was proper to perform ceremonial washings before eating. Jesus and his disciples did not practice these ceremonial washings before eating. This tradition was developed among the Jews, but was not a teaching from the Holy Scriptures. Men often add their own laws and traditions to their religious beliefs, which have no foundation in the word of God. They corrupt and twist the word of God to fit their own thinking. This is what the religion of man always does. When men control doctrine and practice, it always tends to go against God's word. This is because man does not think as God thinks. God ways are not our ways. True Christian religion is one that follows the word of God, not the teachings of men. Jesus pointed out that these religious people were going against the word of God with their traditions and failing to honor their parents, as they should have. We ought to be very careful that our teachings and practices are in agreement with God's word, for God will judge us according to how well we obey his word.

While Jesus was talking about these washings that the religious leaders practiced, he pointed out the error of their thinking. They thought that by washing their hands and the vessels used to eat and drink, they became holy and clean. Jesus pointed out that it is not what enters a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of him. He explains what this means to his disciples when they asked him, and he said that from man's heart comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. It is these things that defile a man, and they find the origin within the heart of man. Sin is an internal problem that we cannot wash away with religious rituals. There is only one remedy for the sickness of sin within us, and that is to be cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ. Because of their false teachings, Jesus described these religious teachers as blind men leading the blind into a ditch. What a vivid illustration of the folly of false religion, and there is much of it in the world today. Men love to make up their own rules and traditions, rather than just follow the plain and simple teachings found in the bible.

Now a woman, with a demon-possessed daughter, comes and pleads with Jesus to heal her daughter, but Jesus does pay attention to her, because she is not a Jew. She was a Gentile, and his mission was first to the Jews. However she pleads with him, saying that even if she might have the crumbs that fall from the table. Jesus said that her faith was great, and rewarded her by healing her daughter as she had requested. The Lord wants us to be like this woman, persistent and serious about the need for our souls to be healed from the grip of Satan. The woman was very humble, because her need was so great, and she would not be satisfied until she knew that Jesus had answered her need. It delights our God when we come to him humbly, but also with a determination to be free from sin and Satan's power.

When Jesus went to a mountain, the people brought to Him the lame blind, mute, maimed, and many others, and he healed them. As Jesus looked upon the crowds that had come to him, he had compassion on them, and saw that they needed food, before going back to their homes. He did not want them to faint on their way. Jesus reveals not only the power of God in healing these people, but also the heart of God, in that He cares for the needs of those who look to Him in faith. The people glorified God, when they saw the power of Jesus to heal all their diseases and afflictions. It is important for us to do the same, when we witness some work of God. God should have the glory and not man, for it is God's power that gives life, and health and healing.

When Jesus fed the multitudes again with just seven loaves and a few small fish, his disciples at first were wondering how they could find enough food to feed the large crowd of people. There were 4000 men besides woman and children. Yet, the disciples had earlier seen the Lord provide food for 5000 besides woman and children. How quickly they had forgotten the power of the Lord to provide, and how quickly their faith had become weak. Often we also are guilty of having small faith. At one time we saw how the Lord provided for us, and yet we forget and wonder how things will work out, because our faith has grown weak. We should remember that believers are called to show faith at all times, and live by faith. We are not only saved by our faith in Jesus, but we are also called to live by faith. The bible says, "The Just shall live by faith". God wants us to trust and believe in Him all the times. Some have trusted the Lord to save their soul, but then have a hard time trusting him for their daily bread, or for steady employment. If we believe he is able to save our souls, surely we must believe He is able to care for us daily through this life.

*" Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire."  
Matt 15:28*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the compassion of Jesus, and our need to trust in the Lord at all times, obeying His word, and not the traditions of men. We learned of a woman of great faith who pleaded for the healing of her daughter, and so someone might ask the question: "If I pray to God for healing will, he heal me?"

If we were to read the story about how the woman in Matthew 15 pleaded with Lord to heal her daughter, and saw how her persistence and faith brought about her daughters healing, then we might be inclined to think, that God will heal us, if we also show faith and are persistent in prayer. However we need to be careful not to think that God must heal everyone of their affliction when they ask for healing. It is not just a matter of how much faith you have, or how much prayer you make, that determines whether God is going to heal you. We must recognize that sometimes God allows our sickness and suffering for certain reasons, and so it is his will for us to suffer, and not to be healed, at least not at this time. It is no reflection upon our faith, if God calls us to suffer in a wheelchair, or in a hospital bed.

Sometimes God uses our affliction to work out His purposes in our life. For instance, concerning the blind man in John chapter 9 Jesus said that his blindness was for the glory of God. The Lord healed him, but he also lived many years of his life blind, for it was God's will to demonstrate his power at just the right time in his life. Sometimes sickness is God's will and means of taking one of his children home to heaven. Sometimes God uses our afflictions to teach us some lesson, or to chastise us. Paul was given a thorn in flesh, so that he would not be exalted above measure, and become proud because of the great revelations that were given to him. Sometimes our afflictions cause us to be more prayerful, to draw nearer to God, or sense our dependence upon Him more keenly. There are plenty of spiritual reasons why God allows suffering and pain, and affliction in our lives. We need to understand this, and should be prepared to accept sickness and afflictions as God's tool to work His purposes in our life. I am not saying it is pleasant to suffer, for it is not, but suffering is often the road to spiritual maturity, and the pathway to a closer fellowship with the Lord.

God does heal at times, and we certainly can ask Him to heal us, or pray for others to be healed, but we should not expect that God must heal, simply because we ask Him to. Man is broken and battered as a result of his sin, and God wants us to feel the sting of sin, so that we shall run to him for help and healing. Sometimes the message does not always reach the mind or the heart, when God is speaking through our sufferings, and so he allows us to endure a season of pain, until we awaken to our spiritual need. After all, our greatest need is not the healing of our body, but the healing of our soul.

There is a sickness that is caused by sin, described in the book of James, and if the sinner confesses, and has the elders pray and anoint him with oil, there is a promise that the pray of faith will heal the sick. We should remember that the sickness here was directly resulting from sin, and through repentance and confession, the person can find forgiveness and healing. So this would not apply to every case of sickness.

*"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you' for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 1Cor 12:9*

LESSON 16  
Confessing Jesus  
MATTHEW 16

In today's chapter from Matthew, we have the great confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We also have Jesus dealing with the evil doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We will learn about God's plan for Jesus to die, and about how we must also be willing to die with him, if we are to be his followers.

The Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus to perform a sign for them, but Jesus tells them it is only a wicked and adulterous generation that seeks after a sign. He says the only sign that will be given is the sign of Jonah, which meant; just as Jonah spent 3 days in the belly of a whale, he would spend 3 days buried in a tomb. The sign of the resurrection is the greatest sign of all, and should be enough to convince anyone who Jesus really is, but unfortunately many people still do not believe in Jesus as Lord. Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, because they could read the signs in the sky to predict the coming weather, but they were not able to decipher the signs of the times. It should have been obvious to them, if they knew the prophecies of the Old Testament who Jesus was, for he was fulfilling all the prophecies concerning the Messiah, but they were too proud to see this clearly.

The disciples did not understand Jesus when he warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, thinking he was talking to them about their need for bread. Again they forgot how the Lord could miraculously produce bread if needed. Jesus has to explain to his disciples that he was talking about the bad doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We should learn from this to be careful when reading our bible not to interpret literally, what was meant to be taken figuratively, and vice versa. Many make this mistake, and end up doing all kinds of strange things. For instance many have interpreted the "tongues of angels" in 1Cor 13, to be an unknown and ecstatic language, which is the same gift of tongues used on the day of Pentecost. This is just a twisting of the scripture, and has led to all kinds of strange babblings in the churches. The phrase "tongues of angels", was given as a hyperbole, meaning an exaggeration. Paul never claimed he could speak in this language, or that it was unintelligible babbling. No one should try to make it mean, what Paul never meant it to say. We could save ourselves much confusion if we were careful to interpret the bible with common sense, and proper language skills and understanding.

When Jesus asked the disciples what other people thought about who Jesus was, they answered John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. Then when he asked them who they thought He was, Peter spoke up and confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This great confession is very significant in the book of Matthew, and is a key to understanding salvation, and the purpose why Jesus came into the world. Jesus told Peter he was blessed, because men had not taught him this, but it was a revelation from God in heaven. It is the Holy Spirit that will reveal to our hearts who Jesus really is. When we accept Jesus by faith, we can receive the salvation of our souls. Jesus told Peter, that it was upon this rock, which is the rock of faith that His church would be built. Some have misunderstood this to mean that Peter is the rock of the church, but that is a misunderstanding of the text. Peter's name in Greek means a small pebble or stone, but Jesus referred to a Great large stone, a different word in Greek, which is faith, and upon that rock, the rock of faith, He would build His church.

Just after Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, he makes a mistake in judgment. Jesus was talking to his disciples about how he would go to Jerusalem, be arrested, and killed, and after three days rise again. Peter began to rebuke Jesus, and say that this could never be, but Jesus corrected Peter, and told him He was not being mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. To Peter, it did not seem right that Jesus would have to die, and so he thought he should correct the Lord. But of course it was God's will that Jesus should die, and be our Savior. This was determined before the creation of the world, and was the reason for which Jesus came into the world, but Peter did not yet understand this. We can learn from this, that we should be careful to hear all details, before making a judgment, and that we should read our bible carefully to understand the full plan of God, and not just pick out things that seem more agreeable to us.

Jesus goes on to tell us that if anyone wants to follow him, he must be willing to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him. In other words, Jesus was prepared to die to fulfill God's purposes for our salvation, and if we follow Jesus, we should also be prepared to lay down our lives for God's purposes. When Jesus said that even the whole world could not be given in exchange for a man's soul, he taught us that our souls are of greater value than all the world. So many people want to gain all they can in this world, and so they forget about God, and about salvation, and lose their life to brief time of pleasure in this world. In the end their soul will be lost in Hell. Only those who give up their life to follow Jesus will find true life, a life that will never end. Jesus says we cannot have both, for we either choose to be his followers, or to seek to make our gain in this world. The heart is either seeking riches in heaven, or riches on earth. Where are you seeking your riches?

Jesus said that when he comes again in glory with his angels he would reward everyone according to his works. It is important for us to understand that our **works** will bring us **reward**, but not salvation. Salvation comes through faith alone, and our works demonstrate that we are genuine believers, and the Lord will reward our works. Even those who



reject God's salvation will be judged in Hell according to their works. This means that how we live our lives will make a difference of how much we enjoy heaven, or how severe we shall feel the torments of Hell.

*"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matt 16:26*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about confessing Jesus as the Son of God, correctly understanding God's word, and the value of a soul. Someone might ask the question "How can I be sure I understand the bible correctly?"

Because the bible comes from God, and reveals to us many things that are difficult to understand, we cannot expect to know everything perfectly. God understands the limitations of our minds, and the difficulties we have in learning language, especially when language changes over time. Therefore God has given to us the Holy Spirit to teach us. The Spirit of God can reveal to us a correct understanding of the bible. You might ask, "Well, if that is the case, how come all Christians don't agree about what the bible teaches?" The fact is, that many Christians do not rely upon the Holy Spirit, and speak out of pride, and their own exalted opinion. So often Christians trust in their pastor, or spiritual leader, to interpret the bible for them, but that can be a dangerous thing to do, if the pastor is not careful, or not relying on the Holy Spirit.

It is also necessary to be a careful student of the bible for ourselves. As we read the bible we should learn how to study the bible, using bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other good reference materials, that will aid us in understanding the words and ideas, as translated from the original languages. It is hard work to study the bible, but if our souls are worth more than the whole world, it is worth our time and effort to learn the bible correctly, to ensure our souls are guided by God's truth, and not just human opinion.

The bible is a big book, and can be complex at times, but God had designed it, for the simplest of minds, as well as for the most scholarly minds. We can all learn the basic truths of the gospel, if we are willing. One thing that prevents people from learning the bible is pride, since God resists the proud. Also many are lazy when it comes to reading and studying the bible, and therefore can make mistakes because they have not been careful to learn well. God does not reward spiritual understanding to those who are not serious about it.

Although we may wrestle with some more difficult ideas in the bible, in general the bible is quite available to all who are willing to put personal time into reading, thinking, studying, and relying upon the help and teaching of the Holy Spirit.

*"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth." John 16:13*

LESSON 17  
**Transfiguration of Jesus**  
MATTHEW 17

We have now reached chapter 17 in our study of Matthew, and a high point in this gospel. We shall see a glimpse of the glory of God in Jesus. From the mountain peak of glory, descending to where Satan torments his victims, and only pray can free the captives. The shadow of the cross looming, brings sorrow to Jesus' disciples, and we shall learn that in some circumstances it is better to do what is expected in order to not offend.

We have in this chapter one of the most sublime scenes in the entire bible. Jesus took three of his disciples Peter, James, and John, and ascending a mountain with them alone. In this secluded place Jesus was transfigured, so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white like light. Then Moses and Elijah also appeared with Jesus, and were talking with him. When the disciples saw this amazing and fearful sight, they were struck with awe, and Peter thought he should say something. Peter asked if they could build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Peter, really did not know what he was saying, he just thought he should suggest something to offer some input, however this was not the time for him to speak, or suggest. This was a time for him to observe, listen, and learn. Therefore a cloud covered them, and a voice spoke, and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him!" This terrified the disciples, but when Jesus came to them, he said they should not fear, and when they looked again, they only saw Jesus, and no one else.

We can learn several lessons from this story, but let us just mention a couple here. Firstly we can learn that in some situations God wants us to listen and learn. There is a time to speak up, but there is also a time to sit still and see what God is doing. Often we want to help along a situation, when God would have us just observe, and allow his glory to shine in the situation. Another thing we can take from this story is to always keep Jesus at the center and focus of our thoughts and service. As we hear the voice of the Father speaking about His son, he draws attention to Him, and says that In Him he is well pleased, and that we should hear Him. Although great men like Moses and Elijah were there also, the focus must be on Jesus, as the man revealing God's glory, and he who would bear away the sin of the world.

As the disciples left that scene they asked Jesus about Elijah. They had heard the scribes teaching that Elijah would return before the Messiah, and now having seen Elijah on the mountain they were wondering about this teaching. Jesus confirms that indeed Elijah was prophesied to come again, and that he had come in the person of John the Baptist. Therefore we are to understand that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, in that his ministry was very similar to that of Elijah's, and his character also was similar, in that they were both bold men, speaking against the evil conduct of the ruler over their people.

At the base of the mountain, Jesus is led to a boy who suffers from a demon, who torments him severely with epileptic convulsions, throwing him into the water or the fire. It was a horrible affliction that seemed certain to destroy the boy eventually. His disciples had been unable to cast out this demon, and Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, and then was able to cast out the demon himself. The disciples then asked him why they could not cast out the demon themselves, and Jesus said that they lacked faith, and that this kind required fasting with prayer. There are some situations we face that are just too great for us to handle, and we must bring them to the Lord in prayer, and plead with him, and trust in him. Prayer is a very powerful weapon against Satan, and draws on the resources and power of God to change situations for the better. When we have done all that we can do, it is good to lean much upon the Lord in prayer to help us in our desperation. God will often answer us according to our faith, so we must be sure to trust in Him fully.

Once again Jesus told his disciples about going His to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, and then be raised up after three days. This made them very sorrowful. If only they had understood how Jesus' death would mean the salvation of millions of souls, they would have rejoiced in God's wonderful plan of mercy. It is very sad that Jesus had to die a horrible death, and suffer as he did, but we can also find much joy because while men and Satan planned it for evil, God planned it for our eternal good.

When Peter is questioned, by the temple tax collectors, about whether Jesus paid his taxes, Peter replied with 'Yes'. We often find that Peter speaks up before finding the right thing to say, and this was one of those cases. He just assumed that Jesus would most certainly pay the necessary tax. Jesus had to explain to Peter, that he being the son of the king, for whom the tax was paid, was not subject to pay taxes. The temple tax was an offering to God, and Jesus was the Son of God, and need not pay into His own treasury. When Jesus explained this to Peter, he told him to pay the tax anyway, so they would not cause offense. Sometimes we might chose to do something, that we do not see as necessary, but we do it in order not to upset or offend others, but we must always obey God's word first.

*"...a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" Matt 17:5b*

**Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have learned about the transfiguration of Jesus, about the need for, and power of prayer, and preventing offenses when we can. Someone might ask the question "Why did only Peter, James and John have the privilege to see the Lord transfigured?"

The Lord Jesus had many followers, but he choose just 12 to be his closest companions, and servants. These men were given special privileges, but also important responsibilities to carry the message of salvation to the world, after Jesus ascended back to heaven. Even among these 12 men, there were three men, Peter, James, and John, that often were with the Lord Jesus on special occasions, such as the transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and praying in the garden of Gethsemane. These three men were among the first he called to be his disciples, and he wanted them in particular to be a witness for these special occasions. These three men would play a significant role in the early church leadership, and witnessing to the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, they needed especially to be taught and strengthened through these special events they were called to witness. Peter would later write about the experience of hearing God speak to them on the mountain, and having seen the glory of the Lord. Undoubtedly this experience enriched Peter's appreciation for the greatness of Christ, and His work for all of mankind. This strengthens him in faith, to be able to stand against all the opposition he would have to face. John wrote about the power of Christ to rise from the dead, when he wrote a detailed account of the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, after having been dead for four days. He had more then once seen His master raise someone from the dead, and could testify that He was the way, the truth, and the Life.

These three men were given unique privileges, because of the important roles they would play in testifying about Jesus, after his resurrection. It is also true that some are privileged to come near to the Lord, and gain a special insight into His glory. This privilege belongs to those whose hearts are sincere in their love and devotion to God. Moses was a man who desired to see the glory of God, and was granted the privilege to see something of His glory. The Lord may allow you and I also to draw near and get a glimpse of his glory, if that is the sincere desire or our hearts, and we walk before Him in a manner that is pleasing to Him. He is not obligated to reveal himself to those who do not value and appreciate the exalted privilege of drawing near to Him. The Lord has his intimates, chosen to behold Him, so that they can declare His glory to a needy world.

Maybe you would like to behold the glory of God, but are you ready to also suffer to make Christ known to a world that rejects Him? When we are willing to join with Him in suffering, then we are promised the privilege of sharing in His glory.

*"Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Rom 8:17*

LESSON 18  
**The Heart of Jesus**  
MATTHEW 18

Today in Matthew 18, we shall learn about two important principles that Jesus taught His followers. He taught the need for humility, and He taught the importance of forgiveness. Jesus teaches humility through our attitude towards small children, and he teaches the importance of forgiveness through a parable about a king and his indebted servant. Jesus' teaching on humility and forgiveness reveals His heart towards us.

Let's first consider the lesson on humility that we learn through small children. While the disciples wanted to know who was greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus took a small child, and said unless one is converted and becomes as a small child, they shall not enter the kingdom of God. He is teaching us that to be his disciple, and enter into His kingdom, you must be willing to humble yourself. To admit our sin, and confess our guilt, and repent before God requires humility. This humility that brings us into the kingdom, is the humility that should govern our Christian life, and will testify to a true conversion.

Jesus said to receive a small child in His name, is to receive Him. Jesus closely identifies himself with the young children, for they do not exhibit pride, and are in many ways innocent, and under God's protection.

If someone causes a child to sin, He says it would be better for a millstone to be tied around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. We should learn that God loves and cares for children, and has angels assigned to protect them. Anyone who seeks their harm is provoking the wrath of God. Offenses will come in this world, but the man who causes offenses will meet with God's severe judgment.

While Jesus talks about despising or harming children, he calls on us to do radical self-judgment, so that we can avoid God's judgment in hell. He said it is better to cut off a hand, or cut out an eye, than to allow these parts of our bodies to sin. It seems he is talking about how we view children, and how we treat them physically. Because they are small and weak, we are inclined to take advantage, look down upon them, mistreat them, and even abuse them. The exploitation of our power over young children through verbal or physical abuse is a grievous sin in the sight of God, and will bring very severe judgment. In fact, it would be better to be lame or blind than to face God's wrath. We need to love, guide, and protect children, as those who are very dear to God. We learn from this passage that angels watch over children for their protection. This is a great comfort to parents, but also a warning to any that should seek to harm a child.

Still on the subject of God's love of these little ones, Jesus gives a lesson about 100 sheep, and how one got lost. He said the shepherd will leave the 99 and search for that lost one until it is found. It was Jesus mission in coming into the world to seek and to save those who were lost, and there is not one little person, that God does not care about. He thinks every person is of great value, and wants to show His love to the little children as well as to all the adults. A culture that does not love and protect its' children, will certainly not please God. If we have the same heart as Jesus has, then we will love what He loves; and He loves children, and wants to bless them with salvation.

We also have in this chapter the importance of forgiveness. So often offenses bring about strife and division, but this is not how the followers of Jesus are to behave. Christians are called to be peacemakers, seek reconciliation and forgiveness with their brethren. God does not accept contentions and divisions among His children, and commands us to deal with our differences and offenses. There is a biblical method of dealing with offenses that goes in stages from the least authority to the greatest authority, to bring about submission to Christ. First we go alone to our brother that has offended, and try to deal with the offense, but if he will not hear, then we can go with one or two witnesses, to ensure every word is established. The order is very important, for many offenses can be easily dealt with on a personal level, when brethren are open and honest to talk of the offense, and willing to work together for a solution. The final step is to take the matter to the church, and if the offending brother does not listen to the collective voice of the church, then he is to be treated as an unbeliever. That is because he behaves like an unbeliever, since he will not submit to Christ's authority, as represented through his church. The church does have Christ's authority, when they meet in his name.

To meet in Jesus name is not just an empty phrase, it means to meet together under His authority, with a desire to see His will and His righteousness fulfilled, and in humble dependence upon His presence and guidance through prayer. When the church meets in this manner, it carries the authority of Christ and agreement between heaven and earth, between Christ the head, and the church, which is his body, for discipline of those who refuse to yield to Christ through the church. It is very important that the church only act according to the word of God, to ensure they carry the judgment and authority of Christ. There is no room for men's opinions, or for human pride when dealing with offenses among brethren.

Because we see a 3-stage process of seeking peace and reconciliation, it teaches us that God cares very much about not only justice, but also mercy. We should always seek the path of mercy and forgiveness prior to making judgment, for this is the heart of our Lord. Jesus tells a parable to illustrate the importance of forgiveness. He spoke of a king who had a servant with a great debt, that could not be paid, and when the servant pleaded for time and consideration, the king took compassion and forgave his debt, but then the servant showed no compassion to his

fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt. The lesson we learn from this is that, since God has forgiven our great debt through our Lord Jesus Christ, showing us great compassion and mercy, then we should be able to forgive those who have offended us, for the amount of offenses done against us, are very small in comparison to the many offenses we have done against God. When it comes to forgiveness, God will treat us as we treat our fellow men. If we can forgive our brother 490 times, as Jesus instructs, then God will be glad to do the same for us.

*"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." Matt 18:20*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about the heart of Jesus, as he taught about humility and forgiveness. Someone might ask the question "Why should I have to forgive someone who has done wrong to me?"

If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, then He requires you to demonstrate both humility and forgiveness. To follow Jesus, and call ourselves Christians, means to acknowledge His authority over our lives, and therefore a willingness to submit to Him. In life there will be many occasions when others offend us, but as Christians, we always must remember how much our own sins have offended God. We had a much greater debt of offenses before our God, than any other person's offenses towards us. Because our God in compassion was willing to forgive our debt, we also should have the grace and humility to offer forgiveness to others who offend us. It is important for all believers to look upon the price that Christ paid for our offenses. He suffered greatly, and was brutally executed, rejected and despised by the people he came to save, and bore the judgment for all of our sins. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God is able to let us go free, to forgive all of our debt. This was done by grace, not because we deserve it. In fact what we really deserve is to be cast into hell to suffer for our sins, but God loved us so much, that he wanted to rescue us from that judgment. If we say we believe the gospel, and that Christ died for our sins, then it only makes sense that we his children should be grateful, humble, and full of forgiveness.

I think the problem for many people, is that they are trying to earn their way into heaven, and so they think that a person is accepted by God, based on how good they are. With this kind of thinking it only seems right, and fair, to repay those who offend us. But this is man's way of thinking, and is in direct opposition to the gospel. We will never be accepted because of our goodness, for the bible says we are all sinners, and that there is none good, no not one. If we truly experience God's forgiveness, then we will understand it is upon the basis of God's grace, and compassion, and we will be compelled as His children to show the same grace and compassion to others. To hold onto offenses, is strong evidence of not knowing the forgiveness of God, and therefore not being God's child at all.

Perhaps in hearing this lesson on God's forgiveness through grace, you have come to realize that you are not truly God's child, because you have never understood the terms of God's salvation, which is based upon the mercy of God, and not upon how good you are. If you can admit before God that you are a guilty sinner, and deserve His judgment, and then ask Him to forgive you and accept you, not only can He forgive you, but He promises to do so, through the payment Jesus has made for your sins on the cross.

Yes, I am able, and obligated to truly forgive others, when I have known the forgiveness of God through Christ.

*"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." Eph. 4:32*

LESSON 19  
The Values of Jesus  
MATTHEW 19

In today's lesson we shall learn about what Jesus Values. We shall discover that Jesus places value on marriage, on children, on eternal life, and on service for God. If we value what Jesus values, then we shall discover not only a successful life in this world, but also an abundant reward in heaven. A man's life is largely defined by what he values, since these shape his decisions, character, and ultimately his destiny, as we shall see in this lesson.

Jesus values marriage and teaches some important things about marriage. Firstly he will tell us that in the beginning God made both a man and woman, and brought them together to be united as one flesh. This is very important for us to understand, for when a man and a woman are joined in physical union, they are said to become one flesh, and therefore sexual relations are to be reserved for marriage alone. Sex outside of marriage is always sin, and God will judge those who practice sexual immorality. Jesus also teaches us that a marriage is not only recognized by God, but also joined together by God, and therefore what God has joined no man should separate. That would be fighting against God. The only allowance God would make for a man divorcing his wife was in the case of adultery. In this case a married person is biblically allowed to divorce their married partner, although they might also choose to forgive, if their partner has confessed, forsaken, and sought forgiveness for their sin. Divorce is never pleasing to God, and should always be the last resort, and only when the adulterer refuses to repent. If someone divorces for any reason other than adultery, and they marry another, they are considered an adulterer; and if someone marries anyone who is unlawfully divorced, they too commit adultery. God holds all marriage as a sacred covenant, not to be broken, and all people should respect marriage, whether it is their own marriage, or someone else's marriage. Never be guilty of destroying what God has brought together.

The disciples were concerned after hearing Jesus teach about marriage, for they feared that marriage was too difficult for men to manage, if they were not allowed to divorce their wives. They suggested it might be better not to marry at all. Jesus answered them, and said that some could accept being single, as an option, to help them serve the kingdom of God, but this would not be acceptable to most men. Some men are Eunuchs by birth, or by choice. This means some men have been damaged, so that they cannot have sex or have children, or some simply choose not to marry, so that they can give their heart and time entirely to God. It is not easy for men to make this choice, but some do so, and God will honor those who honor and love him. Daniel of the Old Testament is an example of a man who was a Eunuch, and lived a life entirely dedicated to God.

Jesus also values children, as we learned also in Matthew chapter 18. When some people brought their children to Jesus, asking him to bless their children, the disciples rebuked them. Perhaps the disciples were like so many people, who think children are an annoyance, and need to be chased away. Jesus was not happy with His disciples, and was glad to bless the children and place his hands on them. He loved the children, and said no one should forbid them from coming to him. He said that the kingdom of God was for these little ones. This teaches us something very important about small children. They are under God's protection, and spared his judgment, for they have not yet reached an age of accountability before God. If a young child should die, they would be taken to heaven, their sin being graciously covered through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When a child reaches the age where they can understand the gospel, and they still reject God's salvation, then they will be held accountable before God for their sins, and could end up in Hell if they die without accepting Jesus as their Savior. Just think of the many young children around you, and when you look into their little faces, remember you are looking at the citizens of heaven. This should make us careful of how we treat little children, for they belong to God and his kingdom.

A young man came to Jesus seeking eternal life. He called Jesus good, and wanted to know what good things he could do to gain eternal life. Jesus immediately addresses the problem of the young man's perception of what is good. He thought he was good, and could do something good to get to heaven. Jesus has to quickly point out that only God is good. When Jesus puts him to the test of whether he has kept God's commands, he claims he has done all these things since his youth. So Jesus tests him a little further and asks him to sell all his possessions, give his money to the poor, and then come and follow him. The young man went away sad, for he had great possessions. The man wanted eternal life, but he did not value it more than his possessions. Maybe he thought eternal life could be bought for a cheap price. Eternal life is a free gift for those who want it, but it did not come to us at a cheap price. Christ had to suffer and die for our sins, so that we might receive this gift. To receive God's salvation, requires an entire change of attitude about life and values. No longer does the follower of Jesus care about riches in this world, but he only cares about serving God, and storing up treasure in heaven. A man, who loves riches, is a man who will likely never make it to heaven. Jesus said it would be easier to pass a camel through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The problem is that a man must let go of all his earthly trust in riches, before he can enter the gate of heaven. If he tries to cling to anything, it will keep him from entering heaven. The lesson is clear, unless a man is willing to forsake all that this world offers, he will never be able to receive God's gift of salvation.

Peter speaks up at this point, and asks the Lord what reward the disciples would receive, for they had left all their jobs, family, and everything else to follow the Lord. Jesus said for them, they would sit on 12 thrones with him in His kingdom, and judge over the 12 tribes of Israel. He also added that if anyone would leave his family or his

possessions to make Christ known, he would receive abundantly in this life, and enjoy eternal life as well. God will richly reward those who make sacrifices for His kingdom and glory.

*But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible". Matt 19:26*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about what Jesus values, including marriage, children, eternal life, and service for God. We also learned about how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into heaven. Some might ask the question, "Is it wrong to want to have more money?"

Money is not man's problem; it is his heart's desire for it that is the problem. There are very few people, who have learned to have the right attitude towards money. Even many Christians, have failed to demonstrate their trust in God, and can fall into the trap of covetousness, selfishness, and the love of money and things. We might ask ourselves, why we want to have more money. Is it because God has not been good to us, because he has not fed and clothed us? Sometimes, we expect to live with not only comfort, but also in some degree of luxury before we think we will be happy. No matter how much money you have, you will never be content; you will always seek after more of it. This is because money does not give us security, at least the security that we really need, and that is the security of our soul. What does it matter if I have all the money in the world, and yet do not know God? When I die the money will do me no good. Because our hearts are so deceitful, we want to believe that we can follow after God, and still follow after riches in this world. Let's be perfectly clear about what the bible teaches about this. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Do not love money, and do not think that if you only had a bit more of it, then everything would be okay. Having more, means more responsibility, and also more worries about losing what you have. If we have the right attitude towards money, we shall see it as God's provision for our needs, and see ourselves as stewards (or managers) of His money. This will cause us to be wise and use money in a way that brings honor and glory to the Lord. Selfishness is not godly, and should not characterize any of God's children, although men are by nature quite selfish. The Christian should be led by the Holy Spirit to share, and lend assistance to others. When we have a heart of generosity, then God may allow us to handle more resources, not to use it on ourselves, but to be a help to others in need.

Many young people want to pursue higher education, so that they can get a good job, and a better life for themselves and their family. This seems like a good goal in life, but we should be careful in advising young people, not to seek after riches, just so they can be rich, or so they can feel secure in a world that offers little security. The greatest advice we can give to a young person starting out in life is to put their trust in the Lord, and allow Him to guide their lives. He may call them to have much, or to have little, but if they have Him, they will have all the riches they need for this life, and for the next. Remember many rich people in the end will be shamed, because of their selfish living, while many poor people will be honored because they had their trust in the Lord.

*"But many who are first will be last, and the last first." Matthew 19:30*

LESSON 20  
The Kingdom of Jesus  
MATTHEW 20

In today's lesson we shall learn about equality, and greatness in the Kingdom of Jesus, and also we shall learn about the rejection and the compassion of King Jesus. Jesus rewards his followers according to His goodness, and not what they think they deserve. Greatness is measured not by high position and power, but by a willingness to humbly serve the needs of others. To be great in His kingdom means a willingness to suffer with Him, and to help others in need.

Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of God to his disciples. He said a landowner went out in the morning and hired some workers to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them one days wages for their work, and sent them into the fields to work. Later in the morning he found others who needed work to do, so he also sent them to work in the field, then around noon he found more needing work, so he also sent them to work agreeing to pay what was right. Around 3pm he found more men needing work and so also sent them into his vineyard to work. At last around 5pm he found some more and even though the workday was nearly over he sent them to work also, and agreed to give them what was right. At the end of the workday the landowner begins to pay his workers starting with those who were the last to come to work, and paying them all the same wage for one days work. This made some complain, since they had worked all day, and others only worked for one hour, and yet were made equal to them in wages. The response of the landowner, was that it was not wrong for him to pay them what they had agreed to work for, and if he should choose to be generous to others, they have no reason to complain, for he may do as he wishes with his money to help others.

The lesson that Jesus teaches through this parable is that the Lord rewards his children and servants, not according to what they think they deserve, but according to his generosity, and we can certainly be thankful for that. The landowner did not hire people late in the day because he needed extra work done, but because he wanted to help some who had no work, to earn some money. He was doing a service for others, not thinking about his own needs. Jesus teaches us that his kingdom is based upon the principle of grace and goodness, not contracts and negotiated salaries. No one deserves to receive God's grace, or to serve in His kingdom, but in His sovereignty He chooses and blesses as He pleases. We should be very grateful for the portion he gives freely to us, whether small or great, because we did not deserve anything.

Jesus foretells his disciples of their going to Jerusalem, where he would be betrayed, condemned, handed over to the gentiles, mocked, scourged, crucified, and then on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day rise from the dead. Jesus mentions 12 specific details about what was going to take place in the near future, and everything happened exactly as he had foretold. After these events took place, his disciples would be convinced of the authority of Jesus, and that He was God's true messenger. No other religion in the world can be verified by the prophetic accuracy that we find in the bible. False religion can be easily discerned when they make prophecies, which do not come to pass. Some people are teaching today that the world will end in May 2011, but when that day comes and goes, we shall know if this was a false religion or not.

The mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked if they could be granted to sit at his right and left in His kingdom. Jesus addressed John and James and questioned whether they could drink the cup, which he drank, and be baptized with his baptism. John and James said they could, but hardly understood what they were saying. Jesus refers to the cup of his suffering, and to the baptism of his sorrow, rejection, and death, and said that indeed they also would suffer and die as his followers, but that to sit in positions of honor at his right and left, was not for him to grant, but it would be awarded to those who are worthy.

The other disciples were upset with John and James, for trying to grasp at power and position, and so Jesus used this occasion to speak to his disciples about true greatness in His kingdom, and how it was opposite to being great in this world. In the world men seek high position and power and believe this to establish their greatness, but in Jesus kingdom, the greatest is the servant, not the master. It is the one who is willing to humble himself, and serve the needs of others, that shall reflect God's heart. It is the humble who will be considered great in God's kingdom. He himself came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.



When Jesus departs from the city of Jericho, there is a great crowd of people following him, and two voices are crying out for mercy as Jesus passed by. The two blind men that were calling out for mercy may have been blind physically, but they could see through the eyes of faith, for they believed Jesus to be the son of David, which meant they believed he was God's Messiah. The crowd warned them to be quiet, for they saw these men as an annoyance. However Jesus stopped and called out to them, asking what they wanted. He took compassion on them, and touched their eyes. Immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him. Jesus is the Light, and He is the Life. He gives spiritual sight to those who believe in Him. He is not like the crowd, who think people in need are a nuisance. He seeks out the needy, the lost, the blind, the hurting, and the wounded, in order to offer them help and healing. He is not only interested in providing physical sight, but more importantly spiritual sight, so others will come to know and follow Him as Savior and Lord.

*"Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave." Matt 20:26,27*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about the Kingdom of Jesus, and about the principles of grace and greatness in His kingdom. We also learned about the compassion of the King, and his prophecy about his rejection at Jerusalem. Someone might ask the question, "Can men still give new prophecies today?"

There are many people today claiming to be prophets for God, and prophesying all kinds of things to their congregations. We should be very cautious when we hear these claims, and remember the biblical test for prophecy found at Deuteronomy 18:20-22. These verses teach us that a when someone claims to be a prophet, but their words do not come to pass, then they were worthy to be put to death. Now today, we are not going to go around killing these false prophets, but be assured that God hates those who pretend to be speaking for God, but really are false prophets.

The scriptures would indicate to us that the special gift of prophecy would be done away with after the age of the apostles. Prophecy was the method God used to speak to His people in an age when the bible was not yet complete, and also to authenticate His words spoken by the apostles. Today we have the bible in it's completion, and we read that God had given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3). This means that the scriptures reveal to us all that He wants us to know about Christ, and therefore how to live before him in godliness. The gift of prophecy was a sign gift, but its usefulness was superseded by a greater and more perfect revelation given in the completed canon of the Holy Scriptures.

Men have always had a fascination with prophecy, and many who have claimed to foretell events in the future, have time and again proven to be wrong. All that God wants us to know about the future, he has revealed to us in His word, and so if someone claims to know things about the future, that are not from God's word, then we can know that they are a false prophet.

Some have been saying the world will end on a certain day in 2011. They support this prophecy from various scriptures, and if we are not careful in our study of the word of God, we could easily fall prey to this teaching, and look foolish, when the prophecy is proven false. This particular prophecy has been postulated as a truth hidden in scripture, but now revealed to the elect. The scriptural basis for the prophesy rests upon some interpretations of scripture in 1 Peter 3 referring to one day as a thousand years, and applying this prophetically to the 7 days before Noah's flood, and then extrapolating it to mean 7000 years from Noah's flood until God judges the world, which they claim will be in 2011. It is certainly an interesting theory, but there is little if any merit to infer this meaning from the text. One has to stretch the meaning beyond the context to arrive at this fanciful interpretation. This prophecy lacks credibility because it is a contrived interpretation, and certainly not the plain meaning of the text.

Men who fancy themselves as prophets with special insights, and prophecies that extend beyond the plain teachings of scripture, are dangerous and deceptive, and Christians should be on their guard against such claims. It is better, and much safer, to listen to God speak through his word, then to listen to men speak things not found in God's word.

*"But whether there are prophecies, they will fail... For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." 1Cor 13:7-10*

LESSON 21  
**Jesus Enters Jerusalem**  
MATTHEW 21

In today's lesson we learn about the day Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, purged the temple, and then was met with indignation from the chief priests and elders. We will learn some lessons about how people respond to Jesus with kindness, or with honor, and some with criticism. We also will learn about how we should not use religion for making money, or getting honor from men. Also Jesus will give us lessons about the power of faith, and the sad future of those who are faithless and fruitless.

Jesus asked his disciples to go to a nearby village and bring him a young donkey to ride upon. He assured them that if any asked why they were taking the donkey, and they said the Lord needed it, that he would gladly let them take the donkey. Jesus clearly knew the place and the owner of the donkey, and that he would be very happy to let the Lord use his property. Certainly Jesus deserves every kindness we give to Him, and we should be so very willing to lend Him anything that He would like to use, such as our money, our time, our skills, our home. The Christians will be glad to share whatever he has for the Lord.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, and this may have been a very humble way for a king to come to his people, but this shows how Israel did not recognize or honor him, and this humble presentation of the king was foretold by the prophet Zechariah 500 years earlier. Though His entrance into the city was humble, still many were glad to see Him, and honored Him as the long expected Messiah, shouting "Hosanna to the son of David".

In Jerusalem Jesus went to the temple and he drove away all those selling and moneychangers. He cried out that the people had changed His father's house from a place of prayer to a den of thieves. He was eaten up with zeal. He felt so passionately about this abuse of religion, that it brought out his righteous anger as overturned tables, and drove away those who were making money from religion. True Christianity is not a business of making money, although so much of what is done in churches today, follows this sad and perverse course. God delights in our sincere prayers, and our drawing near to Him, but despises when men offer spiritual services for a charge. This is a great abomination to God, and when you see and hear men using church services to make money, you can be sure that God is angry and will judge this hypocrisy.

The children were admiring and honoring Jesus for his righteous actions, and seeing in Him the one they believed to be their Messiah. The children's praise of Jesus makes the chief priests and scribes indignant, but Jesus defends them by quoting from a Psalm of David, which said that God had ordained praise from the mouth of infants. The children knew more, by their faith, than the priests knew through all their learning.

As Jesus left Jerusalem he wanted to take some fruit from a fig tree, but when he found none, he condemned the tree, and it immediately withered. This was a picture of the unfruitfulness of Israel, and how they too would also be condemned, and their blessings given to other people who would love God. Jesus teaches his disciples that faith was powerful, and could even move mountains, because if God wills it to be so, then nothing is too difficult for God to accomplish, and God answers prayers made in faith.

The chief priest and elders come to question Jesus by what authority he was acting, and Jesus knew they were hoping to trap Him in his words, so he turned things around on them, and asked them to first answer a question concerning John the Baptist. He asked if John's baptism was from men or from God, and they discussed the question among themselves, and realized they were trapped, for if they said it was of man, then the crowds would turn against them, for they all counted John as a prophet, but if they said his baptism was from God, then Jesus would tell them why did you not submit to him. They could not answer and so they said they did not know where his baptism was from, and thus Jesus said neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. Those who try to resist God's wisdom will in the end look very foolish.

Jesus goes on to speak in parables to help these proud religious Jews the error of their ways. He speaks of two sons, one who at first does not obey His father, but later repents and does what was asked of him. The other son said he would obey, but never did what was asked of him. Jesus told this to the Jews, to show them they were like the son who said he would obey, but never submitted to will of the Father. Next Jesus tells a parable about a landowner who leased out his vineyard, and at harvest time sent servants to collect his share from the harvest, but those who leased the land beat and killed the servants. Then at last he sent his son, in hopes they would respect him and give him his due, but they also conspired against the son, and killed him. Then Jesus plainly tells the Jews that they refused the kingdom of God, while other sinners and harlots were entering into God's kingdom. The parable was given to bring them under conviction of their own treachery against God. They were so proud, and thought that their spiritual authority over Israel could not be questioned, and those who did would be persecuted or killed. They would not recognize any authority other than their own; even when God had sent messengers like John or Jesus to their nation. They rejected John, and now they also were rejecting God's son, and wanted to have him killed, so they could keep their position of honor before men. It is this religious pride that will cause many to lose out on God's blessing and salvation, and they will be cast out from God's kingdom. Be sure you are not lifted up in pride, and think you are so

wise, that no one else can teach you, lest you also be in danger of rejecting God's salvation through Christ, or condemn those who are God's children.

*"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" Matt 21:42*

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about the Jesus entering into Jerusalem, and how people showed kindness, praised Him, and honored Him, but the proud religious leaders criticized and questioned his authority. We saw how these leaders loved to hold onto their position and power over the people. In the end these blind leaders will lose everything because of their faithless and fruitless behavior. We learned also that some were using the temple as a place to make money from those going to pray or to worship God. Someone might ask the question, is it proper for church leaders to ask the congregation to give more money into the collection of the church?

Christians have been conditioned to accept that church services will always include appeals for money, and even multiple collections. The congregation is made to feel obligated to bring money not just once, but over and over again. This is supposedly to support God's work, but may end up being used for the comforts and luxury of the Pastors home, car, and clothes. Church leaders know how to use certain bible verses to convince their congregation to give more abundantly, with a promise that God will bless them. Such tactics of exploiting the church are very wicked, and that which will bring about God's wrath, on ungodly men who use religion as a means to make money for their own pockets. The practice is so widespread, that everyone expects the preacher to have his hand out waiting for any gifts from listeners. We see them often on the street-corners, or on public transportation, peddling the word of God for monetary gains. I am not trying to condemn every honest man of God, who preaches the word sincerely, but when a man begs for money, he is suggesting that God is poor, and needs his servants to plead with people to give something to support His cause. God owns everything, and does not need to beg for money through preachers. This practice is a blight on the church, and all thoughtful Christians should discern the error of preachers who beg for money, avoiding such practices, by not support them. Jesus never begged for money, nor did he teach His disciples to beg for support. We do not see this anywhere in our New Testament. The servants of Christ live by faith, trusting in God alone for their support, and serve God out of love and gratitude, and not because of need, or love of money.

The New Testament does teach us that each Lord's day every believer should lay up in store a gift for the Lord to put into the collection. This includes all Christians whether rich or poor, for each is asked to give according as the Lord has prospered them. If they can put in a few coins, then it is accepted based on what they have, and not what they do not have. Those who have more should also add more to the collection. This instruction is given to us in 1Corinthians 16, and it applies to all believers, teaching the manner in which each should regularly give into the collection of the church. This does not support in anyway the pleading of church leaders, for people to give, and give again. It is an individual exercise of faith, and an act of loving obedience and worship. The collection plate can be passed around to the believers each Sunday morning, without any need to appeal for people to give. Christians who know their responsibility will gladly give, if they know the gifts are being used for the glory of God, and the spread of the gospel, and not for building a palace for their pastor to enjoy. Sadly some sincere Christians are discouraged from attending church services because of the constant pleas for more money. A spirit of love and giving should characterize Christian gatherings, and not an atmosphere of greed and exploitation of the poor.

*"On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper."*  
1Cor 16:2

LESSON 22  
The Wisdom of Jesus  
MATTHEW 22

In today's lesson will learn about the wisdom of Jesus in dealing with proud religious people, and how God will judge those who refuse the invitation to honor His Son.

Jesus tells a parable about a king's invitation to the wedding of his son. The king invited many guests to come to the wedding of his son, but some made light of it, while others had more important personal matters to attend to, and others abused and killed the king's servants. When the king heard about the wicked men who killed his servants, and rejecting his kind invitation, he sent his army to destroy those men and burn their city. These men should have honored their king, but instead they despised him and insulted him greatly. This pictures for us how some people respond to God's invitation to salvation and to heaven. God sends his messengers, preachers, and evangelists, to share God's grace and forgiveness. Some people make light of it, and do not care to hear the message or respond. Others just feel they have too many personal things to attend to. Worst of all, are those people who openly rebel against God's servants, abusing, insulting, persecuting, or even killing them.

The king intended to honor his son, so he sent out more servants into the highways to find whoever was willing to come to the wedding feast. They brought in many guests, and the banquet hall was full of guests. This reminds us of how Jesus came into the world with an offer of salvation for the Jews, but many of them stubbornly refused to respond to the invitation, and so the offer they rejected went out to all nations. Today the scripture tells us that whosoever will, may come. We are all invited to share in the honor of the king's Son, that is our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to honor God's son, will meet with God's judgment in a coming day. In the parable there was one man found among the guests not wearing a wedding garment. It was a tradition to provide garments for guests to wear at a wedding, and if someone did not wear the garment that was provided, it would have been very insulting to the host of the wedding. This is like people who try to come to heaven with their own righteousness, and not the righteousness that God provides through Christ. It is highly insulting to God to present him with our good works for salvation, when he has already freely provided us the garments of salvation, through the work of Christ. If we refuse God's way of salvation, we can expect God's severe judgment. The man in the story, is said to be cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus ended this story with the familiar phrase, "For many are called, but few are chosen", and this means that while many are called by God to receive salvation, there are only a few who are actually saved, because they are the ones who have not only heard the invitation, but have responded to it by accepting God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Jesus spoke this parable to help the Pharisees and other religious leaders understand their own failure to honor God's Son, but they did not hear or appreciate the message he gave them. Instead they tried to trip him in his words. They thought if they asked him a difficult question, and he could not answer it, then they would have a good reason to accuse him. When they asked him about whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, they thought they had him trapped, for if he said no, then he would look like a revolutionary against the Roman authority, and they could hand him over to the Romans for prosecution. If he answered yes, then he would lose favor among the Jews, who hated the tyranny of the Roman occupation of their land. But Jesus answered wisely, when he said render to Caesar, what belongs to Caesar, and to God the things that are Gods. By this he neither appeared as a revolutionary against the Romans, but he also gave honor to God. There was no fault that could be found in His words, and those who posed the question marveled at his answer, and then left him. Some Sadducees also thought they would try to trip up Jesus with a hard question. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. They proposed a very unlikely situation, where a Jewish woman lost her husband, and being childless, the man's younger brother was expected to marry her, and raise up children for his dead brother. They imagined this woman lost all of seven brothers in a row to death, and that each of the brothers had sought to fulfill his obligation to raise up children for their elder brother, but all had died childless. Now they said, when this woman dies, whose wife would she be in the resurrection. This, they thought, was a perfect question to trip up Jesus. However, Jesus points out to these men, their lack of understanding of the scriptures. He points out that in the resurrection people will be like the angels, who neither marry, or are given in marriage. He further explains that the scriptures plainly state that God was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. This proved that God was the God of the living and not the dead, because these words were quoted in scripture long after these three men had already died, and God speaks of them as living, thus proving the resurrection.

Jesus then asked the Pharisees a question about King David, quoting him in the Psalms as referring to the Messiah as both his son, but also his Lord. Jesus, asked, how can he be David's son, and also his Lord? No one had an answer, and no one dared to ask him any more questions, lest they be made to look foolish. Jesus is that son of David, who is also His Lord, for he was born from the seed of David, but also was born of Holy Spirit, and is God manifest in the flesh. This was a difficult idea for the Jews to accept, so much so that they sought to kill him for blasphemy, not ever willing to consider that Jesus was indeed the Lord their God. We also need to understand and acknowledge Jesus as Lord, if we want to be saved and go to heaven.

*"For many are called, but few are chosen." Matt 22:14*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about responding to God's invitation, and also about how proud people cannot overcome the wisdom of Jesus. Perhaps someone might ask the question, what shall I do if I cannot understand something written in the bible?

There is a tendency for men to think they can understand God's word, or that they must be able to answer every question of someone who disagrees with them about what they believe. This comes from pride in our hearts, and a desire to be wise and correct in the sight of others. However, we do not know everything, nor shall we ever know all things. Only God has all knowledge. So with my limited knowledge I try my best to understand what I read in the bible, but there will be times when a certain doctrine is beyond my understanding. Perhaps in the future, once I have studied more God will reveal more understanding to me, but I should learn to humbly accept, that I am limited.

If you engage in arguments with others, who disagree with your beliefs, just remember you do not have to pretend that you know everything there is to know about the bible. The bible is able to defend itself, and God will always vindicate His truth. Men, who disagree with the bible, do so for moral reasons, and not from honest intellectual reasons. Men love either their sin or their false religion, and justify themselves by trying to find fault with the bible, as the Sadducees did. But men can argue all they want, the bible will stand, for it is God's word, and no man can refute it, or stand against it, without suffering consequences.

If we want to understand the bible with a view to obey God, then God will be pleased to increase our understanding, and give us answers to others who have not submitted themselves to God's word. All Christians are messengers of light, and seek to help others know about Jesus Christ and the salvation he freely offers. You do not have to be a university professor to explain the simple plan of salvation to others, and so every Christian can share some understanding of the bible, even if they do not know the whole bible very well. Never be proud of your knowledge of the bible, or God will resist you, and you will tend towards spiritual ruin. If someone asks you a question about the bible, that you are not sure how to answer, then admit that you are not sure, but you will try to learn so that next time you meet you can have an answer for them. The Christian should always be learning and reading the bible, so that he can give an adequate answer to those who ask him about his faith, but also never be proud, and think he has to know so much about the bible to ensure his faith is protected. God will look after His truth. Our main job is helping others know the simple gospel message so they can also find their way to heaven. It is not my job to convince others of everything written in the bible. That is not to say that I should not study the bible well, and be prepared to answer honest questions or objections that others might have. Even though I might have a good answer to give to a skeptic, or someone holding false teachings, they might not want to listen to the answer, or just move to some other argument. Some people cannot be convinced because they refuse to see, even when the evidence is presented to them. This was like the Pharisees, who saw all the miracles, heard Jesus wise answers, but were still determined to kill him, because they envied him.

The bible was given to us by our God, who is infinite in knowledge and understanding, and though He has written in a way that we can understand, there are some things concerning God's nature, and his power and knowledge that are simply beyond our grasp. This is because He is God, and we are merely limited creatures that He has made. Thus we read in the bible:

*"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"*Rom 11:33

LESSON 23  
**Jesus Condemns the Pharisees**  
MATTHEW 23

In today's lesson will learn about Jesus condemnation of the proud Pharisees. We can learn well from this lesson, since there are still many people like the Pharisees still with us today.

When Jesus spoke to the crowds about the Pharisees, he speaks openly against them because of their hypocrisy. He points out how they teach the truth and righteousness but they do not do what they teach. They give burdens to men, that they themselves are not willing to carry. Jesus said they sit in *Moses seat*, meaning they act as spiritual leaders of the nation, and judges over the people. The Jewish people were to obey these teachers if they were teaching God's truth, but not to follow their poor example. Jesus shows how the Pharisees were hypocrites in their words and in their works; and how they loved the praise of men. They were proud of their religious clothing, wanted the best seats in the synagogue, and to be called Rabbi. This same spirit of pride is still with us in the church today, for we see pastors trying to impress with their nice attire, or looking for positions of honor in the church, and they love to take titles like Reverend, or Pastor. Jesus clearly said this was wrong, and that the greatest was to be the servant. We should not seek to have privilege and honor for ourselves, taking special titles. The apostles called themselves slaves and servants, and when referring to their apostleship, they do not treat it as a title of honor, but a service to render. They were God's messengers sent to proclaim the gospel, which is what the work of the apostle was. It was not intended as a prestigious title of honor, as many are doing and seeking their own honor.

There are many areas of hypocrisy which the Lord condemned in the Pharisees, such as blocking the road to heaven, taking advantage of poor widows, making long public prayers, making their converts worse than they were before, and swearing by the temple or altar. Here we notice the character of religious hypocrisy, which takes advantage of poor people, robbing them of their resources. They also like to show how spiritual they are by their long prayers. Some put on a good spiritual show and convince everybody what a great man of God they are, and yet all they are motivated by the love of money, are willing to take it from the poor and gullible. They should not have been swearing, or taking oaths by anything, whether temple, or by God who dwelt in the temple; neither by the altar, or by the gift on the altar. They should let their words be true, and perform what they say without taking oaths. They were straining a gnat, (a very tiny insect), and swallowing a camel. They were so busy thinking about minute details of religion, that they did not see how they had neglected the larger and more important issues like honesty, justice, and mercy. Jesus describes them, as cups that are clean on the outside, but inside are filthy. Their hearts were filthy like a decaying corpse in a grave. The outside might look beautiful, but inside they were filled with extortion and self-indulgence. The phony face of false spirituality can fool many people, but it will never fool God, and someday will meet with His severe wrath and judgment.

Jesus tells the Pharisees to fill up on their guilt, and this speaks of God's coming judgment on them, knowing the course of destruction they were on. He calls them a bunch of snakes, and questions how they will escape from their path leading to hell. He says they have killed, crucified, and scourged God's messengers, and they were guilty of all the innocent blood that had been shed from the time of Abel to Zechariah, that is the entire Old Testament period. Both Abel and Zechariah were murdered by their brethren. This strong rebuke and condemnation of the Pharisees, should teach us how much God hates religious hypocrisy. There are many hypocrites in the church today, and we can easily identify them, as they go about in all their pride, drawing attention to themselves, and how spiritual they think they are. Wearing clothing to impress others, and praying and preaching in ways to show off before men, but it is all rotting bones and putrid in God's sight. Someday God will bring down heaven's judgment on the men who have used religion to boost their own egos, fill their own pockets, and bask in the praise and honor of men.

A godly man is a humble man, who is interested in helping and serving others, not himself. He serves the poor, and does not steal from them. He does not make a show out of his knowledge, prayers or giving, but uses whatever God has given to him in order to serve the needs of those around him, and he does so with a heart of love for God, and not from a heart of self-indulgence and covetousness.

It is remarkable that Jesus spoke these words so freely and publicly. Undoubtedly some of the Pharisees heard these things, and it made their anger rage against Jesus. Jesus spoke the truth, knowing it would incite their anger, and inevitably bring about his execution. He spoke because the truth needed to be said, and the hypocrisy needed to be confronted. They should have humbly repented, but instead they set themselves on a course to kill Jesus, because of his harsh condemnation of them. Sometimes the truth is very painful, but the wise and humble will learn by correction, but the proud and foolish man will never accept a rebuke. There are times we need to be courageous to confront the evil in others, even though it may be costly to us. Those who love God should defend righteousness, and God's honor.

*"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren." Mt 23:14*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and how Jesus condemned their evil ways. They loved people to call them Rabbi, and receive praise from men. Someone might ask, 'what titles are appropriate for Christian leaders to take for themselves?'

Quite often we hear men calling themselves Reverend, or Doctor, or Most Reverend, and some even go so far to call themselves Most Right Reverend. I hear some taking titles as Pastor, Apostle, Prophet, or Evangelist. There seems to be no end to these titles that are given for the distinction and honor of men.

Well, judging from what Jesus said to us in this chapter, we can see the folly of men taking titles for themselves. I believe he meant this to apply more widely than the title Rabbi, which simply means teacher. The spiritual title 'father' should only be given to God the Father, and not to men who rule over their congregations. Also we learn from the apostle's example, for they did not heap names to themselves. You will not find anywhere in the New Testament Paul referred to as, the "Apostle Paul", but rather Paul an apostle. The difference in these is very important, for in the one case it would be a dignified title, and in the other case a service for Christ. None of these men are referred to with titles such as Evangelist Philip, or Prophet John, or Teacher Timothy. All are addressed by their common names, with their work or ministry perhaps also given, but never as a title.

Now let's also be clear that designations of, 'Apostles and Prophets' are not titles, but descriptions of their service, and these ministries are no longer in effect. The original apostles are gone, and there was never an intention for this ministry to be continued. Both the ministry of apostles and prophets were designed to lay the foundation of the gospel in the first century, but once the foundation was laid, and the canon of scripture completed, there was no longer a need for further prophetic or apostolic ministries to continue. I know some might disagree with this view, but it can be shown clearly from the scriptures, but we do not have the time or space to talk of this in detail now. The title Reverend is especially wrong, for the term only appears once in the scripture, and refers to God alone. For men to take an attribute that belongs to God alone is a very serious sin indeed. The bible says, "Holy and Reverend is his name", and this describes how God's name is to be held in the highest honor. The Hebrew word actually means to hold in fear or awe. Men make a grave error when they take this word and apply it as a title for themselves. Should we hold men in the fear and awe, which belongs to God alone? I think you know the answer.

Well what about the title Pastor or Evangelist. These are ministries that do continue with us today, but these are not intended to be titles, but descriptions of the work some men do. Some do the work of evangelizing, and others look to the spiritual needs of God's people, and therefore pastor them. This is their work, not a title, and you never find it anywhere used as a title in the bible. The word Pastor only occurs once in the New Testament, it is in the plural form, and refers to mature men who care for Christians. Today the name 'Pastor' is so frequently used by men as an official title. Even the terms for *elder* and *deacon*, are not titles, but descriptions of their character and the work that these men do. An elder, means an older man who is spiritually mature, and meets the character qualifications of 1Tim3. They labor at feeding and tending to the spiritual needs of those under their care. We never read of Elder Peter, or Elder Paul. We read however of Peter a servant of Jesus Christ, who was also an elder; which describes his service. We do not say Plumber Peter, or Mechanic Michael, so why must we say Pastor Paul?

There are no titles that Christian leaders should take for themselves, but they might speak of their ministry or work as an evangelist, teacher, preacher, elder, deacon. It is always proper for any of God's people to accept the name 'Christian' or 'brother', or to be called a bondservant of Jesus Christ.

*"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?"*  
1Cor 3:5

LESSON 24  
**Prophecy of Jesus Return**  
MATTHEW 24

In today's lesson we shall hear Jesus prophecy of His coming again to the earth in Judgment. Though we may not understand all the details of this prophecy about Jesus coming again, He has given us enough knowledge to warn us and prepare us for His return.

There are plenty of different interpretations of how these future events will unfold. There seems to be some confusion, because many see the future coming of Christ, as a singular event. However a careful study of this passage, and others in the New Testament will show us that the coming of Christ happens in successive stages. First, Jesus will commence the Day of Judgment on the earth, what the bible calls 'The Day of the Lord, by coming for His church. This is what is commonly called the Rapture, and is spoken of in 1Thess 4, 1Cor 15, and alluded to by Jesus in John 14. The rapture involves the removal of the church from the earth, and this will be followed by a period of God's judgment on the earth for 7 years, which is called the tribulation. The great tribulation will be the second half of these seven years, after the abomination of desolation. At the end of the 7-year tribulation Jesus will return with his people to overthrow the enemies of Israel. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, and every eye shall see him coming on the clouds and with great glory. He will return to the Mount of Olives, and will establish his kingdom, ruling and reigning from Jerusalem for 1000 years. This is a quick overview of the future prophetic calendar as it relates to the stages of Christ coming again to judge the world.

In Matthew 24 when the disciples asked Jesus about the end of the age, and his coming again, Jesus provided them much detail. This detail is primarily concerned with the 7-year tribulation period, when God will judge the nations, and then rescue Israel from her enemies, when He comes again in glory. This does not deal with the church, or the rapture of the church, but it deals with the nation Israel and the tribulation period. We will not have time to cover all the specific details of Jesus prophecy, but we can look at some of the interesting aspects of this prophecy, and find things to help us identify when these things will take place.

Jesus mentions that false Messiah's will appear at that time. Messiah is the word for Christ, which means anointed one, and we hear plenty of preachers today talking about being anointed of God. This may indicate what Jesus meant by these false Messiah's who are claiming to be God's messengers today. Likely this is referring to men during the future tribulation who will arise claiming to be God's anointed.

There are many details mentioned about this tribulation period, or events leading up it; namely wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes, which are called the beginning of sorrows. Today we are seeing these things happening increasingly around the globe. We know of great earthquakes taking thousands of lives in Haiti and China. The spread of disease and famine is also very prevalent in our world today. If these are just the beginning of sorrows, then when the full weight of God's judgment comes upon the world, it will be a time of very great sorrow, and horrific destruction.

During the tribulation, the church is gone to heaven, and Israel becomes the focus of God's attention and interest, but they also are hated by all nations. We already see how many of the Arab nations despise Israel, and want to destroy her. There has been tremendous persecution against the Jews in the past century, and this still continues today. This will only increase through the tribulation, until all nations are against Israel and seek her destruction. There will be false prophets who deceive, and lawlessness will abound. Some will faithfully preach the gospel, and there will something called the abomination of desolation. Many believe this to be the anti-Christ setting himself up in the temple, and calling himself God, and requiring others to worship him. This happens at the mid point of the tribulation, and will bring upon the earth God's wrath in what is called the great tribulation. There will be death everywhere, the sun and moon will be darkened, stars will fall, and the powers of heaven shaken. We cannot tell exactly what all this will mean, but it is global, and of such power and terror that even the heavens will shake. There will be a sign given in the heavens concerning the son of Man, which means that is Jesus is coming!

The angels gather the elect. The fig tree when it sprouts tells us that summer is approaching, and Jesus said when we begin to see these signs taking place, we know that His coming is drawing near. Therefore we are warned to be watchful, and wait for His coming. Though no one knows the day or the hour, we know he could come at anytime. Those who claim to know are arguing with Jesus, who said you do not know. I would rather believe Jesus, then those who think they are wiser than He is. Jesus said heaven and earth would pass away, but His words would never pass away. Jesus said the coming Day of Judgment would happen like it did in the days of Noah. Everyone was just eating and drinking and living their lives without any concern of God's coming judgment, but then in one day the flood hit them, and they had no time to react, and they were all swept away in God's wrath. The wise servant of Jesus will be waiting and watching for His return, and busy himself in looking after His master's household. Those who care for God's people, feeding them the word of God, will be rewarded when the Lord comes again, but those who do evil, will be cut in pieces and left with hypocrites to suffer agony and weeping in Hell.

*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Matt 24:35*



### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus prophecy of His return to earth someday, and the judgments of God during the tribulation period. Someone might ask, if the Lord is coming very soon what should I do to prepare myself for that day?

All that the Lord was telling His disciples was not intended to just satisfy their curiosity, but was intended to help them live righteously before God. Prophecy should lead us to fear God's coming judgment, and serve Him well. That is why Jesus talked about the faithful servant who was busy looking after His master's things, while he awaits the return of His master. When Jesus spoke to His disciples about His return, he knew that they would no longer be around to experience much of these things, but he still told them, so that they might learn to live with a constant expectation that their master may come at any moment. There was a partial fulfillment of God's judgment, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, but this prophecy of Jesus reaches well beyond the events of the destruction of one city by the Romans 1900 years ago. Jesus prophecy talks about all nations coming under God's wrath and judgment.

We know that the Lord maybe coming very soon, for many of the signs of which he spoke of in this prophecy are now taking place. For instance, since Israel became a sovereign nation in 1948, they have faced several wars, and the enemies of Israel continue to hate and seek her destruction. The increase in large catastrophic events like earthquakes and floods are happening increasingly, as well as the spread of disease and famine as the world's population rapidly increases. All these should tell us that the Lord's coming is at hand, and we should expect Him at anytime, but most of the world will be taken by surprise and be swept away in God's wrath and judgment.

The most important thing a person can do to prepare for Jesus return is to make sure they have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior. Apart from the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ, the Day of the Lord will be a very terrible time to face. Those who know the Lord shall escape God's wrath and be taken away in the rapture. So the first and most important way to prepare is to accept the Lord as your Savior, then you will be ready, and taken out the world, before God sends down his wrath on the ungodly.

Christians can prepare for the coming of the Lord, by preaching the gospel to the lost souls they come in contact with, and serving the Lord in the church. Jesus left His people with work to do, and we should not be lazy about doing His business. Some call themselves Christians, and refer to Jesus as their Lord, but really they act as though He was just a distant friend they visit once in a while. Most of the time they are ruling over their own life, and doing whatever they want to do, building up their own little kingdom on earth. To be a follower of Christ, is to do what He says, and fulfill His purposes in serving in His church. When the Lord comes what will you be doing? Will you be busy looking after yourself, and your future here on earth, or will you be investing into the kingdom of God. It would a terrible thing for the Lord to come and find you caught away by some sin. Some say they love God, and show up on Sunday to worship the Lord, and yet live in their sins day by day. If we know the Lord, who is holy and righteous, is coming very soon, then we shall hate to be caught in our sin. The coming of the Lord should cause us not only to keep busy serving in His kingdom, but also living a life that is holy and pleasing to the Lord, then we shall be well prepared to meet Him.

*"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Mt 24:44*

LESSON 25  
Entering Jesus' Kingdom  
MATTHEW 25

In today's lesson we shall more teaching from Jesus that tells us about His return someday. Once again Jesus uses parables to teach us about what His coming will be like. These parables in today's lesson are designed to warn us to be waiting, ready, and busy doing His work, so we can be ready for His return.

The first parable is about 10 virgins. We are told that 5 of the virgins were wise and five were foolish. The virgins were waiting for the return of the bridegroom, but because the time was late, they all fell asleep while waiting for him to come. These were friends of the bridegroom who waited for him to return after going to the home of the bride, to collect his bride and bring her to his own home. They would hear the news that he was returning with his bride, and they would go out to meet him and escort the procession into the bridegroom's home. Unfortunately 5 of the virgins in our story ran out of oil, and asked the others to share some of theirs, but the wise ones who had prepared themselves with extra oil, were not willing to share theirs, unless they also run out of oil. They counseled the foolish ones to go and buy their own oil, but while they went to buy oil, the bridegroom had already come and enters into his house and the doors were shut. When the foolish cried "Lord, Lord open to us" The answer came back "I do not know you".

The lesson of this parable is that we should be prepared for the coming of the Lord, who is coming to take His bride back to heaven, which is His church. Those who have sufficient oil, speaks to us of those who are true Christians, and have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. These are the ones who are prepared to go with the Lord when He comes from heaven, because they received the Lord Jesus as their Savior. The foolish virgins picture for us those who are not true Christians, but they think they are. They are just like the other virgins in every way, except they lacked enough oil, which is an illustration of the Holy Spirit. We know they are fake Christians for we see them left outside, and crying to the Lord to let them in, but he replies "I do not know you". The key to salvation is a personal relationship to Jesus Christ by faith, and if you do not know Him personally in your life, then you are like one of these foolish virgins who was left outside.

The next parable is about a man who travels, but leaves some money with his servants to look after until he returns. He gives each one according to his ability, and so one man receives five talents, another two, and the last one receives one talent. The servant who received the 5 talents traded with the money and managed to make another 5 talents with his master's money. Also the one with 2 talents double the money that was entrusted to him. But the man with one talent went and hid the talent in a hole in the ground. When the master return a long while later, the servant with 5 talents returned the 5 talents with the additional 5 talents he had gained, and likewise the servant with 2 returned the gains he had made, but the man with one talent returned the one talent without any gain. The master was pleased with the first two servants and invited them into joy of their Lord, and gave them greater responsibilities. The servant, who did not make any gains, was rebuked by the master, who said he was a wicked and lazy servant, and so he was cast into outer darkness.

This parable teaches us again about those who are genuine believers, who have produced spiritual fruitfulness in their lives, and contrasted with those who are not genuine believers, who in the end produce nothing of spiritual value. Those who were able to make some gains with the money the master left them, picture for us, what the Christian life is to be like. Christians receive bountifully from the Lord, and according to their abilities, are expected to produce some fruit for God. This means that they should grow up in Christ, become more like Christ, and help serve the body of Christ, and lead souls to Christ. If they cannot produce anything for Christ, then it means they never were true Christians. If you planted some seeds and waited patiently for the plant to grow, but it never grew, and never produced any fruit, then you would come to the conclusion that the seeds had no life in them. The same is true of people who say they are Christians, but never bear any spiritual fruit.

The final story here is not really a parable, but an account of what it will actually be like when the Lord returns to earth in judgment. With all the nations before Him, he will separate the people, like a shepherd dividing his sheep from his goats. These animals are different, but all mixed together. So when the Lord comes their will be a mixture of two types of people, those who are true followers of Christ, and those among them who are false. He will bring his true followers to his right hand, which is the place of honor and privilege, and the false professors, will be placed on his left awaiting His judgment. The righteous, on His right hand, are rewarded according to their many acts of kindness done to Him, which He recounts to them. This surprised them, for they did not recognize when they had done these kindnesses for Him. But He tells them, that as much as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me. When he speaks in judgment against those on His left he tells them that they never served him in anyway the kindnesses that those on His right had done. Therefore these were cast into the fires of Hell, prepared for the Devil and his angels (demons).

What we learn from this is that our works show the reality of our faith. If we are willing to serve the needs of others in the church, it means the Holy Spirit living inside has guided us into spiritually fruitfulness. When our lives do not produce good works to serve the needs of others around us, it shows that we are not genuine believers. This is a good test to see if we are really saved or not.

All three of these teachings about the Lord's return, show us that there will be a separation between those who are true believers and those who are not, and it is based upon whether a person has the Holy Spirit, and how that produces spiritual fruitfulness. If you have no fruit, then you do not have the Holy Spirit. Today I hope you will be wise and asked Jesus to be your Savior, and so prepare yourself for His return.

*"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."* Mt 25:13

### **Today's Bible Question:**

Today we have been learning about what it will be like when Jesus returns to judge the world in righteousness, and how he will separate His true followers, from those who were false Christians. We also heard how some would be judged in the fires of Hell with the Devil and his angels. Someone might ask the question, why would a loving God send anyone into Hell?

God never sends anyone to Hell, but he does desire that everyone repent and accept His free offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. God wants all people to live in heaven with Him, and that is why He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. We read in this passage today about the place called Hell, a place of fire and torment, where it is described as outer darkness, and where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. We have been warned about this terrible place, so that we will avoid going there. It is of God's mercy that we are warned, and if we are wise, we will do what God requires to avoid this terrible and eternal judgment. There is an important phrase we should take notice of in this passage, namely that the place of fire and torment was created for the Devil and his angels. What this teaches us is that God never created the sufferings of Hell for people like you and me, but rather for the fallen angels, and for Lucifer, the Devil, who is also a fallen angel. These fallen spirits lived in the splendor of God's presence, and had every joy and blessing, but still pride rose up in Satan's heart and he wanted to be like God. Therefore God cast him out of heaven, and someday will cast him into the eternal fires of His judgment, where he shall never escape. Hell was created for the Devil, and for the evil spirits who followed him in rebellion against God. If men choose the same path of rebellion, then God is left with no other choice than to give them the same judgment. But that is not what God intended or desires. He has gone to the greatest length to save our souls.

In the teaching about separating the sheep and the goats, we will notice that the Lord said to the sheep on his right hand, that they should come and inherit the kingdom, which was prepared from the foundation of the world. God has not only prepared a place of judgment, but he has also prepared a kingdom to inherit. These places of blessing and cursing were both prepared by God from the foundation of the world. God has set a course of judgment, and a plan of reward in motion from the beginning. God in His wisdom and foreknowledge knew that some men would respond to His grace and mercy, and would believe and submit to Jesus as their Savior, and some would choose their own path of rebellion, just like the Devil choose. He therefore has prepared both places of destiny, but never intended for men to go into Hell. If men end up in Hell, it certainly is not God's fault. God has called all men to salvation, but He will not force men to come to heaven, if they prefer to rebel against Him. Hell is a very horrible place, where there will be endless suffering, pain, crying, and darkness. I plead with you to make sure you are prepared and ready to go to heaven, so you never have to enter into that place of eternal sorrow. Heaven is God's desire for you, and today He opens His arms wide to you, and invites you to enter into His kingdom. All He asks of you is to come to Jesus in faith. Ask Jesus to forgive your sins, and to be the Lord over your life. If you ask in sincere faith, then God will save you. In time you should see changes in your life, and spiritual fruit, which shows that the Holy Spirit lives inside of you. Don't be like many church-going people, who say they are a Christian, but can't produce any spiritual fruit in their lives.

*"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"* Matt 25:34

LESSON 26  
**Jesus Betrayed and Arrested**  
MATTHEW 26

In today's lesson we are approaching the climax of Jesus' life and mission. Jesus came to pay the ransom price to purchase us back to God. In this chapter we find Matthew recounting the events that preceded Jesus being sentenced to die by crucifixion. Each gospel writer tells us the details of these events, and in particular the events of the night before he was crucified. It is clear that the Spirit of God wants to teach us through these details, to better understand the sinful nature of man, and to know the grace, mercy, and patience of our God.

The chief priests, along with the scribes and elders of the Jews plotted how they could kill Jesus. Though he had done nothing worthy of death, still these proud men could not stand a young teacher like Jesus winning over the hearts of the people, by His righteous teaching, and healing ministry. Amidst this sad scene of treachery is one woman who anoints Jesus with costly perfume, in preparation for his burial. While the disciples were indignant at this, Jesus said she had done a good work that would be remembered for generations to come. Then we hear about Judas who bargained with the Jewish authorities for 30 pieces of silver, in order to hand Jesus over to them. Judas was a disciple of Jesus, and considered a friend, and yet for a certain price he was willing to betray his good friend, who had never done him any wrong. We see from the example of Judas the wickedness that lies in the heart of man, and how man is deceived and directed by the devil.

The Lord meets in an upper room with His disciples to eat the Passover meal, and also institutes what we today call the Lord's Supper. Jesus said that he wanted his disciples to eat the bread which symbolized his body, and drink from the cup which symbolized his blood which was to be shed for the remission of sins. Today millions of Christians across the globe meet regularly to celebrate this simple remembrance meal. By sharing together this bread and wine, Christians proclaim the death of Jesus. We honor His name, and recall how he gave His life as a ransom for us. It is a great honor to participate at the Lord's Supper, and also a responsibility of everyone who claims Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Jesus foretells how all his disciples would forsake him, and when Peter claims he is willing to die for Him, Jesus has to point out to Peter that he would deny him 3 times before the rooster crowed. Then Jesus takes his disciples to the Mount of Olives, a short walk from Jerusalem, and in the garden he prays. He asked his disciples to pray with him also, but they fall asleep because they were tired. Jesus continues to pray, asking his Father to allow this cup of judgment to pass from him, but also submitting to His will. Jesus knew he was about to face an excruciating and painful death, and is lead to cry out to His father for strength to meet his enemies. We should learn from this that even in the most difficult of circumstances, we could call out to our God, and find strength, grace, and courage to face our greatest trials.

Judas arrives with soldiers to arrest Jesus, but uses a kiss to help identify Jesus to the others. This was a profound act of treachery and irony. One of Jesus disciples strikes with his sword and manages to cut off an ear, but Jesus rebukes him, and says to put away the sword, for those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Jesus reminds us here that He could call on 12 legions of angels to come to His defense, but he was submitting himself to these evil men in order to fulfill God's great plan of salvation. This teaches us that sometimes the ways of God, and His plans require a path of suffering and sorrow. We should not think God always plans to make us prosper and enjoy pleasure, especially when there is sin and rebellion in the world. The way to eternal happiness is a road that leads us through the valley of death.

When Jesus is lead away to the high priest for questioning, they try to find some charge against Him, but could not come up with anything. The high priest finally asked Jesus to tell them plainly if He was the Christ, the Son of God. To this Jesus answered that He was. This caused those present to lash out angrily at Him by striking Him, and spitting at Him. They believed He was blaspheming, by making himself out to be God. Little did they realize that indeed the one they were striking and spitting upon was none other than their creator Himself?

We also have the sad story of how Peter denied His Lord three times. He was fearful to admit His association with Jesus, lest he also is condemned with Him. Peter's courage failed, and when He heard the rooster crow, just as Jesus had earlier prophesied, he was struck with bitter grief, and went outside and wept. So we see how even the closest of friends failed to stand by Jesus in His trial and suffering. In fact all of us must admit that we have failed Him, because of our sinful nature. Jesus stood alone and braved the storm of God's judgment, and this should cause us to bow and worship Him, for He loved us and gave Himself to suffer for our sins. I do hope you will learn how wicked the sinfulness of man is, and see how much you need the mercy of God. He offers you salvation freely through faith. Why not trust in the Lord Jesus today?

*"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Mt 26:28*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. We saw how Judas betrayed the Lord for money, and Peter denied His Lord out of fear. We also saw Jesus instituting a simple meal of remembrance, so that His disciples would continue to remember Him, until His return. Someone might ask the question, it is still necessary and important to celebrate the Lord's Supper today?

On that night in which He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples to, "Do this in remembrance of me". We also notice that the early Christians met regularly, each Lord's Day (that is Sunday), to remember the Lord by taking bread and wine, as the Lord had commanded them. Paul also writes in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11 how Christians are to gather and remember the Lord Jesus, by taking the bread and wine. In fact this is the only regular and formal meeting of the church, as described in the New Testament. We might also meet for the purpose of prayer, teaching, or fellowship, but the early believers main purpose to meet was to celebrate this simple meal together, and take the bread and wine in memory of the death of Jesus for our sakes.

Unfortunately the Corinthian believers were behaving inappropriately at the Lord's Supper. They made it into a common meal, with everyone bringing their own food, and some were eating and drinking much, while others were going hungry. Paul says these was not at all the Lord's Supper, and goes on to explain how Christians are to simply use bread and wine as symbols, and share it among themselves in remembrance of Jesus. He said they had their own homes to eat in, teachings us that the purpose was not to just share a common meal together, but to help believers remember the death of Jesus through the symbols of bread and wine. The point is not to eat, but rather to remember!

The Lord's Supper is very important. Paul says that by this meal we are showing forth the Lord's death until He comes. This means that Christians are to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly until the Lord comes again for His people. Churches have different ways in which they conduct the Lord Supper, but the important thing for us to remember, is the purpose of this practice, and that is to help us remember our Lord Jesus, for He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me". Jesus wants us to think often about how much He loved us, and how He gave His life for us, suffering in order to bring us back to God. The regular gathering for the Lord's Supper should cause us to love our God more and more, bringing forth worship from our hearts, inspiring us to serve Him, and learning to be like Him. I hope at your church you regularly practice this most important remembrance meal, for it is very important to our Lord Jesus, who commanded all of His followers to do this until He comes again.

*"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." 1Cor 11:24*

LESSON 27  
**Jesus Condemned and Crucified**  
MATTHEW 27

In today's lesson we come to the climax of Jesus mission in this world. He came to die for our sins, and we shall see how God used the hands of wicked men to fulfill His purpose, by allowing His beloved Son Jesus to suffer and die in our place. We can only briefly reflect upon this chapter in today's lesson, but I would encourage you to take time to consider and ponder the great things your God has done for you, when He sent His Son to suffer and die for your sins.

In the last chapter we saw how the Jewish authorities were determined to put Jesus to death, accusing Him of blaspheming. Now we find them taking Jesus to Pilate, the Roman Governor, hoping they can get him to do their dirty work of killing an innocent man. Again we meet Judas, who realizing that he had betrayed innocent blood, takes the money back to the chief priests, and offers it back to them. But it was too late, the betrayal had been committed, and when they did not take the money back, Judas threw it down before them, and went out and hanged himself. The priests used the money to buy a field to bury strangers. The lesson of Judas is that those who betray great privilege will have the greatest guilt of all.

When Pilate questioned Jesus he found no fault in him and wanted to release Him, but the Jews kept shouting for his blood. Again and again Pilate tried to settle the crowd and to release Jesus, but the people were determined to have Jesus put to death. Pilate was even warned by his wife, because she had suffered in a dream about Jesus. He thought if he offered to release one prisoner, given the choice between the Barabbas, a notorious murderer, and Jesus, that the Jews would relent and let Jesus go free rather than a murderer, but still they insisted that Jesus be put to death. At last Pilate ordered Jesus to be scourged, thinking if they saw him beaten badly, that perhaps they would be satisfied with this, but they still desired to see him crucified. Pilate then gave in to their cries and sentenced Jesus to be crucified.

When they crucified Jesus, everything happened just as the prophets had foretold centuries earlier. The soldiers gambled for his clothes, and he was nailed to a cross by his hands and feet, and they offered him sour wine with gall. All these things had been prophesied about Him. Darkness covered this scene, and Jesus cried out, "My God, my god, why have you forsaken me", indicating that his sufferings were those foretold in Psalm 22, where this same cry is recorded. After several hours of agony upon the cross, they offered him some sour wine to drink, and after this he yielded up his spirit. Upon his death, the curtain inside the temple was torn from top to bottom, there was an earthquake, and many graves were opened. These signs caused the centurion, and others with him, to say, "truly this was the Son of God".

Some of the women, who had ministered to him, were watching from a distance. Joseph of Arimethea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus, and bury him, and Pilate granted him permission. Joseph wrapped the body in clean linen clothes and laid the body in his own new tomb, which was nearby. He rolled a stone over the entrance of the tomb. The chief priests asked Pilate to send troops to guard the tomb, for they feared some of Jesus disciples might steal his body, and then report he had risen from the dead. It is clear that they had heard this from Jesus teaching, and were determined to get rid of Him and make sure there would be no further reports about Him. Nothing could stop the plan of God to raise up His beloved Son, as we shall learn in our next lesson.

This remarkable story should cause us to reflect on how evil and wicked men can act, because of their pride and envy. These men should have had some sense of justice and righteousness, for they claimed to be God's chosen people, and prided themselves on their knowledge of God's Laws. Yet with all their learning and privilege, they still sought to kill God's Son, pursuing after him with the fury and rage of wild animals. We should also see the incredible love and patience of God, for while evil men were planning to crucify their Savior, God watched on with mysterious silence, as His beloved Son was rejected, despised, forsaken, beaten, mocked, spit upon, and left to die in utter abandonment and agony. The crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ is the means by which God was able to execute his judgment against man's sin. Jesus became a man like us in order to represent us, and bear away our punishment. God is now perfectly pleased with the sacrifice of His son, and calls us to place our trust in Him, so we may be forgiven of our sins, and receive eternal life. If you want to become a child of God, and have your sins washed away, then turn to the Lord Jesus today in faith, and accept His sacrifice for your sins.

*"So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Mt 27:54*

### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about how Jesus was condemned and crucified by wicked men. We saw how Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but in the end gave way to the wishes of the crowd, and ordered Jesus to be beaten and put to death by crucifixion. Someone might ask the question, why did the Jews cry out for crucifixion, and not stoning, as the Jewish Law demanded for capital punishment?

In the book of Acts we read how the Jews took Stephen, a disciple of Jesus, and stoned him. This was what the Law of God called for as the mode of capital punishment, when the crime called for it. Neither Jesus, nor Stephen did anything worthy of capital punishment, but still the Jews were so furious with Stephen that they dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. For Jesus, their intentions were far crueler. The Roman devised crucifixion to be the most agonizing and horrific type of execution imaginable. The Jews were so determined in their hatred against Jesus, that they not only wanted to see him executed, but utterly humiliated, and put to shame, suffering to the greatest extent possible. It is hard to imagine why they would treat Jesus so viciously, but we must realize that Satan is hiding in the shadows leading these men in their hatred toward the Son of God.

When the soldiers scourged their victims, they would use a leather whip that had bones and pieces of metal tied to the cords. This weapon inflicted great gashes into the back of the victim, not only ripping open the skin, but tearing away the flesh also. It would have been horribly painful, as well as creating much loss of blood. It is said that some victims died from scourging only. When they nailed Jesus to the cross, they pounded nails through his flesh and into the cross. While hanging upon the cross, it would have been most difficult to even breath, as the weight of the body was pulling the victim downwards. It is likely that there was some kind of crude seat fastened to the cross so the victim could rest his weight upon it. The victim was stripped of his clothes and hung entirely naked for all to view. The punishment was designed to provide the most shameful, and painfully slow death as was possibly. This was to warn others not to defy the Roman authorities. The Jews, probably looked at this in general with much disgust, for their own scriptures told them, 'that cursed is he that hangs upon a tree'. However in the case of Jesus the Jews seemed very happy to have Jesus suffer such a disgraceful and horrible death. Even while he suffered on the cross, they taunted him, and mocked him.

Most movies that have tried to depict the sufferings of Christ upon the cross have fallen short of what it really meant for Jesus to suffer as he did. He was beaten so bad that you could not even recognize his face. Most of us would look at his suffering and bleeding, and feel the utter shame and torture was far too excessive, and our hearts would be moved by compassion for his sorrow and pain. But we must realize that what Christ endured at the hands of men, is only part of the story, for the bible tells us His soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. God placed the weight of judgment for all of man's sin upon Him, while He was on the cross. This explains the anguish of his soul when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me".

The cross, as shameful and devastating as it was for our Lord, is the means by which God can save our souls. As we think about what Jesus endured, not only at the hands of wicked men, but also what He suffered by the judgment of God for our sins, we must solemnly consider what this means to us personally. If Jesus went to the cross and died to put away your sins, then it would be very tragic if you miss out on the salvation he intended to gain for you through his suffering on the cross. May the Spirit of God help you to see how much God loves you, and how much He wants to save your soul, as you take time to think carefully about Jesus death for you.

*"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil 2:8*

LESSON 28  
**Jesus' Resurrection**  
MATTHEW 28

In today's lesson we will conclude Matthew's gospel, and His historical account of Jesus life, ministry, death, and most importantly His resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Christianity, and the basis upon which Christians have confidence that they too shall be raised to be with Christ.

In our last lesson, we saw how the Romans, because of the Jews hatred for Him, cruelly executed Jesus. Jesus had admitted to them that He was their long awaited Messiah, but they did not believe His words. They were so envious and filled with hatred, that they cried out in fury for His blood, until finally Pilate conceded to their angry cries, and had Jesus scourged and crucified. After the death of Jesus upon the cross, his body was taken down by Joseph of Arimathea, wrapped in new clean linen clothes, and placed in a nearby tomb, hewn out of stone.

Now early on the third day, that is Sunday morning, while it was still dark some of the women, including Mary Magdalene visited the tomb in hopes of completing the embalming of the body of Jesus with spices. At the tomb the women found the stone had been rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, and two angels appeared to them, reporting that Jesus had risen from the dead. The angels instructed the women to report back to His disciples about His resurrection, and prepare to meet Him in Galilee. While some of the women made their way back to the city, they met Jesus on the way, and he said they should not fear, but go and report to His brethren, that He was alive, and they should meet Him in Galilee.

Meanwhile the soldiers that had been guarding the tomb had gone back to the Jewish authorities to report that the tomb was empty, and the stone rolled away. The Jewish elders paid these soldiers a large sum of money to fabricate a story about the disciples stealing the body of Jesus, while they had fallen asleep. Though the Jewish elders, along with Roman authorities did their best to get rid of Jesus, and seal Him in the tomb, they were powerless to resist the mighty power of God. They tried to circulate their false story, but later when Peter testified of Jesus being raised from the dead, the evidence was plain enough for the people of Jerusalem to believe, and many of them placed their trust in Jesus as the true and living Messiah of Israel, and Savior of their soul.

Matthew records that the disciples met Jesus in Galilee, where they worshipped Him, but some still doubted. The gospel account ends with Jesus' great commission to His disciples to go into all the world, and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He instructs them to teach the new converts all things that they had been taught. Jesus also promises to be with His disciples until the end of the age.

When we read this remarkable event in history, we might find it hard to imagine how such a great miracle could have taken place, just as the disciples at first had their doubts. However Jesus appears on several occasions to His disciples over a period of 40 days, before He ascended back into heaven to assure and confirm to His followers that indeed He had been raised from the dead. This helps us today to also be assured of the resurrection, for we have these historical accounts of those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus having been raised up. The fact that Jesus had risen is God's promise that we also shall be raised up with Him, that is all of those of us who have placed their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The Risen Lord Jesus, now sends forth His disciples to proclaim the good news to the world, so that others will believe, be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not only are the apostles commissioned to tell the world about Jesus and His teachings, but every Christian is also part of this great work of spreading the good news. If you are a Christian you should do your part to proclaim, that Jesus died for our sins, and God has raised Him from the dead, and now we can be saved through faith in Him. Sometimes we might think, that the work of evangelism belongs to just the evangelists, but God wants all of His children to spread the good news of salvation. If every Christian took an active part in witnessing for Christ, then we could evangelism the world much faster. Remember that Jesus promised to be with us throughout this age, so we can depend on His help as we seek to share His message of salvation with the world.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Mt 28:19*



### Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This doctrine is the foundation of the Christian faith, and an historical fact. Someone might ask the question, why do the details of Jesus resurrection seem to vary from one gospel account to the other?

Matthew has told us some of the details about the events of the resurrection, but we need to read all gospel accounts to get a fuller understanding of all the details of that morning. If we were to read the other gospel accounts, it might even seem that they contradict each other in some points, because the details seem to be varied. Care must be taken to piece together each gospel record, until the details become clear, and every detail reconciled. The main facts are clear and attested by all writers, that Jesus rose from the dead, that the stone was rolled away, that angels appeared and talked with the women, and that Jesus appeared to His disciples.

The following is a brief Summary, which suggesting how the events of that morning occurred. The actual historical events may vary from this view to some degree, but if we imagine it happening this way, then we can account for the various details given to us by each writer.

#### *The events of the resurrection morning:*

1. Early, while still dark, women come to the Jesus tomb with spices to embalm His body.
2. At the tomb the women notice the stone rolled away.
3. Mary Magdalene sees the disturbed grave, rushes back to tell the disciples, while the other women stay.
4. The women now enter the tomb, and find two angels who report that Jesus is risen.
5. These women run back to Jerusalem also to report to the disciples that Jesus has risen.
6. Meanwhile Mary Magdalene has already reported to the disciples that Jesus tomb is empty.
7. Then Peter and John run to the tomb, with Mary following them, but do not meet the other women.
8. Peter and John enter the tomb and find the empty tomb & grave clothes, then head back into the city.
9. While Peter and John leave, Mary stoops to look inside the tomb weeping, and sees the angels.
10. After the angels ask Mary why she is weeping, she turns and sees Jesus.
11. Jesus sends Mary back to His disciples to speak to them about His ascension back to heaven.
12. Mary now returns to the city again, this time to report that she had seen Jesus.
13. The other women now return to the tomb to further investigate, and Jesus meets with them also.

If we accept this view of the events on the morning of the resurrection we can account for each detail given by the four gospel writers. It would appear in the excitement, unbelief, and confusion of that early morning and the reports that were given, that it would be difficult for each writer to recount each detail exactly. The writers were not attempting to tell us the precise movement of each and every person that visited the tomb, but convey the larger truth as seen through particular ones who reported what they had seen. The larger truth is the testimony that Jesus rose from the grave, and was seen by His disciples. The bible records for us several post resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples, each further confirming the wonderful news that Jesus was raised back to life. The hope of the gospel is bound up in this very fact, for if Jesus is not risen our hope is in vain. To be a true believer, and to have salvation, requires that we believe in this essential doctrine of the Christian faith, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Yes, Jesus is risen indeed, and the historical evidence, along with the spiritual results, are enough to convince anyone to place their confidence in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The bible says:

*"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*Rom 10:9

## **Bibliography:**

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1. Quotation from personal Journal (Oct 28, 1949) of [Jim Elliot](#), Missionary to Ecuador
2. "Disciple's Prayer" Poem by [Ramona K. Cecil](#), Used by permission of [Dicksons](#)