

Matthew: A Chapter-by-Chapter Study

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew is traditionally and widely accepted to be authored by the apostle Matthew, also known as the tax collector Levi, even though the gospel itself doesn't name the author. However, there are some modern scholars who think that since this book so closely mirrors the Gospel of Mark that an apostle of Jesus would have no need to copy another gospel. Most traditional scholars believe that Matthew was simply reaffirming Mark's gospel as an apostle.

There is a wide variety of debates about the date of the production of this letter. Some place it in the early 50's AD, very soon after Mark wrote his gospel while others go so far as to place it in the 70's AD.

Although it is widely believed that Matthew wrote this letter to the Jewish congregation to prove to them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, it isn't just for the Jews. It also speaks about Jesus being for the world, and that the world should be witnessed to, not just Jews exclusively. However, no other New Testament book references the Old Testament more than this gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew is outlined in chronological order (birth, baptism, ministry, death, resurrection), but the events that Matthew records are not necessarily in order. Matthew is recalling events to make a case that Jesus is the Messiah, not telling a story. This should be kept in mind if comparing this book to other gospel records.

Chapter 1

V1-17

Matthew starts off his gospel with the credentials of Jesus, a standard legal opening for a Jewish document. This would send a clear message to the Jewish readers that the adopted father of Jesus, Joseph, was of a royal lineage and worthy of producing the Messiah. It is believed that Luke 3 provides the lineage of Jesus through His mother, Mary.

Not only does this genealogy link Jesus with King David and Abraham, but it uncharacteristically lists four females in the genealogy, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah). It is believed this was done primarily to show that God could use what some would consider an embarrassing bloodline to produce wonderful things, but this is debatable.

It should also be noted that this is an abridged genealogy, which would still be considered a legal and acceptable document in Jewish customs. Matthew was not mistaken or intentionally leaving anything out. This was a common practice among the Jews of the era.

V18-19

Matthew doesn't hide the fact that Mary was pregnant prior to the consummation of her marriage to Joseph. This was a known scandal, and Matthew addresses it in his opening so as not to appear to be afraid of the subject. Instead, he calls it what it was and lets it be known that God the Father was just that: the Father.

Verse 19 speaks to the character of Joseph. He could have legally put Mary to death. Instead, he showed her mercy and wanted to end things quietly. God not only chose Mary as a good mother for Jesus, but Joseph as a good earthly father.

V20-25

It is not made clear if Mary pleaded her case to Joseph or not, but God certainly did. And again, the character of Joseph is revealed. There is very little known about the earthly father of Jesus, even in the pages of the Bible, but what little there is tells us that he was a merciful and Godly man.

Although the name Jesus is held in high regard today, it was quite common in the first century. Joseph and Mary must have wondered why the Savior of the World would have such a regular name.

It should also be noted that verse 25 uses the Greek form of the word “until” meaning that Joseph did not have marital relations with her until after the birth of Jesus. This would imply that she, at some point, lost her virginity, but this is obviously disputed by some denominations, and is not a matter of salvation, just a matter of doctrine.

Chapter 2

V1-2

While chapter 1 begins with the credentials of Jesus and his earthly father, chapter 2 begins with the story of Jesus’ birth and the fulfilling of prophecies by Jesus even from infancy. Since a child would have neither the knowledge nor the inclination to fulfill prophecies, Matthew is trying to convince his Jewish readers that these prophecies are being fulfilled by God.

Although not the first prophecy to be fulfilled, having magi from the east recognize the astronomical signs of the coming Messiah would definitely qualify as an important credential for Jesus to be recognized as the Christ. It is not made clear how Matthew came across this information, although it is widely believed that Jesus’ mother Mary had many interactions with the apostles and these stories would have easily been passed on through her. It is even possible she had some of the eastern gold left to prove the magi’s visit, although that is pure speculation.

It should also be noted that nowhere in scripture does it say “three kings” visited Jesus, nor does it mention that they were present at His birth, however, because of this chapter it is assumed that the visit took place inside of a year after Jesus’ birth. It is also unknown how many magi there were. It is believed they were some sort of scholars, most likely astronomers, or even teachers according to the Greek word used to describe them (magoi). It is also unclear what nationality they were, although since they were from the east and they were familiar with the Jewish prophecies, it is most likely that they were either descendants from the exiled Jews of the Babylonian/Assyrian captivity or descendants of the Assyrian captors.

V3-6

This visit from educated and respected visitors talking of the birth of the “king of the Jews” would have left Herod perplexed and disturbed. His authority and the balance of power with the Romans would be upset by this news. It is recorded that Herod was so paranoid about threats to his authority that he had family members assassinated for the slightest perceived disloyalty.

At this point, the office of “high priest” was a political appointment, not a Levitical assignment by God or Jewish authority. These high priests would have had to consult Jewish scholars to find out the answer to Herod’s question. As with most politicians, they were concerned with the answer, but not with how it applied to their lives.

V7-12

Herod is paranoid, but also clever. He uses deceit to try to convince the magi to reveal who the new king of the Jews is once they find him.

The magi leave to find the Messiah. There is much debate as to what is meant by a star standing still over where Jesus was located. Whether this was an astronomical event or anomaly or something supernatural has been a source of much discussion for many centuries. Whatever it was, it was everything the magi were expecting and more. They were in awe of what they had found. The shepherds were the first to come and worship the Son of God, but the magi were arguably the longest traveled.

There are a couple of hints in this passage indicating how much time had passed since Jesus’ birth. One, Jesus is referred to as a “young child.” Second, they came to a house where the family was staying and not the stable where Jesus was born.

The magi left and did not return to Herod.

V13-15

Joseph’s character is positively displayed once again as he obeys God promptly and without question by taking Mary and Jesus to Egypt during the night. Egypt was still a Roman province, but outside of Herod’s purview and had a population of roughly a million Jews. Matthew closes this passage by stating that another prophecy was fulfilled by this exile and return from Egypt.

V16-18

Herod’s paranoia and ruthlessness lead to drastic ramifications for Bethlehem once he realizes the magi had left him without revealing their findings. The deaths of the young Jewish males fulfilled the dual prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah spoke this firstly regarding the Babylonian conquest of Israel, but it is also metaphorical as Rachel represents Bethlehem’s mothers.

V19-23

Even though Herod had died, it was still not completely safe for Joseph and his family. They returned to their land but settled in Nazareth. Although Matthew says this fulfills words spoken by prophets, there is no specific prophecy in the Old Testament that references that Jesus will be called a Nazarene. The closest that comes to this reference is Numbers 6:1-21 and that Matthew meant that Jesus would be a Nazarite, but taking a Nazarite vow and being from the town of Nazareth are two different things. Another possibility is that Matthew could be referencing Isaiah 11:1. The Hebrew word for branch is ‘neser’ which could be loosely translated to Nazarene. There are other schools of thought and much debate over this passage, but this is the only Gospel of Matthew prophecy without a definitive reference.

Chapter 3

V1-4

Matthew begins this chapter by speaking of the prophecy from Isaiah of the messenger of the Messiah, John the Baptist. John's message was simple, but firm. The word repent doesn't just mean to apologize, but to change one's ways and not go back to the lifestyle of sin. Even though Jesus was already born and walking among them, His ministry had not yet started, so John stated that the kingdom "was near."

Why did John live in the wilderness and dress the way he did?

There is no definitive answer, but most scholars point to Malachi 4:5 as a prophecy that this messenger would be much like Elijah. Others speculate that John chose to shun the temptations of city life and wealth so that he could remain pure and focused on his task of proclaiming the coming kingdom of God.

V5-6

Regardless of his appearance (some might say it was because of his appearance) John gained popularity among the Jews and even the Gentiles of the surrounding area. He practiced baptism for all by full immersion, a practice the Jews reserved only for Gentiles converting to Judaism as they would need to become "cleaner" than Jews born into the Jewish nation. John was pairing baptism with the confession of sin so that a person could become righteous before God, even though he wasn't a priest.

V7-12

Matthew introduces the reader to the Pharisees and the Sadducees for the first time in his gospel. It is important to note that these two groups were both leaders of the Jewish nation and religion, but they were at odds with each other both in politics and in doctrine. One thing they did have in common is that they believed that their Jewish heritage was enough to find them favor in God's eyes. They believed that when or if the Messiah ever did appear, He would be on their side.

John had become so popular as to draw the attention of the Jewish leadership. Since John was proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and the people believed John was a prophet, the Pharisees and Sadducees thought it wouldn't hurt for them to visit John and humor the crowd so that they could win favor with John's followers. John was having none of it.

John knew the place Jesus held and who He truly was (and is). The disciple of a Rabbi was practically a slave to his teacher, but removing a sandal was beneath even this station. John was stating that the Messiah was far greater than this relationship that the Pharisees and Sadducees would be familiar with. This Messiah would baptize with fire, and His judgement would be swift, harsh, and final.

V13-17

Matthew records that Jesus begins his public appearance by being baptized by John. John recognizes that Jesus doesn't need to be baptized, but Jesus requests it. Most scholars believe this is so that Jesus could relate closer to the needs of the sinful man. Even though He was without sin, He could confess the sins of those He would die for.

Matthew closes the chapter with a brief description of the supernatural declaration from God the Father of pride in His Son. This is an example of the trinity being together all at the same time. The voice of the Father, the Spirit of God like a dove, and Jesus standing in the Jordan River.

It is unclear whether Jesus' baptism took place while the Pharisees and Sadducees were present or if this happened at a later time. Regardless, whoever was present must have seen Jesus in a supernatural light going forward.

Chapter 4

V1-2

In sharp contrast to the end of chapter 3, Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit for a period of solitude. This would be another example of how the deity of Jesus would relate to a sinful man. It is important to note that it was not the Holy Spirit or the Father that tempted Jesus, but during His solitude, Satan tempted Jesus.

It is also heavily debated on the translation of the word 'peirazo' used to describe temptation here. Many linguistic scholars think this would be more accurately translated as tested rather than tempted.

It is believed that Jesus did have water during this period, but He went completely without food. A healthy human body can survive forty or more days without food, but the hunger pains would be almost unbearable. If Jesus did go without water, this would be a supernatural fasting sustained by God.

V3-4

Although most translations have Satan's question begin with the word 'if,' most linguists believe it would be more accurately translated 'Since.' Satan was not questioning the deity of Jesus. He was more challenging both the power and the self-control of Jesus.

Why would Jesus respond with scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3) even though He was hungry?

It wasn't so much that Jesus didn't want to eat, but He didn't want to eat at the behest of Satan. To give in now meant that He might give in when the time came for self-sacrifice. Jesus was in perfect self-control, even while starving. The Word of God is sufficient to sustain control!

V5-7

It is not made clear if Satan physically took Jesus to the top of the temple or if this was more of a vision or out-of-body experience like Ezekiel or the Apostle John when he wrote Revelation. Regardless, the temptation was real, so there must have been some physical aspect to it.

Scholars are quick to point out that Satan leaves out part of the scripture that he is quoting (Psalm 91:11-12). Psalm 91:11 fully reads, "For He will give His angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways." Most scholars believe this to mean that God will protect you when you are following His will. Throwing oneself off a building would hardly seem in line with the will of God.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 to rebuke Satan, without excluding anything important.

V8-11

It is important to remember that sin had entered the world, and God had turned the world over to Satan. At this point, the world was Satan's to offer. This would seem like a shortcut around the cross, to regain the world without the sacrifice. But the point of the sacrifice wasn't the world, it was the people in the world. God created His creation to worship Him. The world meant nothing without the worshipers. Jesus again quotes from Deuteronomy (6:13) when He tells Satan that only God is to be worshipped. All three responses to Satan's three temptations were quotes from Deuteronomy. Jesus commands Satan to leave and he does. Once Jesus passes His tests, angels appear and attend to the needs of the Messiah.

V12-17

The gospel of John records the miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding, which supposedly takes place before this passage, but most likely after He was baptized by John the Baptist. The ministry of Jesus would have started before or around this passage.

Matthew records more prophecies being fulfilled for his Jewish readers (Isaiah 9:1-2) as Jesus makes his home in Capernaum. Since He was raised in Nazareth, there would be too many people that recognized Him as the son of the scandalous Mary and Joseph, and they would not heed His ministry. He would have no success in His own homeland. He must begin His ministry somewhere else.

Since His cousin John had been imprisoned, Jesus continued to preach the same message that John preached.

V18-22

It is not made clear in this passage, but this is not the first time Jesus has met these four men that are about to become His disciples. James and John were both followers of John the Baptist, who introduced them to Jesus (John 1:35-42). Jesus had taught crowds from Andrew and Peter's boat (Luke 5:3), so they were familiar with His teachings already. This time, Jesus called to them specifically, as a Rabbi would call a student. This was a familiar concept to them. They knew who Jesus was, and they jumped at the opportunity.

This is not a small sacrifice. James and John came from a lucrative family of fishermen. They were giving up the family business to follow this Nazarene. But they had heard Him speak and seen Him captivate crowds. They did not want to miss out.

V23-25

This final passage of the chapter sets the stage for the next three chapters. The sermon on the mount takes place because Jesus captured the attention of thousands of people by acting on His compassion and mercy. He not only spoke to people, He cared for the lonely, He healed the sick, He cured the demon possessed, He caused the lame to walk, and He did this all across the region. He wanted as many people as possible to know that He loved them and that the message of John the Baptist still applied. They needed to repent!

Chapter 5

At the end of chapter 4, Jesus accumulated a following. When he saw how many people had gathered around Him, He went up on a mountain side and sat down. The Sermon on the Mount was about to begin. The next three chapters contain Matthew's record of Jesus' sermon.

V1

Though anyone who has attended Sunday school has likely heard quotes from some of these passages, these words would have been revolutionary to the crowd hearing them for the first time. The Levitical and Mosaic law were originally written to show how the state of one's heart should be in order to commune with God. Over time, the Jewish leadership twisted the law to suit the needs of human nature. With this sermon, Jesus was returning the law to its original purpose. He was contradicting the Jewish authorities of the day and using *His own* authority! These would be new and fresh thoughts for the followers on the side of the mountain. And they would be refreshing ideas for an oppressed culture under the thumb of Roman authority.

It should be noted that the word "disciples" used in this verse is most likely not referring to the twelve disciples that Jesus would gather for most of His ministry. This could mean a great number of people who were regularly following Jesus up to this point because of the miracles they'd seen Him perform.

V2-12

Some translations use the phrase "...He opened His mouth..." which should be taken to mean that Jesus spoke loudly to the crowd so He could be heard.

The beginning of the Sermon on the Mount contains what is known as The Beatitudes. These are characteristics of the children of God.

- The poor in spirit: These are the people who realize that they can't live by their own accord. They need a savior and they must repent. They are at rock bottom. These who die to themselves will find salvation through Jesus.
- Those who mourn: This verse is similar to its' predecessor in that these people realize what it means to live a life of sin. They weep because they have sinned against God and caused Him grief. God will comfort those who know what it truly means to sin and repent.
- The gentle (meek): It should be noted that there is no English word to translate the Greek word 'praus' sufficiently. 'Meek' and 'gentle' are the closest words that English has, but these are still not on their own a true translation. The idea behind the Greek word is more of a balance between anger and indifference, or a powerful, strong-willed individual who maintains self-control and humility. This was considered a vice in the Roman era because strength, revenge, and assertiveness were all desirable traits at the time. Those who are submissive and practice self-control will be rewarded with the treasures that the assertive seek.
- Those who desire righteousness: The words used here describe an intense passion for righteousness, not just a hope or want for it. Jesus promises to fulfill that passion, to feed that hunger and quench that thirst.

- The merciful: Mercy is given to those that don't deserve it, and usually to those who are less fortunate than the one showing mercy. Mercy is one of God's key traits to His creation. He expects nothing less from us.
- The pure in heart: Another way to translate this Greek phrase is 'utterly sincere.' Those that align themselves the most with God, that keep their soul as far from sin as possible, who exercise restraint that costs them the world, these are the ones that God will draw closest to.
- The peacemakers: This speaks to those who preach reconciliation, especially between man and God. Anyone who can show their fellow man peace through the salvation of God is truly a child of God.
- The persecuted: Jesus finishes The Beatitudes with the way that these kinds of people will be treated by the world. Anyone who shows these traits and is persecuted for them *in the name of Jesus* is to be excessively rewarded in Heaven. Jesus did throw in the caveat that it must be in His name, not just because someone is merciful, or gentle, or a peacemaker.

V13-16

Jesus describes what traits His followers must have. Salt was valuable in the first century. It was used to preserve and add flavor. Jesus is saying His followers are valuable to Him. Much like salt, the followers of Christ must preserve the teachings of Jesus and remain "flavorful" to the world around them. If Christians lose these traits, then they have lost their value in spreading the Word of God.

Jesus also called His followers the "light of the world." This was not a small charge. This title was usually reserved for eminent Rabbis. Here, Jesus was giving this title to all that were listening to Him and would follow Him. This isn't just a title, though. It's a responsibility. As His followers, Christians are to spread His "light" to others. Putting the light on a hill or on a lampstand gives a sense of intention or purpose. Christians are meant to spread the Word. Jesus also gave Himself this same responsibility when He called Himself the light of the world in John 8:12 and 9:5.

V17-20

This has been a long-debated passage of scripture as many scholars and theologians have dived deeply into what they believe Jesus meant when He said this. The most basic and clear interpretation is that Jesus came to separate the Old Testament "law" from the man-made law that the priests had made over many generations. Not only that, but Jesus would "fulfill" this law by fulfilling the many Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah and ultimately become the final sacrifice needed to allow man to commune with God. Jesus would lead a perfect, sinless life which would fulfill all the laws that Moses had given the Israelites in the desert so many generations before. No other man could say that. That not one mark of the law would pass away until the law had been fulfilled foretold the coming sacrifice of Jesus.

Jesus taught the crowd before Him to follow the commands of the law in such a way that others would follow their example. But He also said that they should do so because they loved God! Their righteousness came from following the law out of love, not because there were consequences for disobedience. The Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to the letter of the law, but there was no love in their hearts for their fellow Jew, let alone fellow man.

V21-26

The Jewish teaching of this era certainly forbade murder, but there were many exceptions concerning matters of the heart. The Jewish leadership was more concerned with the letter of the law than the purpose of the law. Jesus isn't excusing murder with this verse. He's more stating that one wouldn't even think of murder if their heart was in such a state that they wouldn't even think of berating someone. Of course, murder is wrong, but murder usually stems from an underlying problem in the heart. It's the heart that God truly cares about. This is why Jesus says it is important to settle disputes before you come to the altar with sacrifices to God. If the heart of the giver isn't in the right place, then the sacrifice is worthless.

V27-30

Jesus gives another example of an unclean heart in this passage. Again, adultery is obviously wrong. But adultery stems from an underlying problem with the heart. If lust is in the heart, the heart is worthless to God.

Jesus gives His famous example of gouging out one's eye or cutting off one's hand rather than sin and be cast into hell to finish this passage. This has been a widely debated passage for many centuries as to whether this is a figure of speech or to be taken literally. Most scholars believe Jesus is speaking figuratively, although there have been some throughout the ages who have taken this passage literally to the point of self-mutilation.

V31-32

Jesus uses this passage to once again assert His authority and to supersede the modern law of the Jewish teachings. Over the past few generations, the Jews had learned to take Deuteronomy 24:1 out of context and provide an extremely loose translation of the word "unclean" to allow almost anything to be a cause for divorce. Jesus sets the law straight and reverts it back to the way God and Moses intended. If a husband does not love his wife in his heart, then his heart is worthless to God.

V33-37

The Jewish law of the day also allowed one to get away with lying as long as one didn't take an oath. Business deals and contracts usually were sealed with oaths and even witnessed so there could be legal action if the contract was broken. Jesus reminds the crowd that if lying is in their heart, then what good is an oath? Their souls are already forfeited. They should treat every "yes" and "no" like an oath in their hearts.

V38-42

Jesus gives another example of how Jewish leadership had warped the law over time. Exodus 21:24 was meant to limit retribution, but legal scholars had manipulated the scripture in such a way as to make revenge an obligation. There was no mercy as far as modern Jewish law was concerned. Jesus corrects this by teaching the crowd that mercy should be shown before revenge.

Jesus even goes so far as to include the Romans in this example. Under Roman military law, a Roman soldier had the right to ask anyone to carry his pack for up to one mile. This is one of the many reasons why there are mile markers on the sides of roads. Jesus is telling an oppressed, even resentful crowd to carry the pack two miles for their oppressors.

The primary reason for this is that mercy and kindness can carry great weight to those that are watching. As Christians, these acts shine brightly to a harsh, mean, vengeful world.

V43-48

Leviticus 19:18 states that the Israelites shall love their neighbors. But over time, the Jewish leadership inserted a caveat to that command: “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” The Jews considered anyone uncircumcised to be their enemies.

Jesus reminds the crowd (and the reader) that it is easy to love those around you. Your friends, family, and those you get along with are easy to love. Everyone does that. What is difficult is loving those that do you harm. Most Jews thought they were doing good if they didn’t retaliate when done wrong. Jesus is telling them to show love to those that they consider enemies. For the members of this crowd, this would be hard to accept. There would be slaves, both Roman slaves and Jewish slaves, there would be women who had been wrongly divorced by their husbands, the Jews themselves were oppressed by Roman occupation...loving one’s enemy would seem like an impossible task. But Jesus reminds them that God loves His enemies, His very creation that shuns Him and curses His existence.

Chapter 6

V1-8

Just like the Levitical and Mosaic law were meant to address the spirit of one’s heart, Jesus is using His sermon to address the same character. Doing good deeds for the sake of appearing righteous means nothing if one’s heart isn’t in the right place. The result may be good, and the recipient may be appreciative, but as far as the reward in heaven is concerned, nothing was accomplished.

Jesus gives modern day examples of false righteousness for all to know and see. It was a common custom for people of wealth and stature to draw attention to themselves when they were generous. They wanted the less fortunate to know that they were doing their best to help out.

What does Jesus mean when He says that these hypocrites “have their reward” in verse 2?

Jesus is saying that if all they are seeking is the approval of man, then they will have it. And they had better enjoy it, because they will not see any other reward from God.

How can we be ignorant of what we are giving like Jesus says in verses 3 and 4?

Although this can be difficult if one wants to be responsible with their finances, Jesus is asking His followers to not even seek self-gratification if giving. Do it privately and, if possible, do it so that it’s not even known to yourself. The Christian musician Rich Mullins took a vow of poverty and lived off a meager salary that his financial manager gave to him on a regular basis. The rest of his money all went to charitable donations that not even Rich knew how much he was donating. This would be a true example of what Jesus is asking us to do in these verses.

Likewise, Jesus asked His followers to do the same when they prayed. Praying was one way that the self-righteous showed just how righteous they were. There are three times of prayer each day in the Jewish religion, 9am, noon, and 3pm. It was not uncommon for the self-righteous to “accidentally” find themselves in a very public place during these times so that others could witness them making

long, wordy, and loud prayers. These people weren't praying to God. They were praying to themselves.

Jesus also calls out the pagans in this passage. It was not uncommon for the followers of Baal to spend half the day chanting, "O Baal answer us" repeatedly. Luke records in the book of Acts (19:34) that the Ephesians shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two hours. These were typical events of the era.

Jesus reminds us that we are not telling God anything He doesn't already know. We should talk to Him as if He is familiar with us and our plight.

V9-13

This passage is commonly referred to as The Lord's Prayer. Another abbreviated example of this prayer can be found in Luke 11:2-4. Although extremely common by today's standards, this would be unheard of by Jewish traditions. Calling God "Father" would be considered too intimate. Jesus was breaking that barrier. Jesus also used the term "Our Father" which would include those around us. It would remind us that we are not alone and that God created all of us, not just the individual.

This prayer puts the priority on God's reputation and desires above all else. After the majesty and royalty of God, Jesus then asks for bread. Not riches, luxury, or exotic material possessions, but simple bread. God cares about our everyday needs and will provide what we need. No more, no less.

Jesus also reminds us to be merciful to those who have done us wrong so that we may be forgiven in the same manner.

Jesus reminds us to use prayer to keep us from temptation. We should seek God whenever we feel weak in our human desires.

It should be noted that the closing of the prayer in verse 13 (some translations like the NASB and NLT leave it out completely) is in dispute about it being in the original manuscript of Matthew's gospel or if it was added later by a scribe. There is no doubt that it is ancient in origin, it just isn't certain if it's original to Jesus' sermon or Matthew's text.

V14-15

Jesus explains the reason for some of the verbiage of His prayer here. Forgiveness is a key component to the love of a Christian. Without forgiveness, there is no love.

V16-18

Jesus resumes speaking about matters of the heart and hypocrites by addressing fasting. It was typical for the Pharisees and leaders of the synagogue to ensure that the Jewish congregation knew they were fasting. It earned them respect and even sympathy. But Jesus is saying they were doing it for the wrong reasons.

V19-21

Jesus then sums up His matters-of-the-heart subjects in this one famous passage. The satisfaction of material possession and man's approval is fleeting and meaningless. But the love of God

provides more treasure than one can count. No matter how much we seek here, it will never be enough. God provides total satisfaction.

V22-23

What does Jesus mean by having a good or bad eye in this passage? What is it to be “full of light?”

This is an example that would be lost over time without the proper context. In this era, an “evil eye” was a common phrase used to denote an envious or covetous man. It could mean someone who was stingy or miserly. Jesus is using this phrase here to refer to someone who has their mind set on worldly things rather than on heavenly things.

V24

The original word used at the end of this verse is difficult to translate and is in dispute as to its actual origin. Some think it might be the name of a pagan god, while others think it comes from the Hebrew word “aman,” meaning to trust or confide, which would roughly translate to “trusting in riches or wealth.” Regardless, it is clear that Jesus is telling His followers that one can only serve God and no other. A divided allegiance is no allegiance at all.

V25-34

The closing of this chapter is Jesus telling His followers not to worry about wealth or material things. Jesus lists the basic necessities, which would be a very real concern to the majority of His crowd. Most of them were simply worried about their next meal, let alone being wealthy. Yet Jesus is telling them to not be troubled by this. It should be noted that the tone Jesus is using isn't telling the crowd to not be responsible with their lives, just not to let stress overwhelm them.

Jesus gives other examples of God's creation to assure His followers of what He means. The birds do not worry, but they do work for their food. Worrying does nothing to help a situation, even when one is trying to improve one's situation. Jesus wants us to be *free* from worry, a concept that would be foreign to the oppressed and enslaved in His congregation.

Verse 33 is an often-quoted verse from Jesus where He tells us to put God first. Everything else will fall into place after that. This doesn't mean that life will be perfect. It means that your eternal reward will be plenty!

Verse 34 is not so much profound as it is common sense and shows the wisdom and practicality of Jesus. Live in the moment and don't worry about the things you have no control over.

Chapter 7

V1-2

Jesus continues His theme of addressing the state of the heart by addressing the way one judges other people. This passage is often quoted and often just as misunderstood. Verses 1 and 2 are meant to be taken *together*. Jesus isn't saying that a person shouldn't judge someone else. In fact, He will go on to explain Himself in the next passage. What He's saying is that your heart should be right with God before casting judgment. If you rightly and fairly judge others, God will justly judge you. Just as God loves us without approving of everything we do, we can still love others without approving of every action.

V3-5

There are at least two meanings that can be discerned from this passage. First, Jesus is asking His listeners to examine themselves before judging others. The fault we find in other people can often be found in ourselves. If someone does something that bothers us or that we can describe as an “irritating sin,” we should ask ourselves why. Does it bother us because it reminds us that we do it also?

Second, if we have dealt with a sin that we recognize, we are more likely to be more understanding of someone who does the same sin and be able to help them out of that sin. This is why there are support groups for alcoholics, drug addicts, porn addicts, and so on. People who have dealt with a difficult situation can often help others out of the same difficulties.

V6

Jesus completes the previous thoughts with this verse. There are those who will not listen to correction and do not want to leave their sin. It will do no good to offer them help.

V7-11

In chapter 6, Jesus gives us the Lord’s Prayer. Here, He instructs us further on how to pray. Notice that He doesn’t say to ask once and stop. There is a progression to this prayer. We must work at it. We must put effort into it. Asking, seeking, and knocking are all part of the praying process. But these are all ways of inviting God to do something. We don’t need to do this alone. Jesus says prayer will bring an answer from God, even if it isn’t right away. Our persistence is sometimes what God is looking for.

God will not let our prayers go unanswered. Jesus is reassuring the crowd that God has their best interest in mind. This would be welcome news, but also probably confusing news as most of them were poor, hungry, and oppressed. Nevertheless, Jesus tells them to pray fervently.

V12

This is another example of Jesus altering the Jewish man-made law. The Jews of the day believed that as long as you followed the laws and did nothing wrong, then you were righteous. The main idea went something similar to what Jesus said: “Don’t do to others what you don’t want done to you.” Jesus is putting a positive spin on this rule. Instead of just not doing wrong, He’s telling them to do what’s right. Help your neighbor if they’re in a bad situation. Give someone food if they’re hungry. Offer assistance to someone who is having trouble. This is true righteousness. Human nature makes this easier to say than to do.

V13-14

Jesus follows His previous statement with this passage, knowing that it is hard to fight our sinful nature. The crowd would recognize what Jesus was saying as the narrow gate referred to what was called a wicket, or a smaller door built into the larger gate of the city walls. This door would be used at night or when the city was under threat. This door was usually only large enough to allow one person in at a time. Going through the wide-open gate was easy, just like it is to follow human nature. Staying in control and doing what is right is an effort and takes focus.

V15-20

Misery loves company. For those that insist on going through the wide gate, some will want to take others with them. They would rather put effort into dragging people through the wide gate with them than trying to go through the narrow gate. Jesus is warning His listeners to be aware of people like this. He has spent the past two and a half chapters telling His followers what traits a good person should have. Now, He's telling them that a bad leader won't have these traits, nor will any of their followers.

V21-23

Jesus again speaks of the state of the heart, but here the consequences are dire. A worthless heart lived out on earth will mean nothing on judgment day. Being a "righteous" person will mean nothing if the righteousness doesn't come from the heart.

V24-27

Jesus give His famous illustration of the two houses and their foundations to close out His sermon. Outside, the houses are similar, even identical. It would be hard to tell them apart just by their outward appearance. But their foundation is what counts. Likewise, Jesus is saying the heart is what God sees, not the outward appearance of man. There are people who live upright, righteous, lawful, healthy, abundant lives who will not make it into heaven. And there are thieves and murderers who have been and will be welcomed at the gates of Heaven. A repentant heart is greater than a self-righteous life.

V28-29

When Jesus was finished, the crowds were stunned by the manner of His teachings. Most scribes or even rabbis quoted scripture or modern law, and occasionally highly regarded priests of old. They would rarely, if ever, speak of anything original. Jesus not only taught new things but *contradicted* many of the Jewish teachings. He spoke as if He was the very author of the law itself.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 9 contain some of the miracles that Jesus performed throughout His ministry. The Gospel of Matthew is not in chronological order, so these records may seem out of place with the rest of the book.

V1

Jesus still had a crowd following Him wherever He went. The term "great multitudes" is believed to mean "thousands." The number of people was too large to count and keep track of.

V2-4

Although Matthew places this miracle immediately following Jesus' sermon, this is probably not chronologically accurate. Mark and Luke both place this event on a different timeline.

Leprosy had been a disease of concern for generations. There are instructions in Leviticus on how to deal with Leprosy. It is a death sentence. Only a miracle could save someone who was afflicted. Lepers were shunned and even ridiculed for their condition. For a leper to be seen in public, let alone approach another human being would have been a brave act on their part. This man came to Jesus not only to be healed, but to *worship*. This man put every ounce of faith he had in Jesus.

Jesus does the unthinkable. He touches the leper. It is unknown how long this individual had been afflicted, but once diagnosed, a leper would not have human contact again unless it was with another leper. Jesus responded to the man's faith with the reward of healing. Matthew doesn't record how many people, if any, witnessed this miracle. Jesus simply told the man to tell no one what had happened. Jesus did, however, tell the man to fulfill the Levitical law (see Leviticus 14) for an offering at the temple for what had happened. This would give credit to God, acknowledging that Jesus is acting with authority.

Why would Jesus not want the leper to tell anyone who healed him?

There are several gospel records of Jesus telling the recipients of His healings to not tell anyone who healed them. Most scholars believe this was simply to keep the excitement of the crowds to a minimum. Others believe it may have to do with the timing of Jesus' ministry. There is no clear explanation offered.

V5-13

In this passage, Matthew records a Roman centurion approaching Jesus. This would be unusual in the fact that he was a Roman officer. The Jews hated the Romans, and the feeling was mostly mutual. But this centurion must have either heard or even observed the works of Jesus because he was already well aware of the capabilities of Jesus, and possibly even the deity of Jesus.

As a commander in the Roman army, he had every right to come up to the Jewish people under Roman rule and simply order them around. He didn't do that with Jesus. He pleaded with Jesus and even called him "Lord." But this is not what impresses Jesus.

The centurion knows what it means to be in authority. And he is aware that Jesus has authority. The centurion understands, respects, and has faith in this authority. Jesus was fully prepared to go with the centurion, a faux pax on its own as it was against Jewish custom to enter the house of a Gentile. But the faith of this Roman made it unnecessary. He placed himself beneath Jesus, knowing that this wasn't just another Jew, but that this Jesus must be someone from a Higher Power.

Jesus was amazed that a faith like this would be found among the Gentiles rather than the chosen people. Jesus announced to His followers that this kind of faith is what brings people to the kingdom of heaven. The crowds would be stunned to hear that Gentiles would be dining with the forefathers of Israel! And just as Gentiles could make it to heaven, being born into the chosen people was no promise of passage into heaven. This would be the continued message of repentance of John the Baptist.

V14-15

This is a short passage without much context. Matthew doesn't say what Peter's mother-in-law was afflicted with or how severe it was, only that a fever was involved. Regardless, Jesus touched her and she was immediately healed. Well enough, in fact, that she served her guests and the One that healed her.

V16-17

Matthew gives a sort of summary piece here with the prophecy from Isaiah 53:4 that Jesus continued to perform countless miracles and exorcisms.

V18-22

In this section, Matthew recounts what could be described as “groupies” from the multitudes that Jesus had accumulated. It is not said who these men were or what their purpose was in making these statements, but the replies to them from Jesus is what stands out.

The first man is a scribe, an educated man of some standing, who offers his services and dedication to Jesus. It is assumed he would have sought to be a man of stature in the troupe of Jesus’ followers, but this is uncertain. Jesus tells him plainly that this life is not a rich life. There are no guarantees of food or shelter. Jesus lived by faith and expected His disciples to do the same.

The second man offered to follow Jesus, but only after certain things were done. It’s not stated clearly in the English translation, but the phrasing used here indicates that this man’s father was dying, not dead. He needed to remain indefinitely to take care of his father before following Jesus. While this may seem like a noble gesture, what the man was doing was delaying following his Saviour. Jesus made him think about what his priorities were.

V23-27

There are several points of context that need to be noted to truly appreciate the words of this passage. First, The Sea of Galilee was a large lake and was traversed heavily by many to get to different lake-front villages and towns. Second, the Sea of Galilee is known for sudden and violent storms. Anyone who has been on this lake or lived near the lake is probably accustomed to these storms. Third, a good number of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen by trade. They spent their life on the sea. They would know how to handle a boat in a storm. So, when Matthew says the disciples came to Jesus in a panic because of this storm, this must have been something highly unusual.

Here is Jesus, a carpenter by trade, who did not spend His life on the sea, asleep on the boat during the most unusual storm these fishermen had ever seen. Jesus is almost nonchalant about the whole situation. Matthew doesn’t record what exactly Jesus says to the storm, but whatever it was shut the storm down immediately. The disciples were in awe.

V28-34

There are other gospel accounts of Jesus meeting a demon-possessed man in a cemetery, but Matthew speaks of two men. It is believed this is the same encounter, but it is unclear and debatable. These demons in these two men recognize Jesus immediately. While they have survived living in the tombs, tormenting anyone who dares come near them, they are now in fear of One who can drive them away.

It is believed that Matthew intentionally put the previous passage and this passage close together to contrast the disciples wondering who Jesus is that the storm should miraculously obey Him (8:27) and here that the demons immediately recognize the deity of Jesus before He even speaks to them (8:29).

The demons ask to be cast into swine rather than return straight to their domain. Jesus permits this and the pigs immediately throw themselves off a cliff to their demise.

Why did Jesus allow the demons to possess and kill the pigs?

There is no clear answer here, and none is given in any of the gospels, but most scholars believe there are at least two good reasons for this. One, this would show those that witnessed this exorcism that the demons did, indeed, leave their human hosts and enter the swine. Second, this shows the true nature of demons. Their intention is always destruction. With swine, it's easier to destroy because they have no soul. With humans, we are made in the image of God. It takes effort. We must allow a demon to destroy us.

When the city saw and heard what Jesus had done, they begged Jesus to leave. Matthew doesn't give an explanation as to why they wanted Jesus to leave. Whether they were afraid of this exorcist, unhappy that the pigs had died and cost them money, or some other unknown reason is a mystery as far as Matthew is concerned.

Chapter 9

V1-3

Chapter 9 continues with more accounts of miracles that Jesus performed during His time here on earth.

As noted in 4:13, Jesus returned to Capernaum. It is believed that most, if not all the miracles in this chapter occurred in Capernaum.

While in His hometown, some people brought a paralyzed man to Him. This account is also found in Mark 2 and Luke 5. What Jesus says catches the crowd off guard. Instead of saying that the man is healed, Jesus says that the man's sins are forgiven. This would be highly controversial as the Jewish religion taught that only God could forgive sins and that would have to be done through ritualistic sacrifice at the temple. This brought the scribes and temple leaders to a boil.

V4-8

In this single passage of the healing of the paralytic (v1-8), Jesus declares Himself as God three times! First by forgiving sin, second by reading the minds of scribes and Pharisees around Him, although it could be argued that He (and others) could read their body language and faces at this point. And, finally, He divinely heals the man of his paralysis. If only God can forgive sins, the Jesus proved He was God by doing what no human could have done before the very eyes of those who accused Him of blasphemy.

V9-13

To properly understand the hatred and resentment of the tax collectors of the era, one must compare them to a French person working for the Nazis in German-occupied France during World War II. The French would have despised one of their own working for their own oppressors and conquerors. Indeed, after the war, many of these sympathizers found themselves on trial and were either thrown into prison or hanged for treason. This is what the Jews thought of the tax collectors among them.

Levi-Matthew would give up a lucrative Roman contract to follow Jesus. Instead of being a rich outcast, he would now become a poor outcast.

Matthew was not the only tax collector that Jesus associated with. He made it a point to find those that the world rejected. Those who were lost and had no where to go were the ones that Jesus knew

He could reach. And He goes so far as to tell the Pharisees this in so many words. The point of the temple and the priests was to bring reconciliation to those that had sinned against God. Instead, they had become self-righteous, and they turned away those that they had deemed undesirable. They didn't offer mercy or compassion. They offered comfort to those that could pay. Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 to remind them that God would rather have the hearts of men than their sacrifices.

V14-17

Apparently, John the Baptist and his followers fasted often out of strict repentant character. The Pharisees also fasted often, but this was more for show than for righteousness. But Jesus explained to them that the Messiah had come! There was no need to fast in preparation for something that had already happened! However, Jesus gives a bit of foreshadowing with the examples of the old garment and the old wineskins. His presence and His purpose would change things. So much so that the old way of doing things would no longer be necessary. This is Jesus speaking of the fulfilling of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant.

V18-19

It is not made clear what type of ruler this person is, but someone in authority worshipped Jesus as if He was truly God! And Jesus accepted this as normal, as He should. This ruler had faith in God to heal his daughter and begged Jesus to come with him. Jesus accepts the invitation, and His disciples go with Him.

V20-22

Both Mark (5:21-43) and Luke (8:43-48) provide more detail of this miracle, but Matthew confirms it himself in this gospel account. A ceremonially unclean woman simply touched the garment of Jesus out of faith and this small amount of faith healed her. Jesus, knowing what had happened, was happy to help and to see another follower with faith.

V23-26

In this era, even death had a system of payment. It was tradition to pay for professional mourners to be present at a house where someone had passed away. It is believed that tradition dictated that no less than two flutes and one wailing woman should be present for the passing of a wife. Since this person was a ruler and presumably had some wealth, there were multiple flute players and a noisy crowd wailing for the loss of his daughter. These were not family members, just paid temporary hires for the occasion.

Since their profession caused them to be around death so often, they knew death when they saw it. They felt they had a right to scoff at Jesus when He told them the girl was only sleeping. But when Jesus grabbed the girls' hand and she got up from her bed, the flutes and wailing ceased. No doubt, these professionals had a hand in spreading the word of this miracle.

V27-31

Blindness was a common disease of the time simply due to hygiene. These two blind men had to work at following Jesus since they couldn't see to follow Him. Their cry to Him of "Son of David" was an acknowledgment of their belief that He was the Messiah, and that as God He could grant mercy. Jesus physically touched them so that they would know what was happening since they couldn't see what was going on. But they would soon be able to.

Jesus tells them to tell no one, but their excitement overwhelms them. One can't help but wonder if they couldn't wait to be asked what had happened to them so that they could "spill the beans," so to speak.

V32-34

It is believed that Jewish exorcism of this era involved getting the demon to tell you its name, as if this would grant some sort of power over the demon. If the demon caused its host to go mute, then there was no chance to gain that power. So, when Jesus cast out this demon without knowing the name of the demon He was dealing with this made the Jewish leadership look particularly inept. They had to find an excuse to cover their inability to heal this mute man when Jesus seemed to do it with little effort. Instead of giving glory to God, they accused Jesus of being satanic or even Satan himself.

It should be noted that there is debate on whether verse 34 is in the original gospel text or not, but there is enough external evidence to suggest it belongs here and Matthew 10:25 more or less confirms the statement of this verse. Because of this, most translations include it.

V35-38

Matthew makes it a point to state the emotions of Jesus in several passages. Here, Jesus is moved with compassion because he sees the needs of the people not being met, both physically and spiritually. Jesus has a desire to preach to their hearts and tend to their needs. And He hopes to instill that desire in His followers.

Chapter 10

V1-4

Chapter 4:18-22 introduces four of Jesus' disciples. This chapter introduces "The Twelve." It should be noted that these are a close-knit group of followers of Jesus and are noted for being personal friends that were with Jesus on almost every occasion once He called them to be by His side. However, there were many disciples of Jesus. He had attracted quite a following at this point and probably had accumulated many passionate admirers that journeyed with Him as often as they could. These twelve are noted as those that Jesus specifically called who gave up what they were doing to lead the lifestyle that Jesus lead.

In return, Jesus gave them power over demons and illnesses. In verse 2, Matthew uses the word "apostle" for the first time. This word literally translated means "one who is sent out" and can be translated as "envoy" or "ambassador". Jesus sent them out to do His work.

It should be noted that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the book of Acts all list the twelve disciples. Thaddaeus in Matthew's account is also known by Judas but is often differentiated so as not to be confused with Judas Iscariot. It is also believed that Bartholomew is called Nathanael, the same Nathanael found in John's gospel (John 1:43-51 and 21:2) as scholars believe his full name to be Nathanael bar Talmai, which could be shortened to Bartholomew.

V5-15

Why would Jesus tell His disciple not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans?

This can be confusing if taken out of biblical context, but Jesus isn't forbidding teaching or helping Gentiles or Samaritans. He is instructing the disciples to take the message to the Israelites *first*. The chosen people should have the first opportunity to hear the news that the prophecies have been fulfilled, and the Messiah has come. Once the message had been spread to the Jews and either accepted or rejected, then the Gentiles and Samaritans were fair game.

The disciples would have the authority and ability to preach the message and perform miracles to enforce that teaching to their audience. They would gather followers in the same manner that Jesus did. Help, heal, show mercy and compassion, and then preach to those that would listen. And they were to do all this without incentives. This would show the purity of the work they were doing and the motive behind it. Jesus wanted to avoid any appearance of scandal. Money would be out of the question because of this. They were to accept only what they needed. Food, minimal clothing, and shelter. Those that provided for the needs of the apostles would be blessed. Those that rejected the apostles would see judgment.

V16-20

What does the phrase 'wise as serpents' mean in verse 16?

Although this saying has been lost over time, most scholars believe this comes from the idea that everyone is either afraid of or hates snakes, so a snake must learn to be creative to survive. Jesus is telling His disciples to be wary and creative so they can survive in the world.

Another reason Jesus wanted to avoid any scandal was to keep accusations from the world off the disciples. Being harmless as doves is another tact of this. There would be no reason for the world to harm the disciples. But the world would find a reason, anyway. Jesus said that even people of great influence would call the disciple before them, for better or worse.

Jesus offered them some comfort in that the Holy Spirit would guide them in their hour of need. They need not worry about what to say or do. Their wisdom would come from God!

V21-23

Jesus also recognized that the truth of His message would be divisive. The world was full of sin, and love was counter-productive to that sin. Those who wallow in sin want no part in the truth. This rings true even today.

What does Jesus mean when He says that the disciples will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes in verse 23?

This is considered to be one of the most difficult to understand passages in Matthew, and possibly the whole Bible. There are several schools of thought on this passage. Some think this refers back to verse 15 where the cities that rejected the disciples would be judged on judgement day. Others believe this has to do with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Rome sacked Judea to squelch the Jewish revolts and the temple was but one casualty. However, these are simply guesses and it is not clear what Jesus meant.

V24-25

Jesus reminds His disciples that He has already been compared to Satan (9:34), so they should expect the same treatment.

V26-31

Despite the impending persecution, Jesus promises that truth will prevail. This prophecy can be looked upon as held true as the very Bible itself has survived two-thousand years of governments and religions trying to hide it, alter it, and do away with it.

V32-39

Jesus reiterates His statements from 21-23 about His message being divisive. These wouldn't just be disagreements. His truth would turn families against each other. Ideologies would clash with the Gospel Truth of Jesus and cause massive rifts between the closest of familial ties. Yes, Jesus encourages those in His fold to hold strong. Eternity is worth more than those that would tear them away from the truth.

V40-42

The closing of this chapter emphasizes the importance of kindness to those that do the work of Jesus. There will be much persecution in the world. Offering kindness to your fellow Christian will be a mighty comfort and is not without its own reward.

Chapter 11

V1-6

Matthew gives evidence of his not recording his gospel in chronological order here as the record of the imprisonment of John the Baptist is in chapter 14. The purpose of this section isn't so much about John the Baptist as much as it is Matthew trying to convince his readers that Jesus isn't the Messiah that the Jews expected. This Messiah isn't a political warrior. He's a spiritual savior.

Most scholars agree that John was well aware who Jesus was. However, his imprisonment may have caused him grief and despair and, in turn, doubt. There are some scholars that think that he wasn't sending his own disciples to confirm the identity of the Messiah, but rather he was sending his disciples so that they could see with their own eyes the Son of God. Regardless, Jesus confirms for both John and his disciples that they need look no further.

Jesus didn't come to setup a government or to overthrow Rome. He came to serve. His miracles confirm His deity, but His humility lies in the fact that these miracles are performed on the poor and rejected. What kind of God would act on behalf of the meek and downtrodden? Only a God of love, mercy, and compassion. This is the gospel that the Messiah preached.

V7-15

Jesus praises John for being the prophet of the Messiah. As a prophet, John was foretold in Malachi 3:1, which Jesus quotes in verse 10. Jesus addresses His own crowd with the rhetorical question, "What did you expect to see when you went to see John in the wilderness?" The first answer would resemble "the same old thing" as shaking reeds would be a common sight. The second answer would be a contrast to John as John was as far from royalty and luxury as one could get. Jesus was calling John a prophet, but even more than that, the precursor to the Messiah. Every prophet before John said the Messiah is coming. John said, "The Messiah is here!"

Why would John be less than even the least in the kingdom of heaven?

Jesus is referring to the New Covenant, which John would not be alive for. John would always live under the Levitical and Mosaic law and never know the benefits of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus or the power of the Holy Spirit living in us!

What does Jesus mean when he refers to heaven suffering violence, and the violent take heaven by force in verse 12?

Most scholars agree that this points to spiritual warfare. Most people, including Christians, think being a Christian means being soft and passive. Jesus was aggressive and passionate about His work! There was very little that was passive about Jesus. He set an example that few Christians follow.

V16-19

Jesus shows some of that violent passion in this passage by rebuking those that refuse His message. There were those that witnessed His miracles and rejected His message because it wasn't what they wanted to hear! They wanted to be free from Rome, not realizing they needed to be freed from sin.

V20-24

What is the idea behind this passage? Why would these cities be held to a higher standard than the cities of the Old Testament the Jesus mentions?

Jesus is saying that since He walked among them, taught, preached, and performed miracles in those cities that they had no excuse not to believe the Word of God. At least Tyre and Sodom had been led astray by generations of idol worship!

V25-27

There is some debate on the meaning of this passage, but it can mostly be summed up in that Jesus will reveal Himself to those who aren't too smart for their own good. Pride will get in between Jesus and your heart.

This passage also reveals the relationship between Father and Son. The equality of knowledge between the Two is telling in the relationship of the deity of Christ and the nature of the trinity. This passage is often used as a defining statement of the deity of Jesus.

V28-30

Some may see this passage as a contrast to Jesus' statements of warning against a not-so-easy life of following Him. However, that's not what this passage means. The keys to this passage are the words "labor" and "heavy laden" depending upon the translation (some use "weary" and "burdened," among others). The first word implies work that we do ourselves. The second word implies work that we put upon others. Jesus is referring to those that are feeling guilty under the weight of their own sin and those that are feeling shackled by the rules of the Jewish law. Jesus is offering freedom from both sin and the Old Covenant, even if the people He's preaching to don't know it yet.

Mathew 12

V1-8

In this era of Jewish law, reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food would have all been violations that Jesus and His followers would be guilty of. Yet these were the man-made laws that took away from the purpose of the Old Covenant. Jesus never violated the Levitical or Mosaic laws. But He had no problem ignoring the made-up laws of the corrupt priests. Some scholars even point out that the Pharisees may have been breaking laws by keeping watch on Jesus and His disciples waiting for them to break a law.

Not only does Jesus ignore their laws, He uses scripture to defeat it! 1 Samuel 21 gives the example of David, Numbers 28:9 refers to the priests having to double the amount of work they do for the temple, and Hosea 6:6 discusses the principle behind the laws.

But Jesus finishes the argument with what the Pharisees would certainly consider blasphemy as Jesus claims His deity to them once again.

V9-16

Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus continued to the synagogue for worship. Jesus still held to the God-given laws and traditions. Jesus was met with another test from the Pharisees even in the house of worship. As is the true meaning of the Law of God, compassion comes before the letter of the law. Jesus points out the Pharisees' hypocrisy and heals the man with the crippled hand right before their eyes.

Both the miracle and His outwitting them are more than they can tolerate and they begin to plot against Him. Matthew records that Jesus withdrew from public ministry at this point, but only for a while. Scholars are also quick to point out that this was not out of cowardice, but Jesus knew this wasn't His appointed time. Jesus proved He was no coward when the appointed time came.

V17-21

Matthew again references the Old Testament as proof of a fulfilled prophecy from Isaiah 42:1-5. Although this is more of a poetic prophecy, this speaks to the character of Jesus, and the Jews would recognize the illustrative references to Jesus found throughout the verses. It would also reference the ministry to the Gentiles, another poke at the Pharisees and Jewish culture of the day.

V22-29

As Jesus continued to perform miracles, the Pharisees worked to discredit Him by claiming His power came not from God but from sorcery. They needed to find a way to turn the crowds against Him. But Jesus would not be discredited. Whether He knew their thoughts divinely or through simple observation, He responded wisely and calmly. What would it benefit Satan to exorcise demons? He also points out that He cast out demons in the same manner that the Jewish exorcists did. Would this make those priests agents of Satan?

What does the analogy of binding the strong man mean?

Jesus is comparing Satan to a strong man and saying that those who exorcise demons in the name of God are stronger than Satan. God will give His followers authority over Satan's strength.

V30-32

There are two severe statements in this passage. The first is that there is no passive neutrality in this stance on Christianity. If you do not follow Jesus, you are against Jesus. There are no “degrees” of Christianity. There is Christian or not Christian.

The second statement is more severe in that this is the only unforgiveable sin found in the Bible. Any blasphemy or discredit of the Holy Spirit will not be tolerated. What the Pharisees just did to Jesus by attributing His healing and exorcism to Satan instead of God, if they truly believed that in their hearts, would be considered inexcusable.

V33-37

Jesus goes on to say that the heart will eventually reveal itself through the words and deeds of the person. Some people may be able to talk a good game for a while but eventually they will be found out if their heart is not of pure intentions or filled with love for God. Our words speak volumes to those around us, and we will even be held accountable for our words on the day of judgment.

V38-45

Whether there were some sincere Pharisees among those that wished to entrap Jesus or these were just taunts and mockery from the previous Pharisees is unclear. Most scholars believe the latter. Regardless, Jesus has already provided miracle after miracle and they still want more. Jesus tells them signs are useless to them as they will never be enough.

Still, Jesus tells them that He will provide them with a sign that's still to come. A sign greater than that of the prophet Jonah. He will mention this again in chapter 16. Even Nineveh repented with less than the signs that had already been given to these Pharisees (Jonah 4). Jesus even references the Queen of Sheba as being a doubter and having no miracles performed at all but walking away with more faith than these men had (1 Kings 10:1-10).

Jesus finishes this section by stating that the rejection of the Messiah now would haunt these Pharisees even more so after upcoming events. Their rejection of the resurrection and deity of Jesus would mark their hearts for eternity.

V46-50

It is unclear what the importance is of pointing out the approaching family members of Jesus. Some scholars believed that the Pharisees sent for His family to remove Him from the crowds so He would stop preaching, but this is speculation based on the context. Regardless, Jesus was quite comfortable surrounded by the masses that chose to follow Him. There were people that genuinely sought mercy, compassion, and love, and He was willing to provide it.

Matthew 13

V1-9

It is unclear at what point Jesus performed these teachings, but most scholars believed Jesus frequently used a boat to preach from with the sea as His backdrop. This gave the benefit of good acoustics and being able to teach without crowds pressing against Him. In this sermon, Jesus provides many parables, presumably at the same time, but not definitively so. The first parable is that of the farmer and the seeds.

The parable says that seeds fell in four different locations, only one of which would produce good results. The first place would be where nothing could grow, the second would be a place where seeds would grow quickly and die quickly, and the third would grow but be swallowed by surrounding vegetation. Only in the final location would the seed take hold and produce anything worthy to be considered good crops.

Jesus finishes the parable with the phrase, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” What does He mean by this?

This was a phrase used to call for spiritually sensitive people to take special note. If someone was capable of understanding the meaning of the parable, they were responsible for doing something with it, whether that be sharing it or acting on it.

V10-17

The disciples and quite frankly many modern Christians wonder why Jesus would speak in parables. The answer, although not quite so obvious even after reading what Jesus says, is that it puts the responsibility of learning on the listener. The truth will be revealed to those that seek it. The truth will remain hidden to those that simply dismiss these parables as simple stories. Jesus references Isaiah 6:9-10 for this prophecy.

V18-23

Jesus reveals the meaning of the parable in great detail to His disciples in this passage. The four variations of believers are still relevant to this day.

- One who hears the Word but has no knowledge of the Word.
- One who excitedly receives the Word, but this excitement only lasts for a little while due to distraction or persecution.
- One who knows the Word but is torn by desires of the flesh or worldly things.
- And finally, there are those that hear the Word and hold fast to it, live by it, and teach others through their lives and knowledge.

Most scholars are quick to point out that Jesus calls this “The parable of the sower.” In this example, the seed is the same and comes from the same sower. The listener is the different types of soil (or lack thereof). It’s what we do with the truth of God’s Word that matters. We cannot blame God for our lack of knowledge.

V24-30

What is a tare (weed, in some translations)?

While some modern translations change this to the more generic term of ‘weed,’ the older terminology speaks to a specific kind of plant related to wheat, most likely darnel, which looked extremely similar to wheat up until the ears formed. Only expert farmers would be able to distinguish between the two. The wisest and experienced farmers knew to let the darnel plant grow with the wheat and then extract it at harvest so as not to damage the crop.

Jesus goes on to explain the meaning of this parable in verses 36-43.

V31-33

There is much debate on the meaning of this parable. It could even have a double meaning. While it could look like a positive reflection of the small faith in Jesus growing into the massive church of Christianity around the world, it could also be taken as a seed of doubt or even corruption inside the church that spread and turns the church into something it was never supposed to be.

Likewise, when Jesus speak of leaven, it could be taken as a positive sign of faith or a negative sign of corruption. In the Old Testament, leaven was usually referred to when speaking of sin. Most scholars use this as reason to believe that Jesus may have been speaking to the negative in these parables.

V34-35

Matthew references Psalm 78:2 as the fulfillment of another prophecy by Jesus using parables to teach people.

V36-43

Jesus explains the parable of the wheat and the weeds rather simply to His disciples in this passage. The world is the field, the wheat represents the true believers, and the weeds are those that belong to Satan. The true believers shall be gathered to God and the 'weeds' shall be thrown into the fire.

V44-46

These two parables differ greatly from the previous parables. Under the Jewish law of the day, a worker who found anything in a field and lifted it out of the field had to bring it to the owner of the field as it would belong to the owner. However, if it remained in the field and the field transferred ownership, whatever was in the field transferred ownership, as well.

In these two parables, Jesus is speaking of Himself as the buyer. *We* are the treasure in these parables. Jesus is speaking about the sacrifice He is going to make to bring us into the Kingdom of Heaven.

V47-52

Jesus tells another parable similar to that of the wheat and the tares. There will be believers and non-believers right up until the end of days (judgement day). When Jesus asks His disciples if they understand what He is saying, they reply, "yes." With that, Jesus informs them that they are now responsible for bringing their understanding to others. This is responsibility for all believers. Those that know are supposed to share their knowledge so that others may know.

V53-58

Matthew records Jesus' return to His hometown of Nazareth. When He began to teach there, He was recognized by those that knew Him as a boy. And they treated Him as a boy. They dismissed Him due to His lowly position as a carpenter and the scandal that hung over His family. They were probably aware of His rise in status and may have even dismissed Him more so because of this. Jesus chose not to persuade them otherwise.

Matthew 14

V1-12

The Herod mentioned here, Herod the tetrarch, is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who was ruler of Jerusalem when Jesus was born. Matthew records that Herod had John the Baptist put to death but does not record when this event took place.

Verses 3-12 are a retrospect of what Herod Antipas had done to John the Baptist. This Herod was apparently feeling guilt as he believed that Jesus was the resurrection of John the Baptist. His guilt may have come from knowing that John was correct in his rebuke. His marriages and affairs were scandalous.

His wife, Herodias, was also rebuked by John, and it was this that caused her to want to ask her husband for John's death. She did this through a shrewd method, through her daughter's pleasing dance in front of a crowd, in public so that there were witnesses, and the request was to be fulfilled immediately so that there would be no backing out.

V13-14

Matthew doesn't record why Jesus left. There are many guesses, but these are all speculation. Some believe it is out of respect for His cousin John and a wish to reflect on his life, possibly even mourn. Regardless, Jesus couldn't be left alone for long. His followers made the journey to find Him. He couldn't turn them away. His compassion was overwhelming.

V15-21

After a full day of ministry, the dinner hour had come, and the disciples were trying to find a way to get everyone to go get food for themselves. But Jesus had other ideas. He asked His disciples to feed them. They protested as they barely had any food. John 6:9 records that these loaves and fish weren't even theirs to give away! Jesus asks everyone to sit down as if at a banquet. This wasn't a standing picnic. This was to be a formal event. Jesus prays over the food. And the feast begins. There was so much food that everyone was satisfied and there was even enough left over to fill up twelve baskets. Matthew records that there were roughly 5000 men. The estimates range in the 12000 to 15000 people including women and children.

V22-25

Jesus sends the crowd away on a full stomach, including His disciples. He sent them away by boat and told them He would meet them later. He was finally able to be alone for a short while. Jesus needed time to be with the Father. Jesus apparently spent hours praying. This is a powerful example set to all Christians.

In the middle of the night between 3am and 6am, the disciples were still on the sea in their boat and were facing another storm on the sea (see 8:23-27). Jesus isn't in the boat with them this time, though. He's walking on the water.

V26-27

This would be even more shocking than the first storm recorded by Matthew. Jesus isn't asleep during this storm. He's literally *in* the storm. This would be a shocking sight to anyone in any era. Their reaction is quite understandable.

V28-33

The original language used by Peter is more of a conditional statement. It's more closely translated, "...since it is you..." rather than "if." This shows Peter's confidence in Jesus. Which makes his lack of faith even more disturbing. However, it should be noted that Peter was the only one with courage to step out of the boat. This is another example for modern Christian's. We often ask ourselves if our faith is stronger than Peter's. Could we survive walking on the water? What we really should be asking is if we would even get out of the boat.

Everyone on the boat worshipped Jesus and whatever doubts they may have had about Him being the Messiah were washed away with the storm.

V34-36

Once they had made landfall, the people on the shore instantly recognized Jesus. He was not to be alone for long. They brought all the needy and ill to Him for mercy and compassion. His ministry was widespread.

Matthew 15

V1-9

Matthew records the interrogation by a delegation of Pharisees from the temple who apparently were sent to observe Jesus and His followers. The washing of hands that they speak of came from a Jewish custom several generations prior to Jesus. There is no Levitical or Mosaic law stating such a requirement, although it would still be hygienic to wash one's hands before eating. The Pharisees were challenging Jesus on a man-made law.

What did Jesus mean when He challenged the Pharisees concerning their parents?

Although lost in context by modern standards, Jesus is challenging them on their own man-made laws. If a Jewish man declared that all his possessions were "a gift from God," then he technically no longer owned those possessions and was under no obligation to contribute any of those belongings to his relatives. It was under this pretense that many of the priests and Pharisees got out of caring for their own parents! They had created their own laws to supersede the laws of God, even those of the ten commandments.

Jesus then quotes Isaiah 29:13 to them to call out their hypocrisy.

V10-11

This passage is often used in conjunction with Acts 10:15 showing that the new covenant breaks the need to refrain from certain types of food. It's what a man does, not what he eats, that shows what's in his heart.

V12-14

The disciples were shocked in the way Jesus so quickly dismissed the Pharisees. This would go against every Jewish tradition they were raised with. However, Jesus didn't tell His disciples to do the same. Instead, He simply said to let them be. Their time would come soon enough.

V15-20

Peter asks for clarification even though most scholars point out there really is no parable to explain. Jesus used illustrations, but these should have been clearer than Jesus' regular parables. Still, Jesus breaks down His statements for His followers. Corruption comes from within and is often found in our words.

V21-28

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities. Jesus intentionally went to speak to those that would listen. Matthew records that a Canaanite, an ancient Jewish enemy came to Jesus seeking help. But she did so in a humble way.

What did the disciples mean when they asked Jesus to send her away?

There is some speculation here due to the verbiage used. Jesus' silence may have encouraged the disciples to be rude to the woman, but most scholars think that they wanted Jesus to simply do what the woman asked just to appease her and get her to go away. In fact, the verb used in Luke 2:29 implies "dismissal with desire satisfied."

Jesus' silence doesn't dissuade the woman. She is persistent. Jesus finally responds to her. While His comments may seem derogatory, His phrasing (using the word 'little') softens the tone to an almost affectionate level.

Just as Jesus had taught His disciples to pray earlier (ask, seek, knock, 7:7-11) this Canaanite woman continuously sought Jesus' attention. And she was rewarded. Her faith was what Jesus was looking for and He found it. Her faith set her and her daughter free.

No where else is it recorded that Jesus says, "O woman, great is your faith!" This statement is only given by Jesus to a Canaanite woman.

V29-31

Matthew does not give a specific location, but this is believed to coincide with the end of Mark 7 where Jesus travels to the Decapolis. This would be a predominantly Gentile region. His ministry had been extended to beyond the "chosen people." Even the Gentiles were giving glory to the Hebrew God.

V32-39

Matthew records that Jesus feeds the multitudes of Gentiles in the same manner as the famous feeding of the 5000. Even though this crowd is supposedly smaller (fewer number of men, anyway) the miracle is the same in many regards. Just as before, the disciples are astounded at how Jesus seemingly produces food out of thin air. And, just as before, there is food to spare.

Matthew 16

V1-4

The Pharisees and Sadducees were opposed on many aspects of religion and politics. It would be rare to see them agree on anything. Yet, their fear of Jesus brought them together. They both saw Jesus as a threat that must be removed.

Jewish tradition held that miracles seen on earth could be “counterfeit” miracles produced by Satan, but a sign from heaven or a miracle produced from the sky could only come from God. It is unclear where this tradition originated. Regardless, Jesus was having none of it. He called them hypocrites for not being able to see the fulfillment of prophecies right before their eyes! And He told them once again (12:39) that He would perform a miracle and fulfill another prophecy greater than that of Jonah.

V5-12

In this passage, Matthew recounts a strange occurrence among the disciples where they had forgotten to bring food and Jesus mentions the Jewish teachers being like leaven in bread. Jesus had to remind His disciples that earthly food is of no concern to Him, and likewise, them. As often as they had seen Jesus perform miracles, as often as they’d seen Jesus feed thousands, they still worried about the physical aspects and overlooked what Jesus was trying to teach them.

V13-20

Jesus asks His disciples two questions here. The first is what others say about Him. The second is what *they* think of Him. He was asking His disciples to search inside of themselves for the truth.

The first answer showed that most people weren’t ready to believe that the Messiah had truly come. They would rather believe in the reincarnation of a past or even recent prophet than see Jesus as the Messiah. Most Jews of the day were hoping for a political Messiah to save them from Roman oppression. Their world view was just that: worldly. They couldn’t see beyond the world into the eternal spiritual world.

The next answer was what Jesus was looking for. Jesus had already declared His deity. He had shown not only them, but the entire region signs and wonders. And He had preached with wisdom and authority. Peter and the others had reached the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah.

This is the first use of the word “church” (ekklesia) in the Bible. Jesus is predicting that the forming of the Christian religion that Peter and the other disciples will bring about after His resurrection will flourish and prosper into something the world has never seen. And He would be right.

The power to “bind” and “loose” (v19) represented Jewish tradition of upholding the law of the day. To be bound meant to be held to the law and to be loosed meant to be released from the law. Jesus is giving Peter the authority to establish the church of the New Covenant.

Finally, after this conversation, Jesus tells His disciples to keep this to themselves. Others must come to this same realization on their own. At least until the resurrection occurs.

V21-23

With the realization that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus tells His disciples the plan. This is also prophesied (Isaiah 53:3-12) and should come as no surprise to the disciples. Still, this would be difficult news to swallow. So much so that Peter even feels the need rebuke Jesus! At least Peter did it privately.

What Jesus says to Peter speaks to the pride of Peter. Jesus had just complimented and even blessed Peter moments earlier. Peter was the rock of the church! He held the keys to Heaven! Why wouldn’t he be able to confront Jesus? But Jesus recognized that Peter was letting these things go

to his head. Peter needed to be confronted before his ego got in the way of the work that needed to be done.

V24-28

After telling His disciples that He was going to suffer, Jesus then breaks the news that His followers must be willing to do the same. This would be difficult to hear. But Jesus explains that the world is not the end goal. There is more than what the world has to offer.

Jesus finishes this passage with some reassuring words to His disciples. There would be some who would see the Glory of God here on earth. Maybe in small glimpses, but the power that Jesus was giving them would be enough to sustain them through some rough times.

Matthew 17

V1-8

This passage contains the Transfiguration. Three of the four gospels tell of Jesus being clothed in bright white light with Moses and Elijah standing with Him. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to witness this event. Surprisingly, the gospel of John is the only one not to mention this occurrence despite the author being present for this event. Just as complete blackness means the absence of light, white means the existence of light. The white of Jesus shone so brightly as if every spectrum of light focused solely on the Creator of the Universe.

There is an interesting use of linguistics in the English translation here that should be mentioned. The words ‘transfigure’ and ‘masquerade’ are opposites in that they both indicate a change but ‘transfigure’ means the change came from the inside. ‘Masquerade’ means the change is only on the outside. The word ‘transfigure’ used here is meant to convey that the brightness of Jesus came from *inside* Him. This is similar to Moses not being able to look directly upon God because His glory would be too bright for Moses to endure (Exodus 33:18-23).

It should be noted that Mark (Mark 9:2) and Matthew both record the phrase “six days later,” while Luke (Luke 9:28) says “eight days later.” Luke is using a Greek phrase which references an estimate of a week. He is not giving an exact count of days.

This passage is also a source of some debate about the afterlife. *How did the disciples know that the figures with Jesus were Moses and Elijah?* Most scholars believe that in the afterlife, the followers of Jesus will all know and recognize each other. Whether this passage is the source of that belief, or an example of that belief is unclear.

Why are the figures of Moses and Elijah important?

Moses is considered the founder of the law of the Old Testament. Elijah usually represents the prophets of the Old Testament. Together, these two would represent the overall summary of the Old Testament. The Transfiguration is another method of converting from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant under Jesus.

What was Peter trying to do by offering to build three tabernacles?

Peter’s intentions may have been good, but he missed the point of what he was seeing. He didn’t fully understand who Jesus really was. As a Jew, Peter would have been in awe of Moses and Elijah.

Seeing Jesus with these two might have elevated Jesus to the level of Moses and Elijah in Peter's eyes. What Peter didn't realize was that Moses and Elijah weren't there to join Jesus. They were there to see the covenant fulfilled and be with God.

What is the significance of the cloud appearing?

Most Christians will recognize this cloud as a symbol of God appearing from the heavens. This would be the same cloud that led the Jews out of Egypt and into the desert in Exodus, the same cloud that appeared to the high priest in the Holy Place of the tabernacle in Leviticus, the same cloud that appeared in the newly created temple of Solomon in 1 Kings, and various other appearances including to Ezekiel and even to Mary when she was told she was going to be the mother of Jesus.

When God the Father spoke from His cloud, Peter, James, and John would have all been in awe of their Teacher. This would have overshadowed the appearance of Moses and Elijah. This would be an emotional roller coaster of a day for these disciples!

V9-13

What do the disciples mean when they ask about Elijah coming first?

There is a prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6 that tells of Elijah coming before the Messiah. What the disciples missed was that this prophecy is concerning judgement day, not the coming of the New Covenant. Both Elijah and Moses are often connected to the two witnesses in Revelation 11:2-13, another reason for them to appear with Jesus during the transfiguration.

V14-21

When Jesus, Peter, James, and John return, they find the rest of the disciples in a bit of a quandary. There is a demon possessed boy that the disciples cannot seem to exorcise. The father immediately seeks the help of Jesus.

Jesus gives a sense of frustration with His disciples as their lack of faith has led to this failure. Jesus reminds them that He will not be with them for much longer and that they will need to do this on their own. Jesus immediately casts out the demon and Matthew records that Jesus rebukes the disciples' lack of faith. Mark 9:29 records that Jesus tells the disciples that these kinds of demons can only be removed by prayer and fasting.

V22-23

It was unusual for Jesus to remind His disciples of His impending death without also reminding them of His upcoming victory in resurrection. He needed them to remember His words in their time of despair.

V24-27

Matthew records Jesus' payment of the temple tax in this passage. This was considered a normal tax of the era, although not without dispute. Sadducees disapproved of the tax, while others sought to escape it altogether. Most men paid it in person during Passover. Rabbis were exempt from paying this tax since it went to the temple.

Jesus tells Peter that He doesn't need to pay the tax since He is the Messiah, but Jesus wasn't going to set a bad example, so He instructed Peter to go fish in an unusual manner for a professional fisherman. Still, Peter trusts Jesus as the Creator of the Universe to know what He's doing. His faith is rewarded in finding the proper payment inside the catch of the day.

Matthew 18

V1-4

Most scholars believe that the disciples' still thought Jesus was going to set up some sort of earthly kingdom, possibly even overthrow Rome. They were anxious to be a part of the political structure that followed. This thought caused a lot of debate and possibly even arguments over who would be Jesus' right-hand man.

In this era, women and children were to be seen, not heard. Women were considered property with very little rights, if any. Male children were not much more until they reached adulthood. When Jesus told the disciples that a child would be the greatest in the kingdom, this must have been confusing and possibly even insulting.

However, Jesus wasn't speaking about stature. He was speaking about the nature of the heart. The faith and innocence of a child was pure. The example was right there before them as Jesus simply called to Him a child and the child came. The child had faith that Jesus had good intentions and meant him no harm. The child obeyed. The child trusted Jesus to do the right thing and that He had the best in mind for himself. The simplicity of the child's faith was what the disciples needed to exemplify.

V5-6

Jesus welcomed *children* to the throne of the kingdom of heaven. He was setting an example for His followers to do the same. Not only are Christians to welcome the humble with open arms, but He adds a caveat that those who mislead the innocent are guilty of sin.

V7-11

Jesus knows that sin is in the world. The first cry of this passage is an acknowledgement of that. The second cry, however, is for the one that allows the sins to happen or "puts the stumbling block in the way."

Jesus uses metaphors to describe the lengths one must go to avoid sin. As Christians, we must be willing to make sacrifices to keep from sin. We can't just avoid sin when it's easy or convenient. Some scholars even believe that the physical mutilation described here is obviously metaphorical because it wouldn't go far enough! We must be transformed from the inside-out to keep from sinning.

Jesus finishes this passage by reminding His disciples (and readers) to keep their sin and anger away from "little ones." This is obviously referring to the child that Jesus called over to Him, but it could also be a reference to "new believers" that are trying to abstain from a sinful life.

Verse 10 and Hebrews 1:14 are often cited as references for the existence of guardian angels. However, both these verses are in the plural instead of the singular which would mean that everyone has multiple angels watching over them, not just one.

Verse 11 is often omitted from modern translations as it is believed to have been added by a scribe in later years. It is not a misrepresentation, however, as Jesus says this phrase in Luke 19:10.

V12-14

This parable is very similar to the one found in Luke 15:3-7, but different enough that scholars believe they are taught for two different purposes. In Luke, Jesus is pointing out the joy in finding one that is lost. In this passage, Jesus is pointing out the joy in finding one that has gone astray. This parable speaks of forgiveness and the joy of repentance.

Verse 14 is often cited as an example that God will exempt children or “innocents” from judgement, but this is highly debated.

V15-18

In this passage, Jesus gives instructions on how to resolve personal conflicts. It should start privately, giving each party a chance to explain their position and not needlessly involve anyone else. This type of resolution can even build a bond of respect.

If this does not resolve the conflict, then it should be escalated minimally so that a mediator or mediators can interact with both parties. If this still doesn’t resolve the conflict, Jesus instructs the church to remove the guilty party like a cancer before the toxicity spreads. It should also be noted that no formal church had been established at this point, so it is unclear how far this excommunication was meant to spread.

V19-20

The word “agree” used here is more accurately translated “to symphonize.” Jesus is expressing how powerful a gathering of Christians can be. Scholars often refer to Leviticus 26:8 as the standard for this verse. Christians gathered together have exponentially more power than a Christian alone.

V21-22

Without context, Peter’s question might seem odd. The Jewish law of the day allowed forgiveness up to three times. Beyond that, forgiveness was not expected. So, Peter offering to forgive seven times would seem generous by Jewish standards. However, Jesus had a much different answer. The forgiveness of God is unlimited. His mercy is never ending. We can do no less than follow that example.

V23-35

Jesus follows Peter’s question with a famous parable of forgiveness. If God can forgive us for all our harsh sins throughout our life, how can we not forgive those who have slighted us? In fact, not forgiving them is a sin! If our hearts are unable to forgive, then our hearts don’t fully understand the nature of God’s love.

Matthew 19

V1-2

Wherever Jesus went, He was followed. His name was known throughout the region. Crowds would gather at every town or city He visited. Judea was no different. As most of the gospel’s record, though, not everyone in the crowd was a believer. Most were there out of selfishness or curiosity.

V3-9

Then there were those in the crowd who wished to test Him. The Pharisees looked for every opportunity to discredit Jesus.

There was a great debate of the day between two primary schools of thought amongst the Jews. There were those that understood that Deuteronomy 24:1 referred to sexual immorality as the sole reason for divorce. There was another popular Rabbi that put forth the idea that any sort of indiscretion could fall under the “uncleanness” clause, and this covered such a broad spectrum that a woman having a mole or the burning of a meal could be grounds for divorce.

Rather than argue about the Mosaic law of divorce, though, Jesus reminds them of the Godly desire of marriage. God’s first design is for a marriage to survive, and to not be separated from one’s spouse. It is only because of the stubbornness of man that divorce is even permitted, and only in the case of adultery. Divorce for any other reason is not divorce in God’s eyes.

This opens the door to many modern conversations concerning marriage. What about abusive relationships? What about marriages of convenience or marriages outside of the church? Jesus makes it very clear in this passage what marriage should be like. It was true then, it is true now, or else it was never true.

V10-12

The disciples understood that Jesus and God the Father took marriage very seriously. They asked if it would be better to not get married at all. Jesus explained that this path was not meant for everyone. Just because it was not to be taken lightly doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be done.

V13-15

It was a Jewish custom for parents to bring their children to the elders to have them blessed and be prayed over. Here, the people wanted Jesus to do the same. It is unclear why the disciples tried to dismiss the children, whether Jesus was being crowded or if they simply found the children to be a nuisance. But Jesus welcomed the innocence of the children.

V16-22

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all three record this story. It’s important because it tells of someone wanting to earn their way into heaven.

Why did Jesus ask the young man why he called Him “good” (verse 17)?

The young man called Jesus “Good Teacher” and then asked what “good things” he must do to get into heaven. This prompted Jesus to wonder if the man truly understood what “good” meant. Jesus tells this young man that he must keep all the commandments to enter heaven. Jesus only lists a handful of the commandments, and only those that deal with relationships to fellow man, at that.

If everyone is honest with themselves, no one has completely kept these commandments since birth. Everyone has broken at least one of these, if not all, and probably on multiple occasions. Still, the young man proudly responds that he’s kept all these commandments.

So, Jesus tells him to get to the heart of the matter, literally. Simply following the commandments doesn’t make a person good. It’s *why* you’re following the commandments that God wants to see.

God wants your heart. This young man was following his money and his status. He wasn't following God.

V23-26

Jesus gives an impossible example intentionally. No one can be saved on their own. We must be saved by a savior. Riches make one comfortable with life so that we don't seek help. We don't think we need to be saved. Money can become a powerful idol that stands between us and God.

V27-30

After the disciples heard Jesus' response to the young rich man, they wondered what this would mean for them. They *had* given up everything to follow Jesus. Some of them, including Matthew, had given up lucrative careers to follow Jesus.

Jesus assured them that the kingdom that followed would be their reward. They would be established as high administrators in heaven over the twelve tribes. He proceeded to tell them that anyone who sacrificed to become a follower would be rewarded in heaven in a similar fashion. Jesus' final statement foretells of how upended heaven will look compared to the status quo of what we expect here on earth.

Matthew 20

V1-16

It is strongly believed that this passage immediately follows the previous chapter and is a continuation of Jesus' explanation to His disciples concerning the rewards in heaven. Jesus again uses a parable to explain what He means.

There are many aspects of this parable to take in. One being that the landowner, God, continuously looks for workers to do the work. Another aspect is that the landowner finds people idle looking for work. There is also a sense of urgency here as the vineyard is ripe and must be harvested quickly before the fruit is ruined on the vine. Time is of the essence. God wants to harvest as much as He can before the final judgment.

Jesus also makes it clear that the reward is the same regardless of when the person was hired. Heaven is for everyone regardless of how long a person has lived a sinful life. As long as one sincerely repents, one is sincerely forgiven.

It is also noted that the landowner makes no effort to explain Himself to the workers other than to say that He is doing what He wishes with what is His. The Creator does not need to explain His actions or generosity to His creation! Jesus again explains that God's social construct will be very different than that of our earthly setup.

V17-19

Jesus tells His disciples of His upcoming betrayal, death and resurrection. It is commonly remarked upon how blunt this passage is and how little commentary Matthew gives surrounding it. There is no mention of a reaction from the disciples. Matthew records this statement very matter-of-factly to state that Jesus said it in great detail, but there is no other context offered.

V20-23

After the end of chapter 19 and the beginning of this very chapter, it seems fitting that Matthew included this passage so soon after. James' and John's mother came to Jesus asking for a place of earthly honor for her sons. These seats would be positions of high authority in any kingdom. Yet, Jesus tells her and the disciples that those seats are not His to give and that those seats come at a cost.

V24-28

The other disciples were less than pleased with James and John at their mother's request. They did hear Jesus say that the seats were not His to give, but they also heard Jesus say that James and John would be baptized with the same baptism as Him. The disciple had no idea what that meant, though. Jesus rebuked them for seeking status. He reminded them to serve one another and others and to not lord position over others like the Romans do.

V29-34

Matthew records that Jesus and His disciples leave Jericho. This would be the last of Jesus' ministry as they set out to Jerusalem for Passover. As they are leaving, two blind men recognize that Jesus is passing by. They know that Jesus is heading out and that they might not get another chance to catch Him. They shout over the noise of the crowd to be heard. And it pays off.

The closing of this chapter is a powerful statement of these two blind men. They didn't simply become healed and then go do their own thing. They recognized that they owed their sight to Jesus, so they followed Him.

Matthew 21

V1-5

Mark 11, Luke 19, and this passage record the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, only Matthew leaves out the encounter with the owner of the colt. Mark and Luke record that only the colt was brought, while Matthew records that both the colt and its mother were brought. Mark and Luke also record that the colt had never before been ridden while Matthew omits this detail. For a colt to be newly ridden by a stranger in a crowd full of shouting strangers and remain completely calm would be another passive miracle.

Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9 as the prophecy for this triumphal entry, noting that both the donkey and colt are mentioned.

V6-11

Because this was Passover week, Jerusalem was filled with Jewish travelers. There would be literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Jews in the region for the celebration. The ministry of Jesus over the past 3 years had spread throughout the region. Now, those people whom He had ministered to were all gathered in one place. When they saw Him coming through the gate, they celebrated His arrival. He did not come as a military leader on a horse, but as a humble, peaceful, royal dignitary on a donkey. Those who didn't know who He was quickly learned the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Palm branches had been a symbol of victory for the Jews for the past 150 years at this point. They even appeared on the Jewish currency of the day. It would be an honor for the Jews to place palm branches on the road before Jesus.

V12-13

It is believed that the record of Jesus cleansing the temple in John 2:14-22 was in the first year of Jesus' ministry. This would have been a complete shock and surprise to the market in the temple as no one had ever done such a thing before. Here, Jesus had the full backing of the people who welcomed Him into Jerusalem. The money changers couldn't have stopped Him if they had an army.

V14-17

Once the temple was cleared of the market, the poor and needy came to Jesus and He welcomed them. The temple grounds were being used as they should have been used. The children were singing praise to Jesus in the courts of the temple! The priests and leaders of the temple, who were just fine with money changers residing in the courtyard, rebuked Jesus for allowing children to sing His praises. Jesus merely quotes Psalm 8:2 to them and continues on His way.

Because it was Passover, lodging would be hard to come by. It is assumed Jesus was on his way to Bethany to stay with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

V18-22

This story can also be found in Mark 11:12-14. Jesus used the tree as an example to the disciples. Fig trees are known for producing leaves and fruit at the same time. A bare fig tree meant that it was in hibernation or even dead. A fig tree with leaves meant that fruit was ripening on the branch. In this case, the tree had leaves but no fruit.

This tree was a metaphor for people claiming to be Christian but not sharing their Christianity with others. Our purpose as Christians is to love others and show them the way to eternal life. If we don't do this, then we are not truly Christians.

Jesus encourages His disciples to have faith. Even with a little faith, they can do more miraculous things than cause a tree to wither away.

It should be noted that Matthew records that the fig tree withered immediately, but Mark records that the fig tree withered overnight. This could simply be a case of Matthew abbreviating the story. Even an "overnight withering" would be considered a miracle.

V23-27

This is another parallel story to Mark 11:27-33. It is believed that the original intention of Jesus was to teach in the temple as He had done so many times before. This time, the temple authorities met Him and questioned Him. What they were not expecting was Jesus to confront them, as well. Jesus posed a question to their question offering to respond to them upon their answer. Jesus' question put them in an awkward position. Answering one way exposed them as hypocrites and answering the other way would turn the people against them. They had been backed into a corner.

V28-32

Instead of answering their question, Jesus gives a parable to the Jewish leadership. Although it is short and easy to understand, there are many nuances to the parable. The relationship as father to son, for one. As Christians, we are children of God. Second, God calls us to work, usually immediately, just as the father asked the son to go to work today. And as children, we should be interested and even invested in what belongs to our Father, just as the son should be interested in the vineyard of his father. Unfortunately, there are many who participate in church and claim to be Christians who have no interest in doing any work for the kingdom of God.

V33-41

In this parable, the story seems a bit extreme. The priests and scribes hadn't killed anyone. Not yet anyway. But the message was clear. Jesus was accusing them of not honoring what God had given them and returning what was due Him. Little did they realize that they would fulfill this parable by sending Jesus to His crucifixion.

V42-46

Jesus quotes Psalm 118 to them in order to make them realize that their time had come and the favor that they thought they inherited would mean nothing as God would pass them over and seek others to allow into the kingdom of Heaven. They were driven to anger. So angry that they would end up fulfilling the very prophecies that were needed to instill the New Covenant.

Matthew 22

V1-10

Even by today's standards, a wedding is considered a significant life event. In this era, a wedding was a weeklong event. Moreso, a royal wedding was a spectacular event attended by people of stature. Most scholars believe Jesus uses this example because there would be no logical reason for the invited guests to refuse to come to the wedding just as there is no logical reason to refuse the gift of salvation that Jesus is offering the Pharisees and Sadducees that stood before Him.

The king doesn't just stop with one invitation. He sweetens the deal and extends another invitation. But is again rejected, either mockingly or nonchalantly.

The third invitation was extended to anyone and everyone, to those that weren't on the guest list originally and even those that were considered undesirable. This would be a picture of God opening His kingdom to the Gentiles, to the sinners, the rejected of the day. These would be the people sitting at the royal feast of the wedding.

V11-14

What does the closing of this parable mean? Who does the ragged-clothed man represent?

There are many who claim to be followers of Jesus and even act like they are up to a certain point. But their hearts are elsewhere. If they are not found out in this life, God will find them out on judgment day. There will be no feast for them.

V15-22

The Pharisees and priests had watched Jesus' popularity grow over the past three years and they grew jealous and tired of His teachings and rebukes. Their direct attacks had no effect, and the

crowds would be hard to win over with a blatant arrest. Therefore, they had to try trickery. They tried clever and confusing questions so as to put Him at odds with either the Romans or God. They did not accept that Jesus *was* God, so they didn't expect Him to outsmart their cleverness.

They begin with flattery and then try to pin Jesus down on the question of taxes. Jesus returns to them with the famous, "Pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" quote.

V23-33

The Sadducees aren't mentioned very often in the Bible, but that's because they are smaller in number than the Pharisees. They tended to be aristocratic theologians of the governing class. They didn't believe in an afterlife or resurrection, and they only adhered to the first five books of Moses, and even then, typically only when it suited them. It seems fitting that their primary "trip up" question to Jesus would be concerning the afterlife.

Jesus is quick to not only rebuke them but call them ignorant. They were so arrogant that they couldn't imagine a world beyond what they could see! Jesus told them that there was a world beyond their small imagination that was not restricted to the social constructs of this planet.

He then goes on to inform them of the linguistics of the very books they pretend to study. God *IS* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not *WAS* the God of. The linguistics of the Word of God would be of great importance to the educated class. Just as no one can be a father without children or a king without people, God *IS*, not *WAS*.

V34-40

Matthew records another attempt of the Pharisees attempting to catch Jesus in some sort of falsehood. Instead, Jesus gives what is one of the most recognized passages of the Bible; The greatest commandment, "Love God with all you heart, all your soul, and all your mind," followed promptly by the second most important commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." These two commandments are the summary of the Mosaic and Levitical law, and the entirety of the teachings of the Bible.

V41-46

Before the Jewish leadership could think of another "trick question," Jesus asks a question of His own. However, scholars are quick to point out that Jesus wasn't trying to trick His opponents. In fact, even today many people that read this passage often glance over it too quickly. The Pharisees weren't wrong in their answer. The Messiah *is* from the line of David. What Jesus was trying to do was get them to realize that the Messiah was *also* God Himself. Being from the line of David would speak to the Messiah's humanity, but the Messiah is also David's Lord, a reference to the Messiah's divinity. If only the Pharisees would have analyzed the passage more closely and listened to what Jesus was trying to tell them, they wouldn't have wandered off in shame but followed closely to the Messiah that stood before them.

Matthew 23

V1-7

If the previous chapter and this chapter are indeed in immediate chronological order as indicated by the opening word of the chapter, then the leadership that had just left Jesus in shame would not have heard these words that He proceeded to speak to the remaining crowds.

Jesus instructed the Jews to listen and adhere to the words of the teachers, for they did teach the law of God. He simply knew their hearts were not in the right place and reminded the people to do what they were taught, not what they observed.

Jesus explained that most of the leadership were prideful and simply wanted the status and glory that came with the office of being a teacher or leader. The phylacteries and tassels in verse 5 are references to Jewish traditional clothing practices taken from Deuteronomy 11:18 and Numbers 15:38-40. A phylactery is a small leather box with tiny scripture scrolls inside, tied to the arm and head with leather straps.

V8-10

Jesus held His followers to a different standard. Instead of being called teachers and students, the body of Christians were to be called brothers and sisters so as to share equality in a family setting under God the Father. Jesus is the earthly teacher who would leave us His message and example for all to follow.

V11-12

Jesus reminds His followers that His kingdom is very different from anything on earth. Instead of greatness being observed by how much power is wielded over others, Jesus would recognize greatness by how much service is provided to others.

V13-36

This section is referred to as “The Seven Woes” (NASB) or “Eight Woes” (NKJ) depending upon which translation is used. V14 is left out of the earliest transcripts of Matthew, but it is present in Mark 12:38-40 and Luke 20:46-47. These are sinful characteristics that Jesus attributes to the temple leaders.

- V13: Jesus warned the rulers that they were making human law more important than God’s law, and this was deterring people from seeking God. This would be costly to the souls of those that caused others to stumble.
- V14: The Jewish leadership would often find ways to steal the land or houses that they desired from widows and call it necessary to further the kingdom of God. Many use the phrasing in this passage to indicate that there are various degrees of punishment in Hell.
- V15: Jesus wasn’t criticizing the missionary work of the Jews. He was criticizing the message they were preaching. It was a corrupt, profit-driven message that had led to a large and successful Jewish movement in the first century, but it was not based on the Mosaic law.
- V16-22: The Jews adhered to Exodus 20:7 and would never swear by the name of God. However, the Jews of the day had constructed an elaborate and difficult oath system which

held varying degrees of legitimacy and binding. Jesus reminds them that every oath is binding and that God will hold them accountable for their lies (Exodus 20:16).

- V23-24: Jesus tells the crowds that the Pharisees have become so obsessed with the trivialities of tithing and keeping track of the small things that they have completely overlooked the purpose of the law that they sought to uphold.
- V25-26: Jesus accuses the Pharisees of simply keeping up appearances without keeping their souls right before God.
- V27-28: Similar to the previous verses, the Pharisees would appear to be clean on the outside but be dead and unrighteous on the inside.
- V29-36: The Pharisees of Jesus' era claimed to adhere to the teachings of the old prophets and swore that they would never ignore the likes of Jeremiah, Ezekial, or others like their forefathers did. Yet, Jesus is warning these same Pharisees that they are not only ignoring Him, but they will continue to ignore His followers, as well.

V37-39

The Bible records that Jesus held a special place in His heart for the Jews because they had been given the Word of God so early on. Luke 19:41 records Jesus' lamenting over Jerusalem as He approached it. Here, He does so aloud to the very crowds of the Passover as He desires all His creation to follow Him but out of their own will, not out of a mandate!

The closing of this chapter is a prophecy from Jesus Himself about His second coming. Someday, the chosen people will welcome Him back and recognize Him as the Messiah. Most commentators point to Romans 11:26 as a corresponding passage to this prophecy.

Matthew 24

Mark 13 and this chapter of Matthew are extremely similar. So much so that it's possible that some of the writing may have been collaborated between the two authors. However, there are enough variations of details to note that these are from two separate accounts.

V1-2

Mark 13:1-2 gives a lightly more detailed account of this conversation but just barely.

Why would the disciples be amazed at the site of the temple?

The temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and then rebuilt by Nehemiah roughly 400 years before the Roman empire came into existence, although only as a semblance of its original glory. Herod was "redecorating" the temple, so it was a fairly new structure, and it was a glorious spectacle. It is said to have had so much gold plating on the outer walls that it could be blinding on a sunny day. Where there wasn't gold, there were large marble blocks. The rebuilding started in 19BC and wasn't completed until 63AD, so the redecorating took place during the entirety of Jesus' time on Earth. This would also lend more credence to Jesus' claims to be greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6).

The Jews continued to revolt against the Roman empire long after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The temple restoration was completed in 63AD, but it would only be seven years later that

Rome needed to squelch the many uprisings of the Jews and leveled Jerusalem flattening even the great temple.

V3-14

In a rare moment of solitude with His inner circle, Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives which provides a spectacular view overlooking the temple.

Luke 21:8-23 and Mark 13:3-13 both record the same conversation with more detail added. The disciples ask two questions (or three depending on which scholar is breaking down the grammar in this passage), but Jesus will only answer the latter portion of the disciples' inquiries.

Matthew does record that Jesus predicted the world conditions until His second coming. There will be false prophets, false messiahs, wars, and natural disasters. Christians will be persecuted, which has happened and continues to happen, even more so throughout the modern world than in the past. This means that Christians must be even more steadfast. One of the answers to the age-old question "Why does God let bad things happen to good people?" is that Christians need to witness to those that are doing the harm. Our fellow man is not our enemy. Satan is. Our persecutors need to know that they, too, can be saved. However bad it gets, however stinging the betrayal, however harsh the world may become, the Love of God must still be preached.

V15-28

What is the 'abomination of desolation' that Jesus speaks about?

Jesus is quoting from Daniel 11:31 where Daniel is prophesying the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanies less than 200 years before the time of Jesus. It was believed at that time that Antiochus Epiphanies was the fulfillment of that prophecy, but Jesus says here the worst is yet to come.

These words that Jesus spoke some two-thousand years ago spark much debate. Some scholars and theologians think that this prophecy had at least begun when Rome destroyed the temple in 70AD, forcing the Jews to flee into the hills. Other scholars refer to verse 19, pointing out that the 'Great Tribulation' hasn't happened yet. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 discusses how Christians will not have to suffer through the tribulation, leading to the general consensus that this prophecy hasn't been fulfilled, regardless of whether it's started yet or not.

Jesus speaks of the horror of the tribulation as something that mankind cannot survive. The tribulation truly does mean the end. Jesus even says for those that find themselves in the midst of the tribulation to flee as this is not something to be taken lightly! People have been waiting on the return of Jesus for two thousand years. This doesn't mean we can relax and think that the end will never come. Jesus warns (later in the chapter) that no one knows when He is coming back, not even Himself. Only the Father knows when the tribulation will begin. There is never a time to relax.

Verse 28 has been rewritten in modern translations to something easier to understand in English culture. Older translations use the phrase, "...wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered..." This is most likely a rough translation from a Greek, Hebrew, or even Roman colloquialism which most likely means, "when judgment is ripe, it will surely come."

V29-31

Jesus continues on to post-tribulation prophecy. This is no longer just about the fall of mankind, but this is destruction on a cosmic scale! Most Christians believe that the end is near because it can't possibly get much worse. Jesus says here that it's going to get much worse.

V32-35

The Mount of Olives was famous for its fig trees. Fig trees are often considered the trumpeter of the seasons as they only produce leaves when summer approaches. Jesus is saying that the signs He has provided are as foreboding as the fig tree.

Why does Jesus use the phrase 'this generation' when talking about the tribulation?

This is often a point of confusion for readers as the disciples all passed away without seeing Jesus' return. Jesus isn't referring to the generation of disciples. Jesus means that the generation that witnesses the abomination of desolation will be the last generation.

V36-41

How could Jesus not know the hour of His return if He is God?

This is one of those questions that non-believers like to ask to stump Christians. However, the answer is relatively simple. Jesus, the Son of God, volunteered to not know. He submitted to God the Father even though He is God *with* the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another example of this would be Jesus' volunteering to be the sacrifice for mankind and submitting to the will of the Father even though He prayed for another way (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus uses the days of Noah as an example of the end times. Everyone went about living their lives without a care in the world up until the rain began to fall and the water levels rose. Once the door closed on the ark, their chance for redemption ended.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 corroborates this message from Jesus that people will simply begin to disappear and meet Jesus in the sky. This is where the idea of the rapture comes from.

V42-51

Jesus tells all His followers to be ready and vigilant. We are not to fall into "normalcy" like the people during the time of Noah! Jesus promises rewards for those that the Father finds doing His work upon His return. But He also promises torment for those that are caught lacking while the master is away.

Matthew 25

V1-13

This parable is a direct continuation of the end of chapter 24. Those that are not doing the works of the Father while the Son is away will not be welcomed into the kingdom when the Son returns.

Jewish customs of the era are far different than modern weddings. A Jewish wedding consisted of three stages: the engagement, the betrothal or the vows, and finally the marriage. These three stages took place over the course of a year. The engagement was usually arranged between the groom and the father of the bride. The vows were the ceremony where the bride and groom promised themselves to each other. The actual wedding took place much later, usually one year

later, allowing the groom to prepare financially to provide for his new bride. In this parable, Jesus is speaking of the third stage of the wedding. It was tradition for ten bride-maids to escort the groom to his new bride on the wedding night.

It is important to note that all the maidens slept while they waited for the groom, but only half were prepared when they were awakened. The other half went to sleep with no thought or worry about what would happen when the night was over. The unprepared maidens could not make up the time and were locked out of the final part of the wedding.

Jesus is simply reiterating what He said at the end of chapter 24; be ready because you never know when the end is coming and when He is returning.

V14-23

In this parable, a “talent” is a unit of money worth a modern-day equivalent of roughly \$1200 US. This was also not an uncommon practice for a wealthy man who had to leave for a long-term trip. He would often divide up whatever money he wasn’t taking with him among his most trusted servants for safekeeping and investing, expecting a return on his investment when his trip was over.

For those listening to this parable, they would completely understand the first two servants wisely investing and doubling their master’s money. They understood their master would be pleased with them. And, indeed, the master rewarded their faithfulness by entrusting them with even more of his possessions and granting them the comforts of his kingdom.

V24-30

The third servant tries to hide behind the greatness of his master, saying that he has so much that this one talent would hardly matter. At the very least, what was given was also returned. Nothing was lost.

The third servant is often looked upon with modern eyes with compassion saying, “Look, he did nothing wrong, why is he being punished?” But that is the point of this parable. The third servant *did* do something wrong: he did *nothing*. He didn’t obey the commands of his master. God calls us to *act*. We are His hands and feet. We are His voice. He wants us to go into the world and seek those that are lost. To do nothing is to disobey God.

The master’s rebuke was also telling in that the servant didn’t need to double the income like his fellow servants did. He simply needed to do *something*. God isn’t going to hold us accountable for how many people we witness to or how many people we bring to the altar or baptize. He wants to know where our hearts are at. Are we willing to do His work? If we are, then we have nothing to fear.

V31-33

These verses are often referred to as the Judgment of Nations. This is another End-of-Times prophecy from Jesus Himself, but distinctly different than the judgment throne found in Revelation 20:11-15. This judgment apparently takes place immediately following Jesus’ return to earth and takes place on earth, not in Heaven. There is much debate about what exactly is taking place for this judgment. Most scholars believe this is a “group” judgment of Gentiles by nation of how they treated the Jewish nation. Others are of the opinion that this is a judgment that takes place of the remainder of the people on earth prior to the final judgement, but after Jesus’ return (after the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), during His 1000-year reign.

V34-40

The “sheep” would be blessed because they did the works of the Father. Their hearts followed the will of God and served their fellow man.

V41-46

Likewise, the “goats” would be cursed because their hearts served only themselves or, at the very least were indifferent (they did nothing like the third servant in the parable of the talents).

Matthew 26

V1-5

As with the previous placement and bluntness of Jesus’ foretelling of His crucifixion (20:17-19), there aren’t any details or reasons for the statement. However, given the context it can be concluded that Jesus may have been trying to remind His disciples to not get too excited. The previous chapters contain the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the overturning of the money-lenders tables in the temple courtyards, and this is after raising Lazarus from the dead (see John chapter 11). The disciples are probably thinking the earthly kingdom of Jesus is drawing near at this point. Jesus is letting them know that the worst is yet to come. But so is the best.

Jesus’ prophecy is about to come true as the high priest plots to kill Jesus. The temple elders decide it would be best to wait until after Passover to kill Jesus, but somehow just the opposite occurs.

V6-13

Matthew, Mark, and John all record the event of Mary pouring oil over Jesus. Luke also records a similar event, but this is commonly believed to be at a different time in a different place. The events in Matthew, Mark, and John are all the same event, but Matthew and Mark leave out the names of Lazarus and his sisters. This is believed to be because Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were all still *alive* while these first two gospels were written. As such, they would be targeted people. Neither the Jews nor the Romans would appreciate having anyone speak of the dead man Lazarus walking around in a fully revived state. Matthew and Mark kept their identities hidden. John, having written his gospel decades later, wasn’t worried about the hidden identities anymore (see John 12:1-3).

It is not stated here, but the disciple that objected to Mary “wasting” the oil was Judas (see John 12:4-6). Jesus rebukes Judas not because He doesn’t have sympathy for the poor, but because he knows where Mary’s heart is at. In that instance, Mary has an overwhelming love and gratitude for Jesus, and this is the best way she knows how to express it.

Jesus recognizes the pureness of Mary’s heart. He goes so far as to ensure that the gospel writers record her actions for all Christians to read for millennia to come.

V14-16

There is a hidden reason for the placement of this passage. Even though Matthew doesn’t say who objected to Mary anointing Jesus with oil in the previous section, the gospel of John and other readers of the day would be aware that this is Judas. Judas might feel that Jesus’ rebuke was insulting, and that would lead to the actions of this passage. This passage also reveals a sense of greed as the first thing Judas thought of was personal gain.

V17-25

It should be noted that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all present this meal as the first day of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The gospel of John typically indicates that this meal took place the day before Passover. However, the simplest and most logical explanation is that the answer is “both.” The Jewish day begins at sunset. It is most likely that Jesus and His disciples had their Passover supper at the earliest moment on Passover, what modern times would call the night before. Most Passover festivities took place at sun rise, including the slaughter of the lambs, which would coincide with the crucifixion of Jesus. It is also usually noted that there is no mention of lamb at the “last supper” of Jesus and His disciples. This is because no lambs had been slaughtered yet! This would also fit with the conversation that lasted well into the evening, going into the garden to pray, Jesus getting arrested, and a rooster crowing when Peter denied Jesus the third time.

During the meal, Jesus informs His closest friends that one of them will betray Him. They all look astonished. The Passover meal usually meant sharing certain dishes amongst family and friends. Jesus wasn’t pointing out anyone in particular when He said, “the person who dipped his hand with Me will betray Me.” He was pointing out that it was someone close to Him.

All twelve disciples asked Jesus if it was he who was the betrayer. Only eleven of them were sincere in their asking.

V26-30

Matthew records that instead of providing the traditional Passover explanation for the food, Jesus gave a new meaning to the food being eaten. The New Covenant was established with this Last Supper. The Greek word for “thanks” is eucharist, which is where many denominations get their name for the communion from. When they had finished eating and talking, Jesus and the disciples sang, and left for the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

It is not recorded what hymn was sung, but the traditional closing song to a Passover meal is Psalm 116-118.

V31-35

Jesus gives another bold prophecy. He has already predicted His own death. He has told them there is a traitor in their midst. And now He tells them that they will all abandon Him. Peter firmly objects, but Jesus only offers Him an even worse prediction in return. The prophecy of Peter’s triple-denial is still to be fulfilled.

V36-46

This passage shows the reader the human side of Jesus. He had no desire to die! This was not the way He wanted things to be! This shows a distinction between Son and Father which Jesus has claimed many times, while also claiming the deity of God the Father. Jesus sets an example for all Christians here which is hard to follow. The Father’s will be done above all else. It doesn’t matter what we want. It may mean suffering and even death. But in the end God’s plan is greater.

Even in disappointment, Jesus still spoke kindly to His friends in His final hours before crucifixion.

V47-56

Jesus was well known to the Jewish community. He had thousands of followers and was recognizable across most of Judea. But to the Romans, He was just another Jew. Even to the temple guards, He might just be another vagrant. Judas had to identify Him in some manner so that the “authorities” would know whom to arrest. So, Judas pointed out Jesus with the traditional greeting of a student and friend to a teacher and mentor. It was a heartbreaking betrayal.

John 18:10 records that the disciple with the sword was Peter. Jesus rebukes Peter, stating that He could easily take care of Himself. Indeed, John gives an account of Jesus showing how much power Jesus truly commands. But Jesus willfully goes with his would-be captors.

Matthew records that “all the disciples forsook Him and fled.” This must have been hard for Matthew to write knowing that he was one of those that left.

V57-68

This section records the trial of Jesus in front of Caiaphas, the high priest. It is believed that Matthew is recording what he learned from Peter and John about the trials, but this is not certain. Jesus lived a very public life. The fact that even finding false testimony against Him proved difficult spoke volumes to the integrity of the life of Jesus.

The only response Jesus gave in this trial were two sentences confirming what He had said many times before.

Considering this confession blasphemy, the high priest declared Jesus guilty.

V69-75

The closing of the chapter concludes with the fulfillment of the prophecy of Peter’s denial. It is uncertain how many hours had passed between Jesus’ arrest and Peter’s denial, but it was just a matter of hours. Peter didn’t even make it a day. The final sentence of this chapter is a powerful statement of repentance on the part of Peter. Once he realized what he had done, he knew he was wrong. This would be a powerful lesson in the life of Peter.

Matthew 27

V1-2

The early morning trials at the house of Caiaphas would have gone against Jewish law. There was apparently a break in these trials for some sleep and then the trials resumed in a more official and legal capacity. The Sanhedrin sentenced Him and sent Him before Pilate, the Roman governor of the region, for a judgment of death.

V3-10

Matthew is intentionally careful with his words in this passage. Judas was remorseful but not repentant. It is unclear how Matthew knew of the conversation between the priests and Judas or knew the results. It is assumed that a Christian-friendly priest or temple servant provided details to some of the disciples after the fact.

Judas throws the silver into the temple as a way to implicate the priests in the murder of Jesus, as well. He was not the only one that was guilty. There is a bit of hypocrisy here on the part of the

priests as they didn't want to keep the silver as that would "defile" them as being unclean by accepting blood money. But it was the priests who paid the money to Judas in the first place!

Matthew apparently makes an error in his quotation which many scholars have tried to explain. The quote given is from Zechariah 11:12-13. Some explanations are that Zechariah may have been quoting Jeremiah, others think that the Jewish scroll of Jeremiah may have included the records of Zechariah. Still, some believe this may be just the error of a scribe copying the letter of Matthew for reproduction. However, this would not be the first time Matthew left some confusion behind his reference of the Old Testament (see notes on 2:19-23).

V11-14

Matthew only records the second time Jesus stood before Pilate, as there are other accounts that record Jesus being interviewed by Pilate twice (Luke 23:1-6). History records that Pilate was a harsh and even cruel individual, especially towards the Jews, so his demeanor towards Jesus seems out of character.

V15-26

Pilate, in an unusual act of mercy, tries to find a way to free Jesus. He seeks the crowd's approval to free Jesus. Pilate was surprised when the crowd chose a rebel Zionist, what one could consider a revolutionary terrorist, named Barabbas over Jesus.

It should be noted that Matthew records Pilate seating in "the judgment seat" (verse 19). As much as Pilate wished to wash his hands of Jesus' death, Pilate had the ability to pass the correct judgment and set Jesus free. He did what he did to appease the Jewish leadership and to keep the peace, not for justice.

It is unclear how Matthew knows of Pilate's wife's dream. There must have been a servant relaying the message that knew the disciples that would have been privy to this information. However Matthew found out about it, Pilate's wife apparently gave a warning to her husband to leave Jesus alone. One can only assume this was God giving Pilate a chance to do the right thing.

Instead, Barabbas, was the first person to discover what it meant for someone else to take your place on the cross. Jesus was crucified instead of Barabbas.

History records that scourging was a common practice before Roman crucifixion to speed up the process of death on the cross. Although the victim would die quicker, it is believed this death would also be more painful as the exposed skin, tissue, and bone would add to the already painful act of crucifixion.

V27-31

Why did the Roman soldiers single Jesus out in this manner?

The garrison of soldiers were likely non-Jewish individuals from the surrounding region (Roman conquered areas) seeking Roman citizenship through conscription. These soldiers likely hated the Jews for their own reasons and saw no reason to go easy on "just another Jewish prisoner," especially one calling Himself "King of the Jews."

V32-56

Simon of Cyrene was likely only in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Here, he finds himself being ordered to help a condemned man carry His cross. He had no idea at the time what he was doing. However, in Mark 15:21 and Romans 16:13, there is evidence that Simon's sons became believers and even leaders in the early church.

The sour wine and gall offered was supposed to be a form of mercy as it would numb some of the pain during crucifixion. Jesus chose not to have His senses dulled while He faced His fate.

Some modern translations leave out the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18 in verse 35, but all still mention the gambling for the ownership of garments. Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 22 when He cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The devout Jews in the crowd would recognize this quote and most likely remember this psalm. When David wrote this passage, crucifixion had not yet been invented as it would first be used by the Assyrians against the Babylonians during a rebellious uprising after the time of Daniel. The Jews remembering this Psalm might begin to wonder at what they had just done seeing as how Jesus was now fulfilling what up to this point was considered just a poem but now was a fulfilled prophecy by King David.

The gospel of John records that Pilate put the accusation of Jesus intentionally on the cross to rebuke the Jewish leadership for sending him an innocent man (John 19:21-22).

Matthew records that the crowd was there to watch the executions. The crowd, the chief priests, and even the other victims mocked Jesus! Luke does record that one of the criminals eventually repents (Luke 23:39-43), but Jesus, an innocent man who was the center of a parade when He entered Jerusalem just a few days ago is now the center of ridicule and torture.

Matthew records that from noon until roughly 3pm, darkness fell over Jerusalem. This would be the latter half of Jesus' time on the cross. At the end of this time, Jesus felt the Father withdraw from Him, and He knew sin for the first time in His life. He knew death.

Even in His dying breath, the people still mocked Him. But His death was only the start of something new. The veil of the temple was split. Earthquakes shook the ground, boulders broke open, graves released their dead bodies to the world.

Verse 52 is one of the strangest and most controversial passages in the Bible. Matthew gives very little explanation of what he means and this is the only gospel account to say this sentence or anything like it. It is unclear what is meant by this verse.

With all that happened, those that witnessed Jesus' death had no reason to not believe the accusation nailed above His head. Even the centurion in charge of the crucifixion proclaimed Jesus the Messiah!

While the disciples fled (all but John, according to John's gospel) only the women stayed faithful and followed Jesus to the end, all the way to death.

V57-66

Crucifixion victims were typically buried in a mass grave, but Joseph of Arimathea claimed Jesus' body and had Him buried in his family tomb. He performed the ritual burial proceedings as best he

could before sundown, but time was short. Expensive tombs were typically sealed with large stones, so this would be in keeping with the customs of the day.

The following day, the Jewish leaders convinced Pilate that a conspiracy to steal the body of Jesus would make things worse than when He was alive, so it would be best to place guards at the tomb. The priest could have simply used temple guards, but they wanted a neutral show of force and had Roman soldiers placed there, instead.

Matthew 28

V1-8

Because Jesus was buried so quickly before Passover, the burial ritual was not complete. Mary Magdalene and others (Luke names three women) came to the tomb to complete the burial ceremony.

Matthew is the only gospel to record an earthquake at the opening of the tomb. Matthew is also the only gospel that makes it sound as if the women witnessed the stone being rolled away. The other three gospels all say that the women approached the tomb and saw that the stone had already been rolled away.

Mark and Matthew both mention one angel while Luke speaks of two angels standing at the entrance of the tomb.

Matthew makes no mention of the linen wrappings in the tomb, but this is an important aspect of the resurrection found in the other gospels (Luke and John). The linen wrappings were undisturbed as if the body had simply dissolved or disappeared. This is an indication that Jesus was raised *in a new body*, not resuscitated in His old body like Lazarus (John 11:38-44). This speaks to the deity and immortality of Jesus in His new form.

The angel instructed the women to tell the disciples the good news and to find Jesus in Galilee.

V9-10

Matthew records the women's first encounter with the risen Jesus. They recognize Him immediately and are amazed that death has been defeated! He gives them the same command as the angel to proceed to Galilee.

V11-15

Once again, it is unknown how Matthew is made aware of this information, but guards came to the Jewish priests and reported what they had seen. There is speculation that they came to the priests out of fear of punishment by their Roman superiors for allowing the body of Jesus to escape. Their superiors surely would not believe them. Even if the priests believed them, they suppressed the truth and spread a falsehood to keep the followers of Jesus from learning what had happened.

It is unknown how many guards were placed at the tomb of Jesus, but the verbiage used here indicates more than two.

V16-20

Matthew is brief with his own encounter with the resurrected Christ. But it is an important encounter. Some of the disciples still couldn't believe their own eyes (John's gospel records the story of "doubting Thomas" in John 20:24-29) with their Savior standing right in front of them.

Matthew closes his gospel with "The Great Commission." Jesus gives His disciples the command of preaching everything that they've seen and heard and baptizing in the name of the Trinity. And everyone that they teach and baptize are instructed to do the same. This command is not a lonesome mission. Jesus promises to be with them while they undertake this task, and with everyone that follows.

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