

X Explore the Bible®

Spring 2017 > Rodney Woo, General Editor

Matthew 14–28

LifeWay | Adults

LIFE BY DESIGN

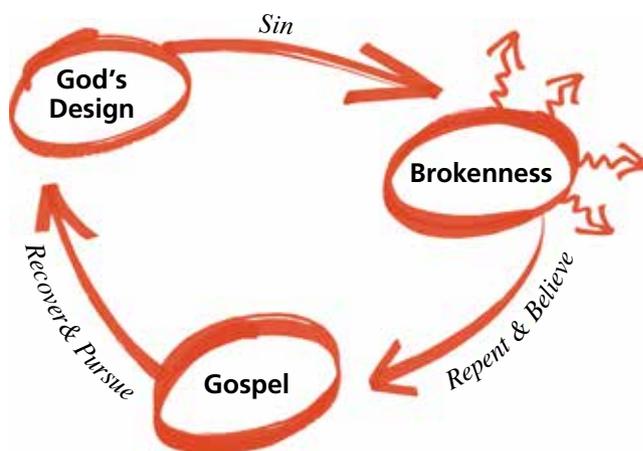
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16; Colossians 2:14; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from *Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel*.

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*Easter Evangelistic Emphasis

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A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



This quarter we have the privilege of studying the second half of the Gospel of Matthew. Chapters 14–28 of Matthew offer a unique and challenging perspective into the last six months of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Together, we will discover the true identity of Jesus Christ and the impact He made on the first generation of Christ followers. This study will enable each of us to get into the ears and hearts of the first disciples as they listen to Jesus, walk with Him, and see their Lord crucified.

As important as it is to understand clearly the first-century historical context of the first Gospel in the New Testament, we will also be challenged to hear the teachings of Jesus with our own ears and to follow this Messiah with all our hearts. There will be some uncomfortable and provoking passages in the last part of Matthew’s Gospel, yet one of Matthew’s primary purposes is that each listener will encounter the prophesied Messiah. As the Gospel writer indicates, the condition of our hearts will determine our response to the very clear and simple message that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers each believer a place in the family of God.

Rodney Woo



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TWO WAYS TO USE QUICKSOURCE

➤ AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE LEADER GUIDE

1. After completing your study using the commentary provided in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, consult the Exploring Key Words section and the Talking Points page for additional insight or as a review.
2. After creating your initial plans for guiding the group time using the suggestions included in the Leader Guide, supplement and refine your plan using the ideas found in *QuickSource*. You will also want to consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible MinistryGrid page (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

➤ AS YOUR PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR PREPARING TO LEAD A SMALL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

1. Read and study the core passage.

Use Exploring Key Words on the first page of the session content to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible like the HCSB Study Bible (also available online at MyStudyBible.com) and a Bible commentary like the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage.

2. Review the outline provided on the Talking Points page (page 2 of each session).

Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study time. Note: You may want to make a photocopy of the Talking Points page so you can use *QuickSource* again in the future.

3. Review the questions on the Discussion Plan page (page 3 of each session).

Identify the questions you believe would work best with the group you are leading. Reword the selected questions to reflect your personality and the personality of the group. Record the reworded questions on the Talking Points page (or the photocopy you made of the page) next to the point related to the question. Remember to arrange the questions so that you are leading the group to a conclusion or action.

4. Consider ways of using the Object Lesson idea (page 4 of each session).

Brainstorm other ideas sparked by the object lesson suggestion.

5. Read the Dig Deeper feature (page 4 of each session).

Add insights gained from this page to the Talking Points page.

6. Use the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG).

Scan a copy of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG), looking for additional questions and the Bible skill feature. Consider ways of incorporating the Bible skill into the session, recording your ideas on the Talking Points page. Record additional questions from the PSG on the Talking Points page as well.

7. Review and refine.

Consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

8. Arrive early.

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person so you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time.

9. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Carry the Talking Points page into the class, using this page as your guide for leading the group.



INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW

Throughout the history of the world, kings have ruled over kingdoms. While some of the kingdoms may have been small, others took in vast territories. When we read about these kings and their reigns, we're fascinated by the power they exerted over their kingdoms and the reach of their authority into the lives of their subjects. We're intrigued by the sincerity of their kindness, or we're troubled at the depth of their cruelty.

Citizens of the kingdom of God enjoy knowing more about the reign of Christ. He's the Son of God and our King. The reach of His kingdom overwhelms us. It includes every person who has given his or her life to Him. At the same time, we're moved by the way He enables the citizens of His kingdom to live for Him with joy and contentment.

The Gospel of Matthew provides kingdom citizens with rich insights into Jesus' life and ministry. In this important Bible book, we come to know Him in a way that helps us to live for Him. When we study what Matthew has written, we will love Christ more completely, follow Him more sincerely, look forward to His return with greater confidence, bend our knees and bow our hearts in anticipation of His eternal reign.

» BACKGROUND

Writer—The identity of the person who wrote the Gospel of Matthew isn't formally stated in the Bible book itself. However, two important clues point to Matthew, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, as the writer. First, the earliest manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel ascribe it to him. Second, the name of the tax collector in Matthew 9:9-13 was Matthew. That's the only place in which Matthew was given as the name of the tax collector who followed Jesus as a disciple. In the other accounts of the same story, he's referred to as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Levi was the name his parents gave to him. Matthew was probably the name given to him after he devoted his life to Christ. The name meant "the gift of God."

Date—No one knows for certain when Matthew wrote his Gospel account. Scholars generally agree that he wrote it late in the first century, although none of them can be more exact with regard to the date. Their estimates range from A.D. 60 to 90.

Purpose—Insights from the Bible book itself confirm that Matthew wanted to show how the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah had been fulfilled

in Jesus Christ. Further, there is a call to unbelieving Jews to faith in the long-awaited Messiah and a strong biblical affirmation for believing Jews to use this Gospel to persuade unbelieving Jews to faith. The people who read his account would probably have been familiar with the Old Testament. Perhaps they were Jewish people who relied on the Old Testament to give them certainty about the identity of the Messiah. Of course, Matthew's Gospel account accomplished another important purpose as well. It provided believers with plenty of information regarding what Jesus taught as well as the actions He took during His ministry.

➤ KEY THEMES

The Book of Matthew declares some significant messages about Jesus. These messages serve as key themes that can be seen throughout this valuable Bible book.

Jesus is the Son of God. The Galilean preacher named Jesus is actually the Son of God whose birth was announced to Joseph by an angel. In addition, His life and ministry verified His unique relationship with His Father.

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Throughout His ministry, Jesus left no doubt about His identity. He was the promised Messiah whom God's people had been longing to see.

Followers of Jesus Christ devote themselves to growing as His disciples. As citizens of the kingdom of God, followers of Christ make spiritual growth a distinct priority. Growing in Him consistently leads to serving Him faithfully and wholeheartedly.

The end of the age will come. One day, the plan of God will be completed, and He will return for His followers. For that reason, believers remain alert and live in hope.

Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected. Christ died on the cross in keeping with His Father's will. He was raised from the grave and assures Christians of victory over death.

Believers have been commissioned to share the gospel of Christ. Followers of Christ have been given a mandate to make Him known to the whole world and to guide believers so they can become growing disciples.

OUTLINE OF MATTHEW

- I. Birth and Infancy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1–2:23)
- II. Beginning of Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (Matt. 3:1–4:25)
- III. Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–7:29)
- IV. Jesus' First Miracles (Matt. 8:1–9:34)
- V. Discourse Two: Ministry of Jesus' Disciples (Matt. 9:35–10:42)
- VI. Responses to Jesus' Ministry (Matt. 11:1–12:50)
- VII. Discourse Three: Parables about the Kingdom (Matt. 13:1-58)
- VIII. Close of Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (Matt. 14:1–16:28)
- IX. Preparing for His Death (Matt. 17:1-27)
- X. Discourse Four: Character of Jesus' Disciples (Matt. 18:1-35)
- XI. Jesus' Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem (Matt. 19:1–20:34)
- XII. Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1–23:39)
- XIII. Discourse Five: Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:1–25:46)
- XIV. Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Burial (Matt. 26:1–27:66)
- XV. Resurrection and Commission (Matt. 28:1-20)

SESSION 1

WHO IS JESUS?

MATTHEW 16:13-28

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the **Son of Man**^a is?” ¹⁴ They replied, “Some say **John the Baptist**;^b others, **Elijah**;^c still others, **Jeremiah**^d or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are **the Messiah**,^e the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this **rock**^f I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah. ²¹ From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and **suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day**.^g ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!” ²³ Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about **God’s concerns**^h but human concerns.” ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and **follow me**.ⁱ ²⁵ **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it.**^j ²⁶ For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Drawn from Daniel 7:13-14, this title described a ruler of heavenly origin who would reign over a universal, eternal kingdom.
- b** John baptized Jesus’ followers in the Jordan River. In this context, he had such a reputation that Herod might have thought he had come back from the dead after Herod had him executed (Mark 6:14-29).
- c** A legendary prophet and miracle worker, Elijah was held in such high regard because he did not die but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11).
- d** Jeremiah was a major prophet and author of the Old Testament book of the same name.
- e** “Christ” (ESV). This is the first time one of the disciples actually called Jesus the Messiah. Jesus would fulfill His promise to deliver believers from bondage and oppression.
- f** The true Rock was Jesus Himself, and Peter just professed that fact.
- g** Jesus predicted He would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leadership because they would not accept what Peter had confessed. Peter was in disbelief because he did not believe the Messiah would suffer.
- h** Like many of us, Peter’s sin was set on outward things and circumstances rather than on the vision of what God had planned for His Son, Jesus, in His dying on the cross for our sins and being resurrected to dwell within us and help us overcome sin.
- i** The idea here is that a person who believes in Christ must not only say no to self but come along with Christ daily in what He does and says.
- j** “If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it” (NLT). People are made in the image of God and as such, they are to live and act as He does. This is only possible with Christ’s presence in our lives.

will reward each according to what he has done.

²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

“ TALKING POINTS

NOTES

» MISUNDERSTOOD IDENTITY

(Matt. 16:13-14)

- In response to Jesus’ question about what they were hearing from others, the disciples listed various prophets many felt Jesus to be.

» TRUE IDENTITY (Matt. 16:15-16)

- Jesus challenged the disciples personally, asking them to share who they believed Him to be.
- Peter, serving as the spokesperson for the Twelve, declared Jesus to be the promised Messiah.

» NEW IDENTITY (Matt. 16:17-20)

- Jesus affirmed Simon Peter’s declaration, emphasizing the name Jesus gave Simon (Peter).
- Jesus explained that He would establish an eternal body of believers (the church), who would also share in Peter’s declaration.
- Note: Be careful to avoid placing Peter in a position of authority over the church.

» CROSS IDENTITY (Matt. 16:21-28)

- Jesus informed the disciples that He would be killed at the hands of the Jewish leaders but would be resurrected.
- He reminded the Twelve that following Him was a commitment to lose their life so they could gain true life and eternal life.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- Jesus is the promised Messiah and the only Son of God, regardless of what others may think.
- Jesus’ redemptive purpose is realized through His church.
- Jesus demands total obedience borne out of our confession of Him.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What news reports can you think of concerning cases of mistaken identity? What happens when facts are mixed up, convoluted, or just blatantly falsified?

- Use mobile devices to find recent cases of mistaken identity and the circumstances involved.
- Emphasize the harm, confusion, and even danger that can occur in these situations.
- In today's study, we will examine Jesus' identity.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 16:13-14

Consider the disciples' responses in Matthew 16:14. How do people today respond to the question, "Who do you think Jesus is?"

- Various religions and people think He was a good man, a good teacher, or a prophet; few people would say He is the Son of God, our Savior. Obviously millions of people still don't understand who Jesus is.

Why is the knowledge of Jesus' true identity crucial for all people?

- Emphasize the foundational truth that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way of salvation. His identity and purpose are pivotal truths of our faith.

MATTHEW 16:15-16

Highlight verse 15. Jesus made the question personal. Why is your answer to Jesus' question critical to your relationship with Him?

- Knowing and believing the truth about who Jesus is provides the foundation for a relationship with Him.

How did Peter's response confirm Jesus' true identity?

- Peter spoke for the disciples and declared that Jesus was indeed the One they had waited for, the promised Messiah and Redeemer, God's Son.

MATTHEW 16:17-20

What is the significance of Jesus' affirmation of Simon Peter's declaration?

- This declared truth about Jesus' true identity demonstrated that Peter and the disciples had at least a rudimentary understanding of Jesus' purpose in coming to earth.
- The truth of Jesus' identity was based on what the disciples had seen, heard, and experienced as they followed Jesus. This knowledge was not only a head-knowledge but also a heart-knowledge.

In Greek, Peter's name means a specific stone or rock (*petros*). How does a rock symbolize the value of Peter's affirmation?

- A rock indicated a solid foundation. The truth that Jesus was God's Son, Savior, and Messiah provided a solid base on which to build a growing relationship.

In verse 18, Jesus referred to another type of rock, a *petra*, or bedrock. What is the bedrock of the church?

- Jesus is the bedrock of His church. This church, the eternal body of believers, stands on the solid foundation of Jesus: Son of God, Son of Man, Savior, and Messiah.

MATTHEW 16:21-28

Recall other times when Jesus told His disciples about His impending death. Why were they slow to grasp the importance of what He was saying?

- Jesus' followers were expecting an earthly king and kingdom nothing like what Jesus prophesied.
- Like many people today, the disciples experienced selective hearing, grasping only what they wanted to hear and filtering out the rest.

How would you characterize Jesus' words to Peter? Explain.

- Jesus wanted Peter and the others to comprehend the weight of what He was telling them. He longed for them to be more concerned about the importance of what was coming than with their own agendas or preconceived notions.

Why is following Jesus a daring commitment?

- Following Jesus is a life-long, daily commitment of obedience—even when life is hard, dangerous, or overwhelming. This commitment requires diligence, unwavering trust, and total surrender.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How does your life show others that Jesus is truly the Son of the God and the Savior of mankind?

- Our actions demonstrate our beliefs. Our passion about the truths of God's Word and our daily example of living in light of those truths provide a true glimpse into our faith in the one true King and Messiah.
- **Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to evaluate your own level of obedience to the truth that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" (Matt. 16:16). How do you consistently live out your discipleship? How does your life point others to Jesus Christ?

A MASQUERADE MASK

Show a mask or a picture of one. Ask: *What is the purpose of a masquerade party?* Provide a synopsis: *Masquerade balls began in Italy in the 15th century at the beginning of the Renaissance movement. The original thought was for society, both rich and poor, to mingle in ways their strict societal etiquette forbid. Guests were to attend in costumes with elaborate masks to hide their identity. At midnight, everyone would take off their masks to reveal who they were.*

Explain: *During His earthly ministry, Jesus made no attempt to hide or mask who He was or why He came. Jesus mingled with all societal classes. However, people still did not comprehend His identity. Read Matthew 16:13-14. Ask: Why do you think people were confused about who Jesus was? What similarities were there between Jesus and John the Baptist and the prophets?*

Say: *In verse 16, Simon Peter confirmed the disciples' understanding that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Ask: If Jesus never tried to hide His identity or mask His purpose, why did so few people understand who He was? What masks Jesus' identity and purpose from people today? What can believers do to clarify His identity?*



Direct a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 16:24. Emphasize that in order for people around us to know we are Christ-followers, we cannot hide our identity. Say: *Following Christ requires sacrifice, obedience, and sometimes rejection and exclusion. But we can't afford to hide the truth that Jesus is the "Messiah, the Son of the Living God!" (Matt. 16:16).*

DIG DEEPER

THE SON OF MAN

One of the most common titles of Jesus is "the Son of Man." While Jesus is also "the Son of God," implying His deity, "the Son of Man" shows us Jesus Christ's humanity. In Matthew alone the title is used more than 30 times and almost 90 times in the New Testament. The phrase appeared in one of Daniel's visions (Dan. 7:13) and references Christ's role as an exalted heavenly one, having been sent by the Father to accomplish His redemption. Jesus referred to Himself by this nomenclature, so it is likely that the reference in Daniel and here is paralleled (see Mark 2:10, for example).

In the Book of Ezekiel, the phrase "Son of Man" occurs more than 90 times. It is not the same title that is mentioned in Daniel 7:13. That particular Messianic title was used especially during the time of history known as the intertestamental period, which includes the years between the Old and New Testaments. That is known in some Protestant circles as the "400 Silent Years" when there was no word from God to His people. The personal title in Ezekiel was not a reference to the Messiah but rather a reference to a member of humanity.

In other places in Scripture, Jesus was referred to as the Son of God, so the implication is clear: Jesus was God, but Jesus was also a man. He wanted the disciples to know He was not just another messianic figure; He was and always will be the Messiah. First John 4:2-3 says, "This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist; you have heard that he is coming, and he is already in the world now."

The Bible does not define what "Son of Man" means, but most understand it to mean that God Himself came and lived among us as a perfect human being. He measured up in every way to the Law of Moses and presented Himself as the perfect sacrifice for us as human beings. When Jesus referred to Himself by the title Son of Man, He was not only identifying Himself as the Messiah, He was also identifying Himself with humanity.

IS JESUS FULLY GOD?

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 17:1-13

¹ After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

² He was **transfigured**^a in front of them, and **his face shone like the sun**;^b his clothes became as white as the light.

³ Suddenly, **Moses and Elijah**^c appeared to them, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good for us to be here. I will set up three **shelters**^d here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and **a voice from the cloud**^e said: “**This is my beloved Son**,^f with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, **they fell facedown and were terrified**.^g ⁷ Jesus came up, touched them, and said, “Get up; **don’t be afraid**.”^h ⁸ When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus alone. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is **raised from the dead**.”ⁱ ¹⁰ So the disciples asked him, “Why then do the **scribes**^j say that Elijah must come first?”

¹¹ “Elijah is coming and **will restore everything**,”^k he replied. ¹² “But I tell you: Elijah has already come, and they didn’t recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Jesus experienced a metamorphosis, appearing in an outward heavenly state, implying Jesus’ soon-to-be eternal state and allowing His disciples to see Him as He will appear in His kingdom.
- b** Jesus was possessed by the very glory of God, just as “the Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7:9-10.
- c** Moses represented the giving of the law. Elijah, the well-known prophet of Israel, represented the prophetic portion of Israel’s history. The presence of both men indicated Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets of Scripture.
- d** “Tabernacles” (KJV). Similar to the tents constructed for Feast of Tabernacles, they were designed for protection from the elements. Peter’s suggestion was to protect and detain the three men in order to enjoy their company longer.
- e** This was the voice of God the Father Himself.
- f** Because Jesus was God’s Son, so “He received honor and glory from God” (2 Pet. 1:16-17).
- g** In the presence of Jesus’ true, holy, majestic form, the men became frightened, fully aware of their sinful, human state.
- h** A common saying in Scripture, it reveals God’s love for humankind. Jesus reassured His disciples that He was present and they need not be fearful.
- i** Christ foreshadowed to His disciples that He would be raised from the dead after He was tortured and killed by the religious authorities.
- j** All religious instruction of the day was expected from these “teachers of the law” (NIV).
- k** A reference to Malachi 4:6, Jesus’ language widens the restoration mentioned by Malachi to include all people. They could be brought into a right relationship with God based on the work He was to accomplish on the cross.

NOTES

» PRESENCE (Matt. 17:1-6)

- Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to a mountain to witness His glory.
- When Jesus showed His glory, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him.
- Peter's request to build a shrine was interrupted by the Father's voice as He declared His love for and delight in His Son.

» PURPOSE (Matt. 17:7-9)

- Having calmed their fears, Jesus directed Peter, James, and John to keep this event a secret until after His resurrection.
- Note: Interpret the purpose of the transfiguration in terms of the disciples later giving a witness to Jesus' messianic reign.

» PERSPECTIVE (Matt. 17:10-13)

- Jesus explained that prophecies about Elijah being the forerunner of the Messiah had been fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist.
- Jesus once again taught His disciples that He would suffer and die.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- As the Son of God, Jesus shares fully in God's glory.
- Jesus' mission can only be understood in light of His death, burial, and resurrection.
- Reverence and fear are appropriate responses to the reality of God's glory.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What is one of your most memorable life experiences?

- Share examples from your life of a time when you had a memorable spiritual experience or a profound experience in a work environment, sports setting, or other life event.
- Ask others to define what constitutes a mountaintop experience for most people.

How did that experience impact you beyond that day?

- A momentous experience can be life-altering or help put life into perspective.
- Transition to the Scripture passage by asking the group to put themselves in the place of Peter, James, or John as we explore this life-changing event.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 17:1-6

This event took place six days after Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction of His death. Why is that important?

- The acknowledgment by Peter and the disciples that Jesus is the Messiah and the events Jesus detailed about His impending death would have been fresh in the minds of the disciples.

What does it mean to be transformed? What was the significance of Moses' and Elijah's presence?

- A transformation typically means a makeover or renovation. Jesus' earthly appearance was noticeably different; His resolve to complete the task of redemption was also strengthened.
- Moses was highly regarded by the Jews as a man of God.
- Elijah never experienced death; he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

What is your reaction to Peter's offer to build three shelters?

- Peter was so focused on the practical aspect that he missed the spiritual significance of what was happening. We are often just like Peter.

What was familiar about the "voice from the cloud" (v. 5)?

- God had also spoken to Moses from a cloud (Ex. 24:15-18).

MATTHEW 17:7-9

How does time with the Father prepare people to face challenges?

- Jesus was preparing to face the cross. He knew the value of spending time with God, seeking strength, boldness, and courage.
- Time with God, reading His Word, praying and seeking His guidance give us strength, boldness, and courage for what is to come. While we are not outwardly transfigured like Jesus was, we can be inwardly transformed.

Why were the disciples told to keep quiet about this experience until after the resurrection?

- Jesus may have instructed them to keep quiet in order to avoid any manmade hindrances to the plan that the Father had laid out for Him.
- The testimony of this event would be another proof to share about Jesus' identity after the resurrection.

MATTHEW 17:10-13

What was the connection between Elijah and John the Baptist?

- Jesus explained that the prophecies about Elijah being the forerunner of the Messiah had been fulfilled through the ministry of John the Baptist.
- In other words, John the Baptist had lived out the spirit and power of Elijah. (Read Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17; and John 1:19,21 for further background on their connection.)

Once again Jesus told the disciples of His impending death, yet they did not grasp what He was saying. How is it possible that they could hear Jesus speak the words and still not understand His meaning?

- The disciples had difficulty understanding why Jesus had to suffer and be killed.
- Even after Jesus' resurrection, many people today know the truths of Scripture concerning Jesus, but they choose to ignore the message of salvation.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Why is it impossible to understand Jesus' mission apart from His death, burial, and resurrection?

- Jesus' purpose in coming to earth in human form was to die in our place. His death, burial, and resurrection are the cornerstone of our salvation. He is "the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through" Him (John 14:6).

Why are reverence and fear appropriate responses to the reality of God's glory revealed through His Son?

- Reverence denotes worship, adoration, and respect. Fear acknowledges the holiness of God and the assurance that our devotion and awe are expressed in light of who He is and what He has done.
- **Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to evaluate how you demonstrate reverence and awe for Jesus in your personal life. Does your life point others to Jesus? Do you verbally share with others about the divine mission of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

A TRANSFORMERS-STYLE TOY

Display one or more Transformers toys (or pictures you have located on the Internet). Direct a volunteer to describe why children are enamored with these toys. If you have an actual Transformer, demonstrate the process of transformation. Explain: (1) *Nearly all Transformers have a minimum of two forms: a humanoid form and an alternate or alias form.* (2) *One of the taglines for marketing Transformers was: More Than Meets the Eye!* (3) *The design behind Transformers is that the parts of the toy can be shifted to change it from a vehicle, animal, or other device into a robot action figure.*

Have someone read aloud Matthew 17:1-2. Then ask everyone to note any similarities in this description of Jesus' transfiguration and the facts about Transformers. Ask: *How would the Transformers tagline be an appropriate description of Jesus? What was the purpose of Jesus' human existence? What was the significance of Jesus' transformation in verse 2?*

Challenge them to keep these thoughts in mind as you explore Matthew 17:1-13. Ask: *What was the significance of God's pronouncement of a blessing on Jesus in verse 5? Why would the*



events on the mountain be of such consequence later on, after Jesus' death and resurrection? Why did Jesus continue to tell the disciples of His impending crucifixion? Why were the disciples slow in understanding? Conclude by focusing on Jesus' ultimate mission: providing the way of salvation to all who believe. Emphasize the crucial role we as believers play in carrying this message to others.

DIG DEEPER

A TRANSFORMATION

The word for *transfigured* or *transformed* is only used four times in the New Testament: "He was transformed in front of them, and His face shone like the sun. Even His clothes became as white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). "After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves to be alone. He was transformed in front of them" (Mark 9:2). "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). "We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

In Matthew 17:2, Jesus went up onto the holy mountain with three of His disciples—Peter, James, and John. Before their eyes He was changed. In Greek, the word is *metamorphoo*. It is the word from which our word, *metamorphosis*, comes. Interestingly, in Scripture, the word is only used in the passive case, so the transformation or transfiguration is done to the person. In the case of Jesus' transfiguration, He is changed outwardly. Jesus was temporarily changed to His heavenly state, the way He would be when He came into His heavenly kingdom, and the disciples were allowed to see Him

in that state: "the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became dazzling white" (Luke 9:29). This description parallels the description of the "Ancient of Days" found in Daniel 7:9-10, which is another name for God, Jesus' Father.

When believers are transformed, it comes from within. We are allowed to see Christ in all His glory, and He transforms us from the inside out. We actually become like Him. According to 1 John 3:2, when we finally see Him—either when we die or when He returns to take us back to heaven with Him—we will look on Him and become like Him in His character—transformed completely from our old selves into people who look and act like Him. The apostle Paul says "We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Then, according to Romans 12:2, we are "transformed by the renewing" of our minds through Christ's work in our lives when we choose Him as Lord over every area of our lives. We present ourselves to Him daily, and He transforms us.

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 19:16-26

¹⁶ Just then someone came up and asked him, “**Teacher,**^a what good must I do to have **eternal life?**”^b ¹⁷ “Why do you ask me about **what is good?**”^c he said to him. “**There is only one who is good.**^d If you want to enter into life, **keep the commandments.**”^e ¹⁸ “Which ones?” he asked him. Jesus answered: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; ¹⁹ honor your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as yourself. ²⁰ “**I have kept all these,**”^f the young man told him. “What do I still lack?” ²¹ “If you want to be **perfect,**”^g Jesus said to him, “go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have **treasure in heaven.**”^h Then come, **follow me.**”ⁱ ²² When the young man heard that, he went away grieving, because he had many possessions. ²³ Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through **the eye of a needle**^j than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, “**With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**”^k

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** One of many titles given to Jesus
- b** The young man apparently wanted a certain quality of life and thought he might do something to earn it.
- c** He wanted to know what he could do that was good, perhaps the minimal good to inherit eternal life.
- d** Jesus’ answer began with the explanation that only God is good.
- e** Jesus explained there was no amount of good he could do to merit eternal life, as it is for all humans.
- f** Astoundingly, the young man declared he had obeyed all the commandments listed by Jesus—an overstatement showing his lack of self-awareness.
- g** Jesus knew the young man’s character was flawed, for in believing he was morally strong he actually proved his lack thereof. This requirement was intended to reveal to the man his own shortcomings and guide him to accept that he would never be made perfect by his own merit. Without complete confidence in and surrender to Jesus, the man would never be able to follow through on selling all his possessions.
- h** Heavenly character is only fully achieved in eternal life
- i** A believer in Christ must say no to self, take on the shame of the cross of Christ, and choose vigorously to come along with Christ in what He does, says, and is—daily (Matt. 10:38).
- j** This is hyperbole, a popular proverb among Jewish people, meaning that it would be very difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God under these circumstances.
- k** Humans, by themselves, cannot save themselves. God’s grace alone allows a person to enter His kingdom. He has provided the necessary sacrifice of His Son to make a relationship with the Creator of the universe possible.

»» **STANDARD DEFINED** (Matt. 19:16-20)

- When asked about what a person must do to gain eternal life, Jesus pointed to keeping God’s Commandments.
- The inquiring young man claimed to have kept the laws identified by Jesus; yet he still lacked assurance, confusing outward performance with obedient trust in God.

»» **IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP** (Matt. 19:21-22)

- After Jesus called on the inquirer to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor, the young man left dejected because he had great possessions that he was unwilling to sell.
- NOTE: Characterize the young man’s response in terms of breaking the First Commandment of having no other God before Him. Emphasize the young man’s trust in his riches for security. The young man left because the cost seemed too great.

»» **PROVISION TO ACCEPT** (Matt. 19:23-26)

- Jesus explained to His disciples that people are not able to save themselves; salvation comes only through God and His work.
- Note: Avoid implying that riches are inherently evil, but that the love of money is the issue (1 Tim. 6:10).

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- The Old Testament law points to our inability to gain salvation by our own merit.
- What a person depends upon for security reveals what he or she trusts for salvation.
- Jesus offers salvation as a gift that can only be received by faith and never earned.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What are various ways people in our culture think they can obtain salvation?

- If not mentioned, include other religions/gods, random acts of kindness, living a life in which the good deeds outweigh the bad, and so forth.
- Emphasize that Jesus is the one and only way to eternal life.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 19:16-20

What is the difference between the “eternal life” (v. 16) the young man asked about and the life of which Jesus spoke?

- The young man may have come seeking answers about life after death. Jesus spoke about abundant life on earth and the promise of everlasting life in heaven with Him.

Why do we sometimes limit the number of commandments we want to obey?

- When the young man asked for specific commandments to obey, he was obviously looking for a checklist to complete. Jesus’ response did not limit obedience to a list.
- Sincere obedience follows the commandments of Scripture but also goes beyond the “letter of the law” and obeys from a heart of love for Christ.

What is the difference between outward performance and obedient trust in God?

- Guide them to consider the attitude of the heart and how it affects our actions.
- Emphasize that while obedience often includes outward performance, those are not a substitute for an attitude of trust, love, and surrender as we conform our will to His.

MATTHEW 19:21-22

Is it necessary to sell everything you own in order to have eternal life in Jesus Christ? Explain.

- Guide them to evaluate people or things in their own lives that sometimes take higher priority than their commitment to Jesus.

What was Jesus asking the man to do in verse 21?

- Jesus demands consummate, unparalleled importance in the life of every believer. Jesus challenged the man at the point of his “first love”—his love of material possessions.
- Remind the group that perfection is not a prerequisite or criterion for salvation. We are made perfect through Jesus’ sacrifice.

In what was the young man trusting for his security? In what do we trust today?

- Wealth and possessions were of great importance to this young man.

- In similar fashion, we tend to place our trust in other people, our jobs, our health, our intellectual abilities, our bank accounts, our houses, and other material possessions.
- Remind them that people today still walk away from Jesus because of their unwillingness to let go of the pleasures and securities of this world.

MATTHEW 19:23-26

How did Jesus respond to the disciples’ question in verse 25?

- Jesus explained to the disciples that people cannot save themselves; salvation is only available through the work of God in Jesus Christ.

How can wealth make it difficult to follow Christ?

- Jesus did not say rich people cannot be saved or that riches are evil. He emphasized that the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10) or anything else we place before our love for Jesus is the issue.
- Encourage the group to commit Matthew 19:26 to memory.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Jesus pinpointed the real issue for this young man: his love of material wealth and possessions. If Jesus were to pinpoint your real issue, what would it be? Why? How would you respond?

- Allow time for quiet contemplation of this question. Oral responses are not required.
- If appropriate, share an example of a personal struggle you have or had regarding misplaced priorities.

What have you relinquished in order to follow Jesus? What have been the results?

- As the group shares personal insights, emphasize the overwhelming value of following Jesus. Nothing compares to His gift of eternal salvation!
- Emphasize that Jesus offers salvation as a gift that can only be received by faith in Him; salvation cannot be earned.
- **Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to evaluate these tough questions for yourself. What comes between you and your complete surrender to the Lordship of Jesus? How does that affect your ministry to others? Is Jesus asking you to forsake or abandon something right now? What is your response?

THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED TO RENT A POST OFFICE BOX

Print and display the documents required to rent a post office box or display the information from *usps.com* on your computer. Write this question down for everyone to see: *What are the requirements for renting a P.O. Box?* Discuss the responses.

Clarify that there are two non-negotiable requirements: 1) money to pay for the box, and 2) proof of I.D. (a driver's license, passport, voter registration card, or bill with a current mailing address).

Ask: *What do you think is the main reason people rent a post office box?* Stress that most people are looking for a secure and trustworthy way to receive their mail, either because of a move, transition, or change in their circumstances.

Turn the discussion to today's Scripture lesson about the requirements for salvation. Conclude by guiding the group to consider what is required for salvation. Comment that, just as people must meet the required criteria for a post office box, the requirements must also be met for salvation.



Emphasize that there is only one non-negotiable requirement: faith in Jesus Christ—His provision of eternal life through His own death, burial, and resurrection. Say: *While there are many ways to get your mail—a home mailbox, a post office box, or even private carriers—Jesus is the only source who provides the secure, trusted, direct route to salvation.*

DIG DEEPER

ETERNAL LIFE

When people are asked what they think these words mean, they almost always say it has to do with living forever or going to heaven. While those things are true, there is much more to this strong biblical teaching. As believers, we need to grasp its significance. For one thing, we must understand that eternal life does not begin when we die; it begins when we start our relationship with the Heavenly Father through the death and resurrection of His Son, Christ Jesus. We have already begun to experience eternal or everlasting life. Another word for it is "salvation."

According to John 17:3, "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ." So the real issue is that God wants us to know Him. The key here is understanding what the word *know* actually means. It is much more than an intellectual assent to the truths of the Scripture. It is an intimate knowledge of God. God desires us to know Him fully and intimately. This is not to negate heaven or hell; it is much bigger than that. Both of those places are real, but an intimate knowledge of God will give us abundant lives now as well as in heaven (John 10:10).

How have we missed this? Realistically, we have placed a period instead of a comma at the end of the word *perish* in our most famous verse: John 3:16. Jesus did not come to the world to suffer, die, and be raised again only to keep us from perishing; He came to give us the opportunity to have a personal relationship with our Creator. Yes, we are saved from sin and death, but if we miss this relationship, then we have missed God's purpose of making us into people who look and act like His Son and who enjoy intimate fellowship with God (Rom. 8:28-29; Phil. 3:7-14). The early Christians had such close relationships with the Father that it was contagious. In fact, their faith and relationship with God changed the known world, and it continues to change people's lives even today. There was an extreme evidence of joy that came from those relationships.

Faithfully walking with God throughout life is for every believer in Christ. It is the way God intended us to live in the first place.

MORE THAN A PROPHET?

For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide or Adult
Commentary, available for purchase
at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 21:1-11

¹ When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples,
² telling them, “Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her foal. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that **the Lord^a** needs them, and he will send them at once.” ⁴ This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet **might be fulfilled:**^b ⁵ Tell **Daughter Zion,**^c “See, your King is coming to you, gentle, and **mounted on a donkey,**^d and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” ⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and its foal; then **they laid their clothes on them,**^e and he sat on them.

⁸ A very large crowd **spread their clothes on the road;**^f others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road. ⁹ Then the crowds who went ahead of him and those who followed shouted: **Hosanna to the Son of David!**^g **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!** **Hosanna in the highest heaven!**^h ¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar, saying, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from **Nazarethⁱ** in Galilee.”

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Jesus designated Himself as Lord of all (Matt. 11:27; 28:18).
- b** The prophets looked forward to the coming Messiah, and for that reason they bore witness to Him. Matthew marked these events as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy.
- c** This is another name for the city of Jerusalem (Isa. 62:11; Zech. 9:9).
- d** Jesus as a king could not have walked as one of the crowd nor on a war horse that would denote him as a leader of an army. So a donkey was chosen, an animal that was often of stately appearance and greatly valued in Palestine.
- e** The disciples placed their garments on the donkey to provide a makeshift saddle.
- f** The people showed their respect and homage to Jesus by placing their robes and palm branches on the road ahead as He rode into the city.
- g** Jesus was in the direct lineage of King David, who was seen as the king deliverer in Israel’s history. One of the duties of the king was judgment. Here, Jesus is tied to David, as in Psalm 122:5.
- h** A song of praise that found its roots in Psalm 118:25-26, the Jews had commonly applied this to the coming Messiah. The title of Messiah asserts and affirms Jesus’ role as the Son of Man.
- i** Jesus’ boyhood home, located in lower Galilee about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea

»» THE KING'S PREROGATIVE

(Matt. 21:1-5)

- Jesus directed His disciples to commandeer a donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem as a king, as prophesied by Isaiah and Zechariah.
- Note: Emphasize Jesus' supernatural knowledge and sovereignty. Give attention to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

»» THE KING'S CELEBRATION

(Matt. 21:6-9)

- Having secured the donkey, Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king. The people responded by referencing Psalm 118:25-26, affirming Jesus as the Son of David.
- Note: Point out that the people recognized Jesus as the Son of David but failed to recognize Him as the sacrificial Son of Abraham. They were seeking a political and military king not a Suffering King.

»» THE PEOPLE'S CONFUSION

(Matt. 21:10-11)

- Jesus' entry created a stir in Jerusalem. The majority identified Him simply as a prophet from Nazareth.
- Note: Highlight Matthew's emphasis on Christology throughout his Gospel account.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- Jesus is sovereign over all His creation.
- Jesus is worthy of our honor and praise.
- Jesus is the promised Messiah who came to save His people from sin.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What jobs today require someone to prepare for the arrival of another person?

- Consider hospital employees, marketers, police and other security personnel, chefs and caterers, personal body guards, hotel managers, and others.
- As you explore today's passage, challenge the group to think about the details associated with how Israel's long-awaited King made His grand entrance as we explore today's passage.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 21:1-5

What would happen today if two people followed Jesus' instructions in verses 2-3?

- Be careful not to endorse breaking the law, but guide the discussion to how we should respond when Jesus calls us to do something unusual or unexpected.
- Emphasize that Jesus' directions to His disciples were a fulfillment of prophecy from Isaiah and Zechariah.

What did Jesus' mode of transportation portray about Him?

- A donkey was one of several types of animals considered beasts of burden, animals that carried or pulled a heavy load.
- Guide them to consider how carrying Jesus was a unique "burden" for this donkey.
- Emphasize the contrast between the lowly animal and the sovereignty and majesty of Jesus.

What type of king and kingdom had the people expected?

- The people were looking for and expecting a king who would establish his kingdom on earth and make life better and easier for those under his rule.
- Jesus' kingdom was definitely not what they expected. His followers had many unanswered questions, but they followed Him in faith.

MATTHEW 21:6-9

How would your life be different if you responded like the disciples in verse 6? What are the benefits of unquestioning obedience?

- Examine why the disciples may have been so receptive to Jesus' unusual instructions.
- Share about a time in your life when you obeyed without questioning (or a time when you did not).

Describe what the image of Jesus on a donkey means to you personally.

- Remind the group that this was not at all the type of entry that the people were expecting. They were seeking a political, military king, not a suffering King.
- Refer to the Old Testament passage from Psalm 118:25-26.

MATTHEW 21:10-11

Refer to several Bible translations to compare the people's reactions when Jesus entered on the donkey. Why were they shaken, stunned, and/or surprised?

- There was confusion about who Jesus was from the beginning of His ministry. The people could not comprehend how the Son of Mary and Joseph could claim to be the promised Savior of the world.

Why was it easier for the people to call Jesus a prophet than to acknowledge Him as the Son of God?

- Human nature looks for an indisputable explanation for everything. The people knew and understood the role of a prophet; most of them could not define, defend, or comprehend the work of Jesus.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Why is the sovereignty of Jesus, the promised Messiah, paramount to our faith?

- Acknowledging the deity and power of Jesus assures believers that God is in control. He is Lord of all, worthy of praise and honor, and our soon coming King.
- Remind the group that the day is coming when our King will destroy evil and set everything right. But in the meantime, we live in faith that He will complete His work in His time.
- **Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to evaluate your trust in the sovereignty of Jesus. Do you worship Him with reverence and praise, even when you have questions? Do your actions demonstrate that Jesus is indeed King and sovereign over all creation? How can you communicate your beliefs through your life?

PICTURES OF BEASTS OF BURDEN

Call attention to where you have written or displayed pictures of a donkey, llama, yak, ox, camel, buffalo, and mule. Ask: *What do these animals have in common?* Explain that they are beasts of burden. *What exactly is a beast of burden?* Invite someone to do a search on their mobile device and share a definition of a beast of burden. Briefly discuss how these animals were/are utilized in countries around the world.

Direct a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 21:1-5. Ask: *Why do you think Jesus chose a donkey and its foal to be His mode of transportation that day?* Call attention to the fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah and Zechariah. Ask: *What would a dignitary or high-ranking king or official likely have ridden into Jerusalem?*

Read aloud Matthew 21:6-9. Ask: *Why do you think the disciples were so willing to obey Jesus' unusual instructions? Discuss the value of obedience.* Highlight the fact that Jesus entered Jerusalem as King—but not the kind of king the people had expected. They were expecting a military or political king, not a suffering King.



Call for a volunteer to read Matthew 21:10-11. Say: *Put yourself in the place of the people in Jerusalem. Why did Jesus' entry cause such a commotion? State: Jesus is sovereign and worthy of our praise. He is the promised Messiah who came to save all people from sin.* Ask: *What is the significance of the beast of burden carrying the long-awaited King?*

DIG DEEPER

HOSANNA

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Matt. 21:9).

What a great word of praise for Jesus as He entered into the city of Jerusalem! *Hosanna* "was a Hebrew imperative, 'Save us, we beseech thee,' and had come into liturgical use from Psalm 118. ... The addition of 'Hosanna to the Son of David' made it a direct recognition of the claims of Jesus to be the Christ; that of 'Hosanna in the highest' claimed heaven as in accord with earth in this recognition."¹

"Please save" is the meaning for us in today's language. Additional places where this idea is expressed in the Psalms are found in Psalm 12:1, where the expression is used for one person, "Help, LORD"; Psalm 20:9, where the expression is used for one person, the king: "LORD, give victory to the king!" Psalm 28:9, where these words are more akin to the verse in Matthew 21:9, when the psalmist says, "Save your people"; and Psalm 60:5 and 108:6, where the writers declare, "Save with your right hand."

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, it had been used so often, that it became an expression and prayer for help, an exclamation of honor and praise, and a celebratory shout. In this case, the expression was used in a messianic sense, meaning the thought was present that Jesus was the Messiah. The addition of "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" in Matthew 21:9 adds credence to the fact that the people recognized Jesus as the Messiah when He entered Jerusalem. "Hosanna in the highest heaven" invokes not only Jesus to save them but God Himself to save them.

Add to this the fact that the Jewish officials asked Jesus in Matthew 21:15-16 if He had heard the children using the word hosanna. Jesus replied to them that He had heard it, and He called their attention to the fact that the psalmist had said in 8:2, "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger" (NIV). By calling their attention to what the children were appropriately saying, Jesus implied that they were inspired by God to say this about Him. Our only hope for salvation is found in this expression: Hosanna!

1. "Matthew 21:9," *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, available on biblehub.com.

SESSION 5

IF I REJECT JESUS?

MATTHEW 21:33-45

³³ “Listen to another **parable**:^a There was a **landowner**,^b who **planted a vineyard, put a fence around it,**^c dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to **tenant farmers**^d and went away. ³⁴ When the time came to harvest fruit, he sent his **servants**^e to the farmers to collect his fruit. ³⁵ The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Again, he sent other servants, more than the first group, and they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally, he sent **his son**^f to them. “They will respect my son,” he said. ³⁸ But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.” ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?” ⁴¹ “He will **completely destroy those terrible men,**^g they told him, “and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his fruit at the harvest.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The **stone**^h that the builders rejected has become the **cornerstone.**ⁱ This is what the Lord has done and it is **wonderful in our eyes**’?” ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit. ⁴⁴ Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him.” ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the **Pharisees**^k heard his parables, they knew he was speaking about them.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** An earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Some have called it a story that starts out being about someone else but ends up being about you. Jesus often used parables to convey His message to those around Him.
- b** The landowner represents God.
- c** The vineyard represents the Jews, God’s chosen people, and the fence shows us how God had made Israel separate from other nations.
- d** This referred to the Jewish religious leaders of the time who were responsible for the spiritual care and teaching of the Jews.
- e** The title here is equated with the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist.
- f** The Son is representative of God’s Son, Jesus. The Jewish leaders had refused to give God the fruits of righteousness He demanded; they rejected and murdered His Son, so God would take away His kingdom from them and entrust it to Jesus’ disciples.
- g** “Bring those wretches to a wretched end” (NIV). Their punishment would fit their crime.
- h** Christ was rejected by the Jewish leaders but became the capstone of the enterprise of God.
- i** This particular cornerstone, Jesus Christ, became the most important element of God’s kingdom—the centerpiece.
- j** “We rub our eyes, we can hardly believe it!” (MSG). God brought to fruition the Jews’ rejection of the Messiah, His acceptance by the Gentiles, and their admission into the church.
- k** Members of an ancient Jewish sect who were distinguished by their strict adherence to the Jewish laws and customs. They also had a very high regard for themselves and thought they were much better than the rest of the Israelites.

NOTES

»» THE SON SENT (Matt. 21:33-37)

- Using a parable, Jesus introduced the idea of God sending prophets to the Israelites.
- After the messengers in the parable were beaten, killed, and stoned, the landowner decided to send his son to represent him.

»» THE SON REJECTED (Matt. 21:38-39)

- Jesus continued with the parable, explaining that the tenant farmers killed the son sent by the landowner.
- Note: Explore the motives for the farmers to kill the son.

»» THE SON VINDICATED (Matt. 21:40-45)

- Jesus asked the Jewish religious leaders for their opinion as to what should be done with the evil farmers.
- Following their decision, Jesus proclaimed that God would take His kingdom away from the Jewish leaders and entrust it to Jesus' followers.
- The Jewish religious leaders realized Jesus was speaking against them.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God sends His servants to direct His people's hearts toward Him.
- Rejection of Jesus leads to sure destruction.
- Jesus' judgment on all who reject Him serves as an impetus for believers to share His offer of salvation with everyone.
- Salvation includes submitting to Jesus' rule in our lives.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Imagine you owned a business. What qualities would you look for when hiring employees?

- Reliable, qualified employees are crucial to the success of any business. Employees need qualities such as honesty, integrity, leadership skills, experience, and dependability.
- Introduce today's study by challenging the group to listen to the parable not only for its practical message but for its deeper truths about what happens when we reject Jesus.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 21:33-37

What's the value of teaching with a parable?

- Parables are intended to convey a lesson using comparison or analogy.
- Stories and parables are often used to help people grasp the deeper meaning of a truth. Through a parable, we can often comprehend and accept the truth easier than when we are told directly what to do or how to do it.

What was the main point of the parable?

- Jesus used this parable to illustrate that the people of Israel had been told about the coming kingdom of God using various sources through the years, yet they refused to listen—even to the Son of God. Refer to the vineyard illustration used in Isaiah 5:1-7.
- Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19 also include this parable. This story was obviously important if three Gospel writers included it in their account of Jesus' last days.

MATTHEW 21:38-39

What may have been the motives behind the farmer-tenants killing the landowner's son?

- The obvious expectation was that they would respect the landowner's son.
- The motivation to kill the son included greed, lack of respect for the owner or his son, and an insatiable, selfish desire.

Obviously Jesus was speaking of His own impending death in these verses. How would you have reacted to this parable if you were one of the disciples who heard Jesus' words?

- Explore the confusion and disillusionment that the disciples were probably feeling. Hearing all these warnings about His impending death was bewildering and hard to digest.

MATTHEW 21:40-45

What does the answer given to Jesus' question in verse 40 reveal about those who responded?

- Those who heard the parable obviously thought that the

tenants should be put to death and a new tenant-manager hired. Perhaps they were thinking only of the illustration and not its deeper meaning. Or they may have understood the truth of the parable and were afraid to respond.

Jesus often used Scripture to relay truth as He taught. What did His response in verse 42 mean?

- The psalmist used this analogy in Psalm 118.
- Stone masons were selective in their choice of quality stones. Stones were sometimes rejected due to imperfections; the masons did not want to jeopardize the architectural integrity of the building.
- The stone Jesus referred to had been rejected but was now an essential, irrefutable part of the building.
- Jesus was vindicated in His resurrection and elevated to the Father's right hand.

What does the reaction of the religious leaders indicate about their spiritual journey?

- Jesus told them God would take His kingdom away from the Jewish leaders and entrust it to Jesus' followers. The Jewish religious leaders realized Jesus was speaking against them.
- No doubt they were angry, confused, and unsure how to respond. They were convicted but obviously not convinced to change.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How would you summarize this parable today?

- God sends people to direct other's hearts toward Him.
- Rejection of Jesus leads to destruction.
- Jesus' judgment on all who reject Him serves as an incentive for believers to share His offer of salvation with everyone.
- Salvation includes submitting to Jesus' rule in our lives.

With whom do you identify in this story? In your life, is Jesus the cornerstone? Why or why not? Explain.

- Encourage personal reflection. If the group chooses to share openly about times of struggle they have experienced, listen with compassion, not condemnation. Stress that at times we have all been selfish, vindictive, dishonest, and/or arrogant.
- **Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to evaluate how your life portrays Jesus to those around you. Are you openly sharing your faith with others? Do you have a deep burden for those who are lost and don't know Jesus as their Savior? Do you have an ongoing prayer strategy for friends, family, and others who are lost? What needs to change in order for you to be more proactive in reaching others?



OBJECT LESSON

PICTURES OF VARIOUS STONES, SUCH AS A MOSS-COVERED STONE, A BUILDING CORNERSTONE, A MILLSTONE, ETC.

To conclude this study of Matthew 21:33-45, display various stones you have collected and pictures of the ones you can't physically bring with you to the session. Guide a brief discussion of what each stone is and where it is typically found.

Ask the group to consider how each type of stone can denote something significant in our Christian experience. For example:

- A moss-covered stone represents growth and stability.
- A stone altar indicates a milestone in our walk with Jesus.
- A pebble or sling stone signifies preparation for our battle against the enemy.
- A capstone could symbolize the level of our faith.
- A millstone denotes those people or circumstances we allow to bring us down.
- A cornerstone conveys the foundation of our faith, the centerpiece for who we are, and the mark of Whose we are.

Comment: *While all these stones may play a role in our relationship*



with Jesus, without Jesus Christ as our Cornerstone, the others are worthless. Jesus demonstrated this to His disciples through the parable of the vineyard owner and countless other teachings during His earthly life. Examine your life to determine if He is your Cornerstone. Read aloud Matthew 21:42. Close the session in prayer.



DIG DEEPER

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The word *kingdom* appears more than 150 times in the New Testament. It is referred to as "the kingdom of heaven" more than 30 times in the Book of Matthew, but that particular phrase appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The basic idea for *kingdom* is that there is a ruler and there are subjects. In this case, *kingdom* refers to God's reign over us as His subjects. This idea is a basic tenet of what Jesus taught.

Having its roots in the Old Testament, *kingdom* refers to God's judgmental reign over the whole world in general and over the children of Israel in particular, although the actual phrase kingdom of God does not appear in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is connected to the church, though it is not synonymous with the church.

The idea developed during the time of the exile when the people wanted a leader to restore them to the way they were during the time of King David's rule. In their view, the kingdom of God was when God would finally take back the reins of control and restore His children to what they felt were their rightful places, as under

King David's reign. It has evolved into the idea of a Christian lifestyle: God is in control of our lives, and He is developing His character in us so that we will be His representatives or ambassadors in this world.

When Christ was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God in heaven, He took His rightful place over all creation. Although the ultimate rule of God over the universe will be completed when Christ returns, He is still in control of the world today, allowing the ramifications of the fall of man to play out until He returns.

In Revelation, John declares: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11, NIV). This is the indication that the kingdom of God has been made complete.

SESSION 6

OFFERED TO ALL?

MATTHEW 22:1-14

¹ Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who gave a **wedding banquet**^a for his son. ³ He sent his **servants**^b to summon those invited to the banquet, but they didn’t want to come. ⁴ Again, he sent out other servants and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: See, I’ve prepared my dinner; my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went away, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest **seized his servants**,^c mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged, and he sent out his troops, killed those murderers, and burned down their city. ⁸ Then he told his servants, ‘The banquet is **ready**,^d but those who were invited **were not worthy**.^e ⁹ Go then to where the roads exit the city and invite everyone you find to the banquet.’ ¹⁰ So those servants went out on the roads and gathered everyone they found, **both evil and good**.^f The wedding banquet was filled with guests. ¹¹ When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed for a wedding. ¹² So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him **into the outer darkness**,^g where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are invited, but few are **chosen**.^h”

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** This feast is not only a marriage feast but also implies the handing over of the kingdom to the son.
- b** The reference here, as in other places in the New Testament, is that the servants represent the Old Testament prophets and perhaps even Jesus’ disciples.
- c** The servants, or prophets, were treated poorly and in some cases were even killed.
- d** The king wanted the guests to know that the wedding feast was prepared and the celebration was about to begin. Those who were invited did not want to come or did not want what the king was offering. They refused even though they knew the banquet was ready.
- e** “Did not deserve to come” (NIV). Spiritually, these were people who loved their own way more than God’s way. They focused on what they wanted instead of what the Father wanted.
- f** The gospel is offered to everyone. There is nothing a person can do to deserve a relationship with the Father. No one is excluded from being invited to the banquet. No one is excluded from being invited into God’s kingdom through a relationship with His Son.
- g** The wedding feast was bright with lights and music while darkness loomed outside the palace, filled with the groans of those who did not attend the feast.
- h** The “chosen” have accepted the invitation and willingly wear the wedding garment—a willingness to put on holiness.

NOTES

»» THE INVITED (Matt. 22:1-7)

- Jesus told a parable of a man who prepared a wedding banquet but was ignored by the invited guests.
- The king throwing the banquet destroyed the invited guests.
- Note: Interpret this section of the parable as it relates to Israel and her rejection of the Messiah.

»» THE GATHERED (Matt. 22:8-10)

- Jesus' parable continued with the king directing his servants to invite any and all to the banquet.
- The servants gathered all available people to attend.

»» THE UNPREPARED (Matt. 22:11-14)

- Jesus' parable concluded when the king removed those who were not dressed for the wedding banquet.
- While surprised, these unprepared faced eternal judgment as a result.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God will hold all people accountable for their response to Jesus.
- God offers salvation to all people, regardless of their past, race, or social station.
- Only those who come to God on His terms, placing their trust in Jesus alone, will escape eternal wrath.



FOCUS ATTENTION

When have you felt unprepared for a task?

- There are times when we face a task feeling ill-equipped for the job.
- In this session we will look at an invitation offered to all, and we need to be sure we are prepared to accept it.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 22:1-7

Jesus told this parable about Israel and her rejection of the Messiah. What modern day event might compare to the event described by Jesus?

- The king represents God. The Son represents Jesus. The slaves represent the prophets and possibly Jesus' disciples.
- The wedding banquet represents the feast the Jews expected to share with the Messiah at the beginning of His rule.

What does the destruction of the city represent?

- The destruction of the city (the invited guests) represents God's judgment on people who do not honor and accept His Son.
- Jesus taught this parable to describe Israel and her rejection of the Messiah.

Many in Jesus' day rejected Him, denying He was God's Son and the Messiah. People today still reject Jesus.

What excuses do they give for rejecting Him?

- People today reject Jesus for many reasons (just like the people in the parable). For example, they don't think they need a Savior, they prefer worldly things over a relationship with Jesus, they view Christians as intolerant or hypocritical, or they don't view Jesus as the only way to salvation.
- In verses 1-7, the king sent his servants out not once but twice, inviting the people to come to the banquet. Today people also have many opportunities to hear the invitation of the gospel message, yet they still choose to reject it.

MATTHEW 22:8-10

What was the significance of the king's invitation?

- After the invited guests rejected the invitation, the king instructed his servants to "invite everyone you find" (v. 9). This included those considered by society to be unworthy, the social outcasts.
- The guests who came to the banquet represented Jesus' followers. Jesus clearly expresses that there was a place in the kingdom for everyone, "both evil and good" (v. 10).

What should we be doing to ensure that everyone, "both evil and good," hears the king's invitation?

- Through our prayers and monetary gifts, we can help spread the gospel across the globe.
- In our own community, we are called to share the good news with "everyone" we encounter. We must do our part in sharing and then allow God to work in their hearts.

MATTHEW 22:11-14

What happens to those who are unprepared when Jesus returns?

- The man "who was not dressed for a wedding" (v. 11) represents false disciples.
- They may call Jesus Lord, but their actions show that they never truly repented and followed Jesus in faith. These unprepared people face eternal judgment (see Matt. 7:21-23).

How do we prepare ourselves for Jesus' return?

- When we truly repent and seek to make Jesus the Lord of our lives, we are invited into God's kingdom.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Salvation is offered to all, yet each person must respond in obedient faith. What must we do to be a part of God's kingdom? How can we help those around us to join Jesus in God's kingdom too?

- To be part of God's kingdom, we must place our trust in Jesus alone as God's Son and our Savior.
- Through our words and actions we should tell the gospel story of God's invitation for all people to join His kingdom.
- We must remind ourselves that God holds us accountable for our response to Jesus, and eternal punishment awaits those who reject His Son.
- **Personal Challenge:** Consider your own life and ask, *Have I placed my trust in Jesus, declaring that I want to be a part of God's kingdom?* If you have not made that decision, what keeps you from making it today? If you have said yes to God's invitation and put your trust in Jesus, where and how can you share that good news with someone else this coming week?



OBJECT LESSON

A PARTY INVITATION

Display a party invitation. Ask the group if anyone can recall a time when a party or special event was taking place and their friends were invited, but they were not. Note that it's likely all of us can recall a party or event sometime in our life when we were not invited.

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 22:8. Explain: *Jesus used this parable about the king who hosted a banquet to describe how some people had rejected the Messiah. When the guests rejected the king's invitation, then He eventually sent out His servants to invite everyone they could find to come to the banquet.*

Say: *There is an invitation where all are included, and it's the invitation to put our faith in Jesus. But even though everyone is invited, not everyone chooses to accept the invitation. Some reject God's offer of salvation.*

Ask: *What excuses do you think people might give today for rejecting God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus? (Examples: there are too many rules, religion is irrelevant, it's for weak people ... they don't think they need it, etc.)*

Remind the group that God holds all people accountable for their



response to Jesus. God's invitation for salvation is extended to every person. Unlike the parties we can recall, not a single person is left off God's invitation list. But if we reject His invitation to put our faith in His Son Jesus, then we face God's eternal judgment. Encourage the group to be bold in sharing the good news of their faith with any family members, friends, or coworkers who need to hear it.



DIG DEEPER

"NOT DRESSED FOR A WEDDING"

This phrase is found in Matthew 22:11. In Revelation 19:9, the apostle John wrote: "Then he said to me, 'Write: Those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb are fortunate!' He also said to me, 'These words of God are true.'" There is a parallel between the parable found in Matthew 22 and the great wedding feast found in Revelation. One foreshadows the other.

During the time of Jesus, it was customary for the king to supply proper garments to his guests, given that many invited would not have been able to supply such attire for themselves. Therefore it would have been inexcusable for anyone to refuse or otherwise neglect to wear the proper wedding attire.

God, the Giver of the feast, insists that everyone be invited to join Him at the wonderful banquet where Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. Everyone is invited, and the proper attire is provided to all.

In our case, the proper attire is a relationship with the Heavenly Father through Christ. Those who are accepted to the feast are willing to put on the proper attire. The one who was singled out in this parable was not wearing wedding clothes, though they were provided. He declined the intent of the invitation and thus was forced to leave the wedding. A sad day!

The lesson for us is that we have been invited to the wedding feast for Christ and the church, and we've been provided an avenue of proper attire to be present. We must accept the invitation and all the attendant requirements, which means must choose Christ over everything else!

SESSION 7

WHERE IS JESUS?

MATTHEW 28:1-15

¹ After the **Sabbath**,^a as the first day of the week was dawning, **Mary Magdalene**^b and **the other Mary**^c went to view the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He **rolled back the stone and was sitting on it**.^d ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was **as white as snow**.^e ⁴ The guards were so shaken by fear of him that **they became like dead men**.^f ⁵ The angel told the women, “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here. For **he has risen, just as he said**.^g Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.’ Listen, I have told you.” ⁸ So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and **great joy**,^h they ran to tell his disciples the news. ⁹ Just then Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They came up, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.” ¹¹ As they were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests **everything that had happened**.ⁱ ¹² After the priests had assembled with the elders and agreed on a plan, **they gave the soldiers a large sum of money**^j ¹³ and told them, “Say this, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him while we were sleeping.’” ¹⁴ If this reaches the governor’s ears, we will deal with him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ They took the money and did as they were instructed, and this story has been spread among Jewish people to this day.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** In the Jewish week, the Sabbath was the last day of the week. It was the day set aside for worship and rest for the Jews. It ended at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday evening. The events of this verse occur early on Sunday after the Sabbath.
- b** Mary was one of Jesus’ early followers. According to Luke 8:2, at one time she had seven demons cast out from her.
- c** She was the mother of James and Joses, who appears to have been known by the early church (Mark 15:40).
- d** The indication is that the angel rolled it back and sat on it triumphantly. Sitting implies completion.
- e** The angel was a heavenly messenger wearing clothes of white, symbolizing celestial purity.
- f** The sentinels were so overcome with terror at the sight of the angel that they became as powerless as though they were dead.
- g** Jesus was no longer among the dead; He was alive, and to emphasize what Jesus had been telling His disciples all along, the angel told the women, “just as He said” (v. 6; also see Luke 24:6).
- h** Both the angel and Jesus told the women to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen. As they left, they were filled with an enthusiasm that could only have come from the Lord Himself.
- i** The soldiers recounted all the events to their superiors, and the officials were concerned to say the least.
- j** While we don’t know whether the Sanhedrin believed the validity of the soldiers’ report, they did understand the potential impact, so they immediately bribed the soldiers to counteract any belief that Jesus’ resurrection had taken place.

»» THE GRAVE OPENED (Matt. 28:1-4)

- On the first day of the week (Sunday), Mary Magdalene and other women made their way to the grave.
- Prior to their arrival, an angel of the Lord appeared and removed the stone. His appearance caused the guards to collapse in fear.

»» THE RISEN KING ANNOUNCED (Matt. 28:5-10)

- The angel announced to Mary and the others that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead and told them to share this news with the disciples.
- While in transit, they encountered Jesus and worshiped Him.
- Jesus assured the women and repeated the directions delivered by the angel.

»» THE COVER-UP CONCOCTED (Matt. 28:11-15)

- The guards who had been stationed at Jesus' tomb reported to the chief priests.
- The chief priests paid them and offered protection if they would tell others that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- Jesus conquered death, affirming His identity and giving all believers hope.
- As the resurrected King, Jesus is worthy of our worship.
- Even when faced with the undeniable facts of Jesus' resurrection, some will refuse to believe in Him.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Have you ever witnessed a car accident? Were you asked to report what you saw? Why is eyewitness testimony so important in certain situations?

- In most situations, the best, most accurate information will come from people who actually saw the event happen.
- In today's session, we will study the account of those people who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 28:1-4

What is significant about who was present in verses 1-4?

- Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" were named as the first visitors to the tomb. The angel of the Lord appeared, as in other key biblical moments (for example, see Ex. 3:2; Matt. 1:20; Acts 12).
- In that culture, women would not have been viewed as trustworthy, yet Matthew included them as important eyewitnesses to the resurrection. All people are valued in God's kingdom.

MATTHEW 28:5-10

What evidence of the resurrection do we uncover in these verses?

- The angel reported the resurrection, reminding the women that Jesus had promised this would happen.
- The angel invited the women to see for themselves the evidence of the empty tomb.
- As final confirmation of the resurrection, the women met the risen Savior as "they ran" to tell His disciples the great news.

Why is prompt obedience so important?

- The angel told the women to go quickly and tell Jesus' disciples that He was risen from the dead, and they obeyed.
- The more we trust God, the quicker we will respond in obedience to His plans for our lives.
- Delayed responses to God's prompting may cause us to miss out on opportunities to serve Him.

What were the women's responses upon encountering Jesus? How should we respond to the risen Savior today?

- Immediately the women recognized Jesus, fell down before Him, and worshiped Him.
- Our response today should be that of worship and obedience.

MATTHEW 28:11-15

What motives were at work as the chief priests' devised their deceptive plan?

- If the resurrection really had happened, then perhaps Jesus was who He claimed—the Son of God. The chief priests could not risk this potential threat to their position and authority.
- The chief priests devised a plan to bribe the soldiers to say Jesus' disciples stole His body while they were sleeping. They wanted to show the resurrection was a hoax.
- The priests' made-up story didn't make sense. If the soldiers were sleeping, how could they know it was Jesus' disciples who stole the body?

What reactions have you encountered from people today toward Jesus' resurrection?

- The women heard of Jesus' resurrection and rejoiced. The priests heard of the resurrection and rejected it by telling a lie to discredit it.
- People are faced with the same choices today. We must either accept it or reject it.
- Some who reject the resurrection simply ignore it, thinking it irrelevant for their lives. Others deny it as being preposterous or unbelievable. Still others reject the resurrection because they want nothing to do with Jesus and His claims in their lives.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How does Jesus' resurrection give us hope for daily living right now? How can we live in a way that shows the power of the resurrection?

- As we face challenges and especially when we feel discouraged or defeated, we must remind ourselves that the power of the resurrection is available to us daily. As believers, we are never alone.
- When we surrender our lives to God's plan and allow Him to work through us, we will accomplish things the world cannot easily explain or understand.
- **Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to reflect on the hope we have as believers because of Jesus' resurrection. Allow the hope of the resurrection to show through your words and actions. Be ready to share the reason for your hope with others you encounter.



OBJECT LESSON

AN ARTICLE ABOUT AN EYEWITNESS

Find an article in the newspaper or on a news website where a person who was an eyewitness is interviewed and quoted in the story (news, sports, crime, etc.). Show the news clipping at your group session (or display the story on your computer if you have Internet access).

Briefly describe the article, and read a quote from the eyewitness. Then ask the group: *Why is the account of the eyewitness important to the story? Why is it better to interview an eyewitness than to interview someone who just heard about the event?*

Direct the group to silently read Matthew 28:1-8 and name aloud the things these two eyewitnesses—"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary"—saw and heard. Call for a volunteer to read Matthew 28:8. Say: *This verse describes the eyewitnesses to the greatest story ever. Note the extreme emotions as the women ran to tell what they had witnessed with their own eyes and ears.*

Point out that we are not eyewitnesses to the resurrection, but we are able to share with others our own experiences with God and His Word.



Ask: *What should we be doing with the good news of Jesus' resurrection? Are we sharing it as we should? Who in your life needs to hear the resurrection news today?*

Challenge the group to look for those they can share this news with in the week ahead.



DIG DEEPER

THE RESURRECTION

Because it was decided by a group of leaders who did not want the truth of the resurrection to get out, they agreed on a plan. Knowing they had no proof that Jesus' resurrection did not occur, the scribes and Pharisees immediately bribed false witnesses. The accusation the Sanhedrin propagated (as well as the soldiers) was that Jesus' disciples had simply come to take His body away so they could promote a story of His resurrection (Matt. 28:11-15).

The story that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body and staged His resurrection was one that continued long after this period of time. Matthew penned this Gospel more than 20 years after the resurrection (some scholars estimate that it was at least 40 years later), so the lie was still being spread then.

There are still many who deny Christ's resurrection. What these people cannot deny are the effects of the resurrection on the lives of those who have been changed by the resurrected Christ whose Spirit dwells in them. The deniers have tried to explain it away for centuries, but when all is said and done, the real evidence that Christ rose from the grave comes by the faith of those who

have been transformed by His presence in their lives. They have a different character than those who do not claim to have Christ indwelling them. It cannot be explained away with different theories of how the early church tried to concoct a story of such magnitude.

One of the challenges of the present-day church is that its people must allow Christ such control of their lives that the world cannot cast aspersions against them; the evidence of change in Christian lives is just too powerful to overcome.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 24:36-51

³⁶ “Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—**except the Father alone.**^a ³⁷ As the **days of Noah**^b were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. ³⁸ For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, **until the day Noah boarded the ark.**^c ³⁹ They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way **the coming of the Son of Man**^d will be.

⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore **be alert,**^e since you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this: If the homeowner had known what time **the thief**^f was coming, he would have **stayed alert**^g and not let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. ⁴⁵ Who then is a **faithful and wise servant,**^h whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes.

⁴⁷ **Truly I tell you,**ⁱ he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delayed,’ ⁴⁹ and starts to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ that servant’s master will come on a day **he does not expect him**^j and at an hour he does not know. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with **the hypocrites,**^k where there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**”^l

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a No amount of speculating about world events and natural phenomena will help us determine the exact time of Christ’s return. Jesus Himself insisted that He did not know the time of His return to the earth.

b In the time right before the flood, people were going about their regular business. The flood came upon them suddenly (see Gen. 7). In the same way, Christ will return to earth unexpectedly.

c Right as the rain began to fall on the earth, Noah entered the ark, and God sealed the door so no one else could enter the ark (Gen. 7:16).

d This is the time when Christ will return to the earth to secure His church.

e “Watch” (KJV); “Keep watch” (NIV). The end will come suddenly, so we must always be prepared for the Lord’s return.

f A homeowner does not know when a thief might arrive; he or she is caught off guard when a burglary happens.

g There is a sense of diligence in these words. In the same way people whose houses have been broken into previously will look for thieves more carefully, people who are ready for the return of Christ are on high alert for that time.

h An unwavering steward who thinks, speaks, and acts in a suitable manner.

i Nothing is more firm than this assurance, and all diligent servants may expect it.

j An image of people who delay coming to terms with Christ and are not prepared when He returns

k No one can serve two masters, and the duplicity of such a person’s life will be revealed.

l This phrase is often used to depict hell. Hell is a literal place reserved for Satan and those who fail to accept Jesus’ salvation.

NOTES

»» **BE REMINDED** (Matt. 24:36-41)

- Jesus compared His second coming to the flood of Noah’s day, focusing on how both were unexpected and sudden.

»» **BE ALERT** (Matt. 24:42-44)

- Jesus prepared the disciples for His death by pointing to His return.
- He reminded them of their need to be alert for His return, since no one but the Father knows when the return will take place.

»» **BE FAITHFUL** (Matt. 24:45-47)

- Jesus challenged His followers to be faithful in anticipation of His return. The faithful followers will be rewarded.
- Note: Emphasize that love for Jesus—not the desire for gaining an eternal possession—is the proper motive for following Jesus.

»» **BE WARNED** (Matt. 24:48-51)

- Jesus issued a warning to the people who reject Him. The unfaithful will face judgment.
- Note: Affirm the existence of a literal hell.

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- God rewards and punishes people at the final judgment based on their stewardship of the tasks assigned to them.
- Faithful stewardship requires perseverance and consistency, for the end could come at any time.
- The time of the Lord’s absence is to be marked by unfaltering service.
- Those who postpone their responsibilities and do evil will discover that it is too late to correct their sinful ways.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Do you prepare for a trip with a lot of planning and preparation, or do you simply say, “Let’s go!” in the spur of the moment? Explain.

- Whether traveling for business or fun, we vary in the ways we prepare for a trip.
- In today’s session, we will talk about a preparation that is absolutely essential—preparing ourselves for Jesus’ return.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 24:36-41

How would you compare living in “the days of Noah” (v. 11) with Jesus’ second coming?

- Like the flood during Noah’s lifetime, the second coming of Jesus will be sudden, swift, and unexpected.
- When Jesus returns, people will be going about their business in ordinary ways, just like the people in the days before the flood. Then, suddenly, some will be taken to heaven while others are left behind.
- Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man.” This messianic title appears first in Daniel 7:13-14 and was one that Jesus used frequently; it appears 28 times in Matthew’s Gospel.

How does remembering the story of Noah help us focus on the second coming of Christ?

- No one, not even Jesus, knows the timing of His return. Only God the Father knows when His return will occur.
- We don’t need to invest our energy in trying to discern when Jesus will return, because like in the days of Noah, no one knows. We should direct our efforts toward being ready when He does return.

How can we be ready for Jesus’ return if we don’t know when it will happen?

- We don’t get ready for Jesus’ return by speculating on the when or how of His return. We get ready by living each day as if that day could be the day of His return.
- Jesus’ return is also compared to a “thief” coming when we least expect it in 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; and Revelation 3:3; and 16:15.

How can we help others to be ready for His return?

- We need to remind others that putting off the decision to trust Jesus is a dangerous delay, because we do not know when He’s coming.
- We can encourage each other to be ready for Christ’s return by regularly gathering for prayer, Bible study, worship, and service.

MATTHEW 24:45-47

What does the faithful slave reveal that we should be doing while we await the return of Jesus?

- The faithful slave kept busy doing the tasks the master had assigned. He lived each day ready for the master’s return.
- As Christ-followers, we should stay busy loving and serving God and others.
- Like the slave who was rewarded for his faithful service, we will be rewarded for our work in God’s kingdom.
- We demonstrate our love for Jesus when we stay focused on doing His work here on earth.

MATTHEW 24:48-51

What does the “wicked servant” (v. 48) reveal about the fate of those who reject Jesus?

- The slave who lived with no regard for his master’s return received his punishment.
- The Bible tells us that hell awaits those who choose to reject God’s Son.

How would you respond to someone who asks how a loving God could send someone to hell?

- God does not send people to hell. He has given all people free will. If we reject Him, hell is the punishment.

How is postponing a decision to accept Jesus the same as rejecting Jesus?

- Since we do not know when Jesus will return, those who postpone the decision to accept Jesus are unprepared for His return.
- The moment Jesus returns, their delay becomes a rejection.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What should we be doing daily to be prepared for Jesus’ return? How can we help those we meet be ready too?

- We stay ready for Jesus’ return when we prioritize our relationship with Him. We commit to regular Bible study, prayer, and worship, so that we continue growing in our faith.
- We stay ready for Jesus’ return through ministry and service for God’s kingdom.
- We need to be bold in sharing the gospel message with all we meet. Don’t fear rejection or ridicule; just plant the seeds of the gospel message.
- **Personal Challenge:** Ask yourself whether you’re ready for Christ’s return if it were to happen today. If not, what steps should you take today to prepare yourself? Are there family members and friends who need to hear about your faith? Will you make the first move in sharing the gospel with them?



OBJECT LESSON

SMALL SUITCASE

Bring a small suitcase or carry-on bag from home. Display the bag and explain that when a pregnant woman approaches her due date, she will pack a bag and keep it ready to grab when labor begins and she heads to the hospital.

Ask: What are some common items women put in their hospital bags? Why is it important to have the bag packed and ready to go? Point out that we do not know exactly when a baby will arrive, so expectant mothers pack their bags in advance in order to be ready to go to the hospital without delay.

Explain that in today's study, Jesus talked about a different kind of readiness—being ready for His return at the end of time.

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 24:42.

Ask: As believers, what are some ways we can "be alert" for Jesus' return?

Explain that this could include making regular prayer and Bible study a priority so our relationship with Jesus is strong, boldly talking about our faith with others, and worshiping and serving in God's kingdom through our church communities. We can also look



for ways to serve and encourage others as we do life together and live each day as if it were the day of His return.

Encourage anyone in the group who has not placed their trust in Jesus to consider that decision today.



DIG DEEPER

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

The idea of a servant being in charge of his master's household would have been familiar to Jesus' audience. They understood what it meant for a servant to be in charge of everything in the household. The Old Testament recorded the story of Joseph and Potiphar in Genesis 39:1-6:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Just as with Joseph, the ruler of the house in Jesus' parable had placed a wise, faithful servant over his entire household to manage it effectively and efficiently. He was held to a standard so strong that if he messed up, he would be punished severely, even put to death. In this case, the servant did not know when the master would return, so he had to be alert at all times for the hour when the head of the house would return and ask the slave to give an account of how he had managed the household.

In the same way, the Lord has placed us as His wise and faithful servants (disciple-makers or ministers) over those whom He has entrusted to us. We are held accountable, just like the servant in Jesus' parable. We must remain faithful and on high alert for His return. One day we will give an account to God of all He has entrusted to us.

HOW DO WE REMEMBER?

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 26:17-30

¹⁷ On the first day of **Unleavened Bread**^a the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the **Passover**?”^b ¹⁸ “Go into the city to a certain man,” he said, “and tell him, ‘The **Teacher**^c says: My time is near; I am celebrating the Passover at your place with my disciples.’” ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When evening came, he was **reclining at the table**^d with the Twelve. ²¹ While they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, **one of you will betray me**.”^e ²² Deeply distressed, each one began to say to him, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³ He replied, “The one **who dipped his hand with me in the bowl**^f—he will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go **just as it is written about him**,^g but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born.” ²⁵ **Judas**,^h his betrayer, replied, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” “**You have said it**,”ⁱ he told him. ²⁶ As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take and eat it; this is my body.”

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, “Drink from it, all of you.

²⁸ For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for **the forgiveness of sins**.^j ²⁹ But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰ After **singing a hymn**,^k they went out to the Mount of Olives.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a This is the Jewish feast that begins on Thursday before the Passover (Ex. 12:8,15,20; 13:3,6-7). The unleavened bread reflected their hasty departure from Egyptian slavery.

b Passover is a festival in the early spring that commemorates God’s miraculous work to emancipate the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Jesus and His disciples shared a Passover meal the night before His death.

c “Master” (KJV); The title refers to Jesus.

d “Sat down” (KJV); “sitting around the table” (MSG)

e Jesus knew that one of the Twelve would betray Him. It’s possible Jesus failed to mention the betrayer’s name to give Judas the chance to repent and thus not betray Him.

f “Someone I eat with daily, one who passes me food at the table” (MSG).

g The Old Testament gave evidence that Jesus would be betrayed. It’s likely the references are to Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

h One of two disciples named Judas, this one is referred to as Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Christ. He acted as treasurer for the disciples but was known as a thief (John 12:4-6). Judas would receive 30 pieces of silver for his betrayal of Christ, which he returned to the Jewish leaders before hanging himself.

i Jesus indicated that He knew Judas would betray Him.

j Jesus’ shedding of His blood (death) provided the sacrifice required for sins to be forgiven and forgotten (v. 28).

k Jews often sang portions of Old Testament psalms during the Passover meal.

NOTES

»» PREPARATION (Matt. 26:17-19)

- Jesus directed His disciples to make provisions for their observance of the Passover meal.
- Note: Affirm Jesus' deity, pointing to His omniscience as demonstrated in this passage.

»» BETRAYAL (Matt. 26:20-25)

- When Jesus declared that one of the Twelve would betray Him, all, including Judas, denied it.
- Note: Affirm God's sovereignty and humanity's free will, pointing to the judgment the betrayer faced.

»» REMEMBRANCE (Matt. 26:26-30)

- Jesus gave new meaning to the elements of the Passover meal, interpreting the unleavened bread and the cup in terms of His sacrificial death.
- Note: Affirm the teaching that the bread and cup are symbolic of Jesus and do not become the flesh and blood of Jesus.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- Believers can recognize God's provisions and be thankful for what He provides.
- None of us are beyond betraying Christ, so we must always be diligent in our loyalty.
- Believers should always be mindful of Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What are some key events we commemorate in our society? In our families? What makes them worthy of remembering?

- There are holidays where we reflect and remember the sacrifices our military personnel make for our freedoms.
- In today's study, we will remember the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for each one of us.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 26:17-19

Why was it important for Jesus and His disciples to observe Passover?

- The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven or eight day celebration; Passover was a one-day observance during this celebration. Passover marked the final plague in Egypt when all firstborns died, but the Israelites were unharmed because of the blood smeared on their doorposts. The unleavened bread reminded the people that they left Egypt with such haste that there was no time to put leaven in their bread.
- Large crowds gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover; Jesus was crucified during the Passover event.

How did Jesus' disciples prepare for the Passover?

- Following Jesus' detailed directions, His disciples secured a room and prepared for the Passover meal.
- Jesus' knowledge of how these events would unfold reveals His supernatural power (see also Mark 14:13-16).

MATTHEW 26:20-25

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' declaration that one of them would betray Him?

- The disciples were "deeply distressed" (v. 22), and each one denied that they would betray Jesus.
- Finally Judas called attention to himself, saying "Surely not I, Rabbi?" (v. 25). All that happened was a part of God's plan, yet Judas acted of his own free will and faced judgment because of his betrayal.
- When Jesus spoke of the one who would betray Him, He might have been referring to Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

In what ways do we betray Jesus today?

- Some betray Him today by rejecting His gift of salvation and abundant life.
- Others betray Jesus in subtle ways—by not taking a stand for Jesus when the opportunity is there, by not sharing about the gift of eternal life we have received, or by not loving others as He commands us to do.

MATTHEW 26:26-30

How did Jesus give new meaning to the elements of the Passover meal?

- Using the old, familiar Passover meal to explain His coming death, Jesus gave the bread and wine new meanings.
- The unleavened bread symbolized His physical body which would be torn by beating and crucifixion. The cup symbolized His blood that would be shed on the cross.
- In the old Passover meal, the people recalled their freedom from slavery in Egypt. With the new meaning Jesus gave to the Passover, we remember our freedom from the slavery of sin.
- The New Testament identifies Jesus as "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7).

How does remembering Jesus' sacrifice help us in daily living?

- If we do not remember Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, it's easy to take for granted the price paid for our salvation.
- Remembering Jesus' sacrifice encourages us to look forward to the day when He will come again.
- Remembering Jesus' sacrifice gives us strength and hope as we face each day's challenges.

How can we keep the memory of these symbols fresh in our own hearts each time we take part in the Lord's Supper?

- Sometimes when we do things regularly we can start to feel like we are just going through the motions. We should never let the Lord's Supper become a mindless behavior.
- Each time we approach the Lord's Supper we can thank God for the sacrifice He made on our behalf and remember afresh the abundant life we have because of the cross.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What are the best ways we can remember Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf?

- We remember the sacrifice by thanking God daily for His provisions and care.
- We remember the sacrifice by being diligently loyal to Christ.
- We remember the sacrifice by observing the Lord's Supper regularly, always mindful of the price paid for our sins.
- **Personal Challenge:** Carve out time this week to pause and reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made for you. Then when you approach the Lord's Supper, look at the table—the bread and the cup—with fresh eyes, appreciating all Jesus has done for you.

A WEDDING RING

Display a wedding ring. Show it to the group and ask them to describe what the ring symbolizes or represents. If no one mentioned the words “covenant” or “covenant relationship,” say those words as you describe it.

Explain that a wedding band symbolizes many important things, but ultimately the ring represents the covenant relationship between a man and a woman who promise to love each other until death.

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 26:27-28. Explain that Jesus’ sacrifice enacted a new covenant where God promised to forgive our sins and provide the gift of abundant, eternal life. The bread and the cup symbolize Jesus’ body and His blood, reminding us of the sacrifice He made for us through His death.

Say: *There might be times when husbands and wives take each other for granted because life gets hectic, hurried, and busy. The wedding bands they wear are visible reminders of the promises couples make to each other. Similarly, there might be times we take for granted the sacrifice Jesus made to provide us forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Each time we come to take the Lord’s Supper, it*



reminds us of the covenant promises God made to us through Jesus’ death on the cross.

Challenge the group each time they take the bread and the cup to slow down, pause, and reflect on the tremendous sacrifice Jesus made for each of us. Remember His suffering and death. Give thanks for that sacrifice.

DIG DEEPER

THE LORD’S SUPPER

From a biblical point of view, the Lord’s Supper has deep theological and spiritual meaning. In Luke 22:19 Jesus told His disciples that they were to observe this ordinance in remembrance of Him. Thus, it is a time to remember what Jesus did for us, as 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 tells us that whenever we take it we proclaim the death and return of our Lord.

By reading the Bible, we are told of at least three things the Lord’s Supper memorializes or calls to our remembrance.

(1) *The bread symbolizes the broken body of our Lord.* Like the Passover lamb, Jesus, the Lamb of God, laid down His life as a sacrifice for sin. His hands, feet, side, and brow were pierced for us. Each time we take the bread in the Lord’s Supper we are reminded of the theological truth of substitutionary atonement; Jesus gave His life for us. He laid His life down on the cross to pay the price for our sins. He died in our place. His body was broken so our broken souls could be healed (Isa. 53:5).

(2) *The cup symbolizes the blood of the covenant.* A covenant is the same thing as a testament. The Old Testament, or old covenant, was one which was based on the blood of sheep and oxen whereby the High Priest would have to go to the temple once each year and make atonement for the sins of the people. But when Jesus died, He

fulfilled the law and instituted a new covenant, or New Testament, one which was ratified or established on the strength of His shed blood. This is why the Bible says in Hebrews 10 that it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin, but Jesus, it says, took away the first covenant and established the second, so that “by this will of God, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all” (v. 10).

Jesus’ blood shed on the cross was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. With His blood He became the sacrifice for our sins, a sacrifice which was acceptable to God. When we take the cup we remember His shed blood, we are reflecting on the sacrifice He made for us and are being reminded of the covenant between us and God—a covenant sealed with the blood of His only begotten Son. Remembering that covenant should have a sobering effect on our lives.

(3) *He is coming again to take us home.* In 1 Corinthians 11:26 the Scripture says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” The Lord’s Supper reminds us not only that Jesus died for us, but that He will come again for us some day. It calls us to live each day in light of that final day.¹

1. Adapted from Dr. Calvin Wittman, “Baptist Faith and Message Sermon 7: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” Available at lifeway.com.

DO I HAVE THE STRENGTH?

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he told the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and **pray.**”^a ³⁷ Taking along Peter and **the two sons of Zebedee,**^b he began to be **sorrowful and troubled.**^c ³⁸ He said to them, “I am deeply grieved to the **point of death.**^d **Remain here and stay awake with me.**”^e ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, **let this cup pass from me.**^f Yet not as I will, **but as you will.**”^g

⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and **found them sleeping.**^h He asked Peter, “So, couldn’t you stay awake with me one hour?” ⁴¹ Stay awake and pray, so that you won’t enter into temptation. **The spirit is willing,ⁱ but the flesh is weak.”**

⁴² Again, a second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³ And he came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open.

⁴⁴ After leaving them, he went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? See, the time is near. **The Son of Man is betrayed^k** into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up; let’s go. See, my betrayer is near.”

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a Jesus went some distance from the disciples and spent time in conversation with His Heavenly Father.

b James and John were sons of a fisherman named Zebedee.

c In the Gospel of Luke it is recorded in this way: “Being in anguish, He prayed more fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground” (22:44). Jesus’ sorrow resulted from His anticipation of His physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering, especially His alienation from His Father as He bore the price of humanity’s sins on the cross.

d Jesus was so overwhelmed and distressed that He felt He was on the brink of physical death.

e “Stay here and keep watch with me” (NIV). During this dark time, Jesus in His humanity longed for a friendly presence.

f Jesus requested that the salvation and forgiveness of our sins be taken care of in a different way than what He faced. He had a choice, and yet He chose to follow through with the Father’s plan.

g Ultimately, Jesus surrendered to the Father’s plan for our salvation.

h The disciples were too tired to continue in prayer for their Master and friend.

i The disciples were willing to go to death with Jesus because of their love for Him. Their inner beings longed to be able to do just that.

j Jesus knew they would be unable to do this without God’s presence giving them strength to do so. Prayer was the only way they could receive the power to avoid temptation.

k Aware of the events about to happen, Jesus announced to His disciples that the time had come; they were to get up and be ready.

»» COMMITTED TO THE TASK

(Matt. 26:36-39)

- With Peter, James, and John close by, Jesus prayed in earnest as He faced crucifixion.
- He committed to following the Father's will no matter what.
- Note: Affirm Jesus' deity and humanity. Discuss the honesty expressed in Jesus' prayer.

»» ASLEEP ON THE JOB (Matt. 26:40-43)

- Jesus found His disciples asleep as He faced the most difficult weekend of His life.
- He reminded them of humanity's weakness and limitations.

»» REALIZING THE MOMENT

(Matt. 26:44-46)

- Jesus found His disciples continuing to sleep and in danger of missing the beginning of the greatest weekend in human history.
- Jesus declared that the time had come for Him to pay the price for humanity's sin.
- Note: Explain that God's timing is sovereign and will move forward regardless of our hesitation or failure to stay alert and watchful.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- Believers are to willingly accept God's direction and will in their lives.
- Believers are to stay alert, depending upon the Father to help them remain faithful to their assigned task.
- Jesus came to earth for the sole purpose of laying down His life as a sacrifice.



FOCUS ATTENTION

When in your life have you felt the strongest—either physically or mentally? Explain.

- Sometimes a situation requires us to display great physical strength. At other times, we may instead need great mental or emotional strength.
- In today's study, we will see Jesus' disciples at a time when He needed them to be strong, but they were weak and limited. We will explore the ways Jesus calls on us to be faithful, alert, and strong in following God's plan for our lives.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 26:36-39

In what ways did Jesus show His humanity and divinity in these verses? What emotions did He express?

- As the Son of God, Jesus was completely willing to go through the horror of death on the cross.
- As a man, Jesus felt sorrowful and distressed, struggling in the same ways we do. He knew the horror of physical suffering that was ahead of Him.

What was Jesus' attitude as He faced impending death?

- Jesus wished that "this cup" of death might not happen to Him. The "cup" (v. 39) was God's wrath against sin.
- In the Old Testament, "cup" is used to describe divine wrath and judgment (see Ps. 75:7-8; Isa. 51:17).
- Jesus knew God possessed the power to provide a way of escape from those who wanted to kill Him, but Jesus completely embraced the will of God the Father to the point of death on a cross.

When have you wrestled with God over a situation or hardship? Why is praying that the Father's will be done such a hard prayer?

- Sometimes our desires and the Father's will are not necessarily the same. We might prefer an easier path when the Father's will is a harder course.
- We might know God's plan is best, but sometimes we still wish for a different outcome.

MATTHEW 26:40-43

How did Jesus' disciples let Him down? How do we let Jesus down?

- The disciples fell asleep even after Jesus instructed them to stay awake.
- We are imperfect, so we fail at times despite our best intentions.
- We sometimes choose our own sinful ways instead of living as obedient Christ-followers.

What can we learn from Jesus' prayer here to apply in our own prayer life?

- Jesus questioned the Father's plan but ultimately wanted to follow His Father's will, not His own.
- God can handle our honest questions when we bring them to Him in prayer.
- Seeking the Father's will is always the best course for our lives.
- Prayer is key in helping us stand against temptation.

How can we support each other during hard times?

- We need to be spiritually alert as we support each other in our Christian walks.
- Spending regular time in prayer and praying for each other are essential.
- Through prayer and words of encouragement we can help each other stand strong against temptation.

MATTHEW 26:44-46

How might we be guilty of sleeping when we should be alert and praying?

- The time had come for Jesus to pay the price for all the sins of humanity.
- We must guard against spiritual laziness. Are we prioritizing Bible study, prayer, and service in the kingdom? We want God to find us spiritually alert and at work.

What steps can we take to recognize God's work in our world?

- Jesus prayed and committed to follow God regardless of the cost.
- Every believer is important and has work to do for the kingdom. Each of us should be doing our part in service.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How should Jesus' willing submission to the Father's plan shape our responses when God calls us to action?

- We should willingly obey God's plan for our lives.
- We should give thanks through our words and actions for the sacrifice Jesus made for each of us.
- We should remain alert and faithful as we serve each day in God's kingdom.
- **Personal Challenge:** Consider your own situation and develop a list of practical steps you can take to help you stay spiritually alert and remain faithful to God's plans for your life.

AN ALARM CLOCK

Bring an alarm clock, and show it to the group. Ask them for a show of hands of how many use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning as opposed to those who wake up naturally.

Say: *In today's study, we see Jesus facing the most difficult weekend of His life, and His disciples kept falling asleep.*

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 26:38. Explain that Jesus gave this first instruction to "stay awake" as He prayed. He asked God honest questions about what lay ahead even though He was committed to following God's will.

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 26:40-41. Explain: *In verse 41, Jesus found the disciples sleeping, so He urged them again to "stay awake." Then Jesus returned to praying.*

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 26:45. Explain that in verse 45, Jesus has returned after praying a third time to find the disciples still sleeping. Despite the importance of the events unfolding, Jesus' disciples kept falling asleep at the time He most needed them to be awake and alert.



Say: *As Christ-followers today, we need to stay alert and remain faithful in the tasks God calls us to do. Ask: How do we stay alert as believers? How can we encourage each other to stay alert and watchful? Stress the importance of depending on God and not our own limited strength as we serve Him.*

DIG DEEPER

GETHSEMANE

In all of Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection, maybe the most telling experience was the one Jesus had in the garden of Gethsemane. After sharing His last supper with the disciples where Jesus outlined what all of this experience meant to them and to all of mankind, they left that location and made their way to Gethsemane.

The word, *Gethsemane*, actually means "oil-press," and it was associated with the orchard of olive trees where Jesus and His disciples often came for retreat or respite. John, one of Christ's disciples, indicated that it was not far from the brook Kidron Valley (John 18:1), located on the lower slope of the Mount of Olives (see map on the inside back cover).

Scripture indicates that Jesus was very troubled and was overcome with sorrow. In one passage, the intensity was aptly described: "Being in anguish, He prayed more fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). In every recording of this time in Gethsemane, Jesus asked that the cup be lifted from Him—the cup being that He would bear the sins of all the people of the world to provide forgiveness for those sins. Scripture

records this time in Jesus' life as profoundly intense. He pleaded with the Father three times for this cup to be removed, and that indicates for us Jesus' commitment when He finally, said, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39, NIV). Jesus was so intent on doing the will of His Father that He was willing to bear the weight of the sins of all mankind. "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV).

The conclusion we come to in the garden of Gethsemane is this: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

SESSION 11

LOYAL?

MATTHEW 26:63-75

⁶³ But **Jesus kept silent**.^a The high priest said to him, “I charge you under **oath**^b by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” ⁶⁴ “You have said it,” Jesus told him. “But I tell you, in the future you will see the **Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power**^c and coming on the clouds of heaven.” ⁶⁵ Then the high priest **tore his robes**^d and said, “He has **blasphemed!**^e Why do we still need witnesses? See, now you’ve heard the blasphemy.

⁶⁶ What is your decision?” They answered, “**He deserves death!**”^f ⁶⁷ Then they spat in his face and beat him; others slapped him ⁶⁸ and said, “Prophesy to us, Messiah! **Who was it that hit you?**”^g ⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. **A servant girl**^h approached him and said, “You were with **Jesus the Galilean**ⁱ too.” ⁷⁰ But he denied it in front of everyone: “**I don’t know what you’re talking about.**”^j ⁷¹ When he had gone out to the gateway, another woman saw him and told those who were there, “This man was with Jesus the Nazarene!” ⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” ⁷³ After a little while those standing there approached and said to Peter, “You really are one of them, since even your **accent**^k gives you away.” ⁷⁴ Then he started to curse and to swear with **an oath**,^l “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed, ⁷⁵ and Peter remembered the words Jesus had spoken, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Jesus knew the high priests lacked evidence and any response would not be heard.
- b** This was a serious oath from the high priest to assure Jesus would have to answer. Though Jesus could have remained silent, He did not.
- c** Jesus confirmed His humanity and His deity, claiming His rightful place as God’s equal and sitting next to the Father in heaven.
- d** A customary Jewish response to blasphemy, however, in this case a high priest’s robes were sacred. By tearing them he committed an act of sacrilege.
- e** The Jews expected the Messiah to be equal to the Father. Since they had already dismissed Jesus as the Son of God, they accused Him of blasphemy, the highest of sins.
- f** According to the high priests and the Sanhedrin, Jesus deserved His death sentence. However, at this point they were not able to carry it out.
- g** Mark 14:65 indicates they had blindfolded Jesus. They spoke these words, adding to the mockery.
- h** A mere slave girl acted as the agent of testing when she asked Peter if he was with Jesus as one of His followers.
- i** Jesus was born in Bethlehem. By indicating Galilean or Nazarene (v. 71), the people were subtly calling Jesus’ Messiahship into question because Old Testament prophecies said the Son of God would be born in Bethlehem.
- j** Peter publicly disassociated himself with Jesus.
- k** “Thy speech” (KJV)
- l** Again Peter denied Christ, yet this time he also forgot that Jesus forbade any use of oaths in common speech (Matt. 5:34).

»» **AFFIRMED BY SCRIPTURE**

(Matt. 26:63-64)

- When asked by the high priest about His identity, Jesus authoritatively affirmed His identity as both Messiah and Son of God.

»» **DENIED BY HIS OPPONENTS**

(Matt. 26:65-68)

- The religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy and condemned Him to death.
- The religious leaders mocked Him, challenging Jesus to identify who hit Him.
- Note: Emphasize the religious leaders' misunderstanding/misinterpretation of the role of the Messiah.

»» **ABANDONED BY HIS FRIENDS**

(Matt. 26:69-75)

- In a courtyard outside the place where Jesus was being tried, Peter denied three times any association with Jesus—an event Jesus had predicted.
- Once the rooster crowed, Peter realized his failure and was brokenhearted as a result.
- Note: Remind readers that Jesus would restore Peter after the resurrection (see John 21).

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- Jesus is the promised Messiah who will reign eternally.
- One's denial of Jesus' identity does not change the fact of who He is.
- Believers must remain loyal to Christ regardless of the potential costs.



FOCUS ATTENTION

How do fans show loyalty to their favorite teams?

- Loyal fans cheer when their team competes, wear their team's apparel, or perhaps even attend games in person.
- In today's study we will explore what it means to be loyal to Christ even in the face of potential costs.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 26:63-64

How did Jesus use Scripture to affirm His identity?

- Jesus used Old Testament Scripture to confirm His identity in verse 64 (Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13).
- Jesus affirmed that He is both Messiah and Son of God.

How does knowing Scripture help us when we face situations where we need to defend the faith?

- When we invest time in Bible study and Scripture memorization, we carry those words with us wherever we go. At times we need them most, God will call to mind Scriptures we have studied.
- Once we have memorized scripture, we can apply that Scripture through application in daily living.
- When we know Scripture, we can "always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).

MATTHEW 26:65-68

In what ways did the religious leaders misunderstand Jesus?

- The high priest accused Jesus of blasphemy because He claimed to be the Messiah.
- When the religious leaders heard Jesus' words, "Son of Man seated at the right hand" (v. 64), they knew He claimed to be equal with God. In their eyes, this was blasphemy.
- When the high priest tore his robe, it was an expression of grief and an appropriate Jewish response to blasphemy.
- Blasphemy was punishable by death. The Old Testament (Lev. 24:10-23) prescribed death by stoning as the punishment for blasphemy.

In what ways do people misunderstand Jesus today?

- Some people acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet or teacher, but they fail to recognize Him as the living Son of God.
- Others ignore Jesus, as if He were just some character in an old story.
- Many fail to acknowledge Him as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

How does knowing the persecution Jesus faced help us as we face challenges to our faith today?

- Verse 67 says the people "spit in His face and beat Him." After blindfolding Jesus, they taunted Him, calling for Him to name who was hitting Him.
- If we receive any mistreatment because of our faith today, we can draw strength from knowing that Jesus stood firm in the face of even greater persecution.

MATTHEW 26:69-75

How far did Peter go in denying Jesus? What was Peter's reaction when he realized the full measure of his denial?

- Just as Jesus had predicted, Peter denied Him three times. The third time, Peter cursed, using an oath to deny he knew Jesus.
- Peter "wept bitterly" (v. 75) when he realized his denials had fulfilled Jesus' prediction.
- Remind the group that it's good to recall Peter's comeback following the resurrection, when Jesus restored Peter (John 21). God gives second chances.

How might we deny Jesus today? Through words? Attitudes? Actions?

- Sometimes we deny Jesus through the words we say or in the moments when we should speak up but remain silent.
- We deny Jesus when we place other things above our relationship with Him.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What are the potential costs of remaining loyal to Jesus today?

- Being a loyal follower of Jesus may mean experiencing ridicule or hardships because of our faith.
- We may find that family and friends misunderstand us and our allegiance to Jesus.
- In some parts of the world, faith in Jesus could lead to physical persecution or even death.
- **Personal Challenge:** In the coming week, reflect on Jesus' position as Messiah and King. Ask yourself if you have given Him rightful priority in your life. Are you prepared to defend your faith when others question it? Commit yourself again to loyal, obedient living as a Christ-follower.



OBJECT LESSON

SPORT TEAM CAP OR T-SHIRT

Display a T-shirt or cap of a favorite sports team. (If you're not a sports fan, enlist a sports fan in the group to bring an item.) Talk about what it means to be loyal to your team. Guide the group to describe how fans act toward their favorite teams. Note that there is a cost involved with being a sports fan—maybe the cost of tickets and sports apparel, or maybe the cost of ridicule if your team is losing. *Say: In today's study, we will see that there is a real risk or cost involved in being a loyal follower of Jesus.*

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 26:75. Explain that this verse describes Peter in the courtyard near where Jesus was being tried by the religious leaders. Peter had just denied knowing Jesus three separate times.

Ask: What does it mean for us as believers today to be loyal to Jesus? What might it cost us to be loyal to Jesus? Note: Loyalty to Jesus is much more than just wearing a T-shirt or cheering at an event, as we do for our favorite teams. Loyalty to Jesus impacts every area of our lives and calls for faithful obedience to Him through both the easy and hard times of life.



Say: For Peter, loyalty to Jesus required him to acknowledge that He knew Jesus on a dangerous, difficult night. Peter stumbled and did not show himself loyal in this situation. Remind the group that Jesus would restore Peter after the resurrection, and he would go on to accomplish great things for the kingdom as a loyal follower.

Encourage the group to consider if there are areas in their own lives where they need to show greater loyalty to Christ.



DIG DEEPER

PETER'S DENIAL OF CHRIST

I remember going to see the 2004 movie "The Passion of the Christ," Mel Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' journey to the cross. I knew going in that it was going to be difficult. What I wasn't prepared for was the portrayal of Peter's denial of Christ. As I viewed it I wept, thinking about my own denial of Christ on many occasions. Though mine were not as intense as Peter's, they produced just as much anguish as what I saw on the screen. After all Christ has done for me, I can still fall into the trap of denying Him.

When Peter was first accosted, he simply said, "I don't know what you're talking about." It got a little more intense when he was questioned again. He replied, "I don't know the man." When called out a third time, "he started to curse and to swear with an oath, 'I do not know the man!'" (Matt. 26:74). The word Peter used on this occasion was one that people use when they are angry; he even invoked a curse on himself. He had gone so far in his denial that even his own life didn't matter anymore. Ironically, that is the position he wanted in the first place—to die alongside Christ. Yet it was a denial instead of an identification.

Then, the rooster crowed. This reminded Peter of what Jesus had told him earlier (v. 34) about how he was overconfident and would in fact deny Him. It was the dawn of awareness for Peter. Peter's response? "He went outside and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). Peter's sorrow at having done exactly what Jesus told him he would do is unmeasurable. It was deep, agonizing, and abiding. However, each of us has done this as well. We can all identify with Peter.

There's one particular lesson we need to take away from Peter's grief: While Jesus agonized in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, He was able to overcome everything that came His way—torture, beating, and death. Peter, on the other hand, slept, and when the test came, he was unprepared. We must be in constant prayer as we face the days ahead, so that when the trials come—and they will—we will not deny Him but identify with Christ.

SESSION 12

CRUCIFIED

MATTHEW 27:41-52

⁴¹ In the same way **the chief priests, with the scribes and elders,**^a mocked him and said, ⁴² “He saved others, but he cannot save himself! He is the **King of Israel!**^b Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

⁴³ **He trusts in God;**^c let God rescue him now—if he takes pleasure in him! For he said, “I am the Son of God.”⁴⁴ In the same way even the **criminals**^d who were crucified with him taunted him. ⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon **darkness**^e came over the whole land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling for **Elijah.**”^f

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him **a drink.**^g

⁴⁹ But the rest said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

⁵⁰ But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and **gave up his spirit.**^h ⁵¹ Suddenly, the **curtain of the sanctuary**ⁱ was **torn in two from top to bottom,**^j the **earth quaked, and the rocks were split.**^k ⁵² The tombs were also opened and **many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.**^l

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** These were likely members of the Sanhedrin.
- b** This refers to Jesus, but the leaders in the passage said it in a derogatory manner.
- c** Again, the leaders of the Israelites were mocking Jesus. Even though He trusted His father, they derided Him.
- d** “Rebels” (NIV). These were the ones crucified on either side of Jesus. Only the Book of Luke (23:42-43) records that one of the criminals turned to Jesus.
- e** The bystanders naturally interpreted the darkness as God’s judgment. While they likely thought the judgment was against Jesus (as if He were a heretic), in light of His later resurrection they came to see the darkness as a judgment against the sin that Jesus became on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21).
- f** The Old Testament prophecy is noted in Malachi 4:5.
- g** Someone heard Jesus say, “I’m thirsty” (John 19:28), at about the same time He had called out to God—who Jesus felt had deserted Him—and they retrieved some sour wine, or vinegar, for Him to drink from a sponge soaked in the liquid and attached to the end of a stick.
- h** Jesus died victoriously and willingly for the redemption of mankind from its sinfulness.
- i** This thick piece of cloth separated the holy of holies, where only the high priest could go to make sacrifices.
- j** These words indicated that this veil was not torn by human hands; it was torn by God Himself. The importance of this is found in Hebrews 10:19-20.
- k** A supernatural phenomenon, just like the occurrence of darkness in verse 45.
- l** “Many godly men and women who had died came back to life again” (TLB).

»» **MOCKED** (Matt. 27:41-44)

- Prodded by the religious leaders, the crowd witnessing Jesus' crucifixion and the others being crucified mocked Jesus, using His own words against Him.
- Note: Point to the crowd's reference to Psalm 22:8 as a part of their mocking.

»» **FORSAKEN** (Matt. 27:45-49)

- After darkness fell on the region for three hours, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1. The crowd misunderstood His cry, thinking He was calling out to Elijah for relief.
- Note: Emphasize the supernatural nature of the area being darkened for three hours.
- Explain that Matthew recorded only one of Jesus' seven sayings from the cross.

»» **SACRIFICED** (Matt. 27:50-52)

- With a final cry, Jesus willingly died for our sin.
- As a result of His death, the curtain in the temple was miraculously torn from top to bottom, an earthquake split stones, and people were resurrected from the dead.
- Note: Affirm Jesus' being in control, being sovereign over the very timing of His own death.

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- All of creation, knowingly and unknowingly, testifies to Jesus being the Messiah.
- Sin causes separation from the holy God.
- Jesus' death removed the chasm between God and sinful humanity, making it possible for humans to have an eternal relationship with God through faith in Jesus.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Which of these terms bring the greatest response from you: *mocked, forsaken, or sacrificed*? Explain.

- In this session, we examine the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made so all people have the opportunity for a relationship with God.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 27:41-44

Of those who mocked Jesus, who surprises you the most?

- The crowd, including the chief priests, scribes, and elders, mocked Jesus on the cross.
- Even the criminals being crucified alongside Jesus mocked Him. Note: One of those criminals later repented, and Jesus promised him a place in heaven (Luke 23:39-43).

In what ways were the crowds' accusations wrong or unfair?

- Led by the religious leaders, the crowd mocked Jesus and challenged Him to have God "rescue Him" (v. 43).
- The crowd quoted Psalm 22:8, taunting Jesus with the words.
- The crowd taunted Jesus saying "He cannot save Himself" (Matt. 27:42), when His death was actually providing a way for all who trust Him to be saved.
- They called for Jesus to "come down now," when the only way to secure salvation for all was for Him to stay on that cross until dead.

MATTHEW 27:45-49

What is the significance of these supernatural events accompanying Jesus' death?

- As Jesus was dying on the cross, God covered the land with darkness in the middle of the day, allowing nature to reveal the supernatural power of Jesus.
- Both physical and spiritual darkness filled the land during this time.

How did Jesus' words reflect His anguish? The pain of sin? His separation from the Father?

- Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1, asking why God had "forsaken" Him. In that darkest moment, Jesus carried the crushing burden of the world's sin and felt separated from the Father.
- Matthew records only this one of Jesus' sayings from the cross. The remaining six are found in the other three Gospels (Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19)
- The crowd misunderstood Jesus' words, thinking He was calling on Elijah the prophet for relief.

MATTHEW 27:50-52

What events marked Jesus' death?

- The temple curtain was torn from top to bottom. There was an earthquake that split the stones. "Saints" who had died were raised from the dead.
- Jesus' death occurred at 3:00 p.m., the same time as the afternoon sacrifice at the temple. So the priests would have been present in the temple to witness the tearing of the curtain.
- This curtain, which separated the holy of holies from the other parts of the temple, was reported to be 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and as thick as a man's palm.

How would you interpret the significance of each event?

- The torn curtain symbolized sinners' new access to God with the barrier between God and humans removed.
- With the earthquake, God showed through nature that something amazing had happened.
- With the resurrection of the saints, or "believers" (v. 52, MSG), God showed that He would raise His people.
- Note that Jesus "gave up His spirit" (v. 50). Jesus was sovereign throughout the crucifixion, controlling even the timing of His death. He gave His life as an offering to humanity; it was not taken from Him.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How should we live in light of Jesus' sacrifice for us?

- If we have never asked forgiveness for our sins and placed our trust in Jesus, we can do that today.
- As believers, we should live each day so that our words, attitudes, and actions reflect that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord of our lives.
- We should live with thankfulness for the sacrifice Jesus made through His death, so we could have an eternal relationship with God.
- Personal Challenge:** Take time this week to reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made for each of us. Remember the sin debt that each of us carries and none of us can repay except through Jesus taking our sins upon Himself on the cross. Thank God for providing our way to salvation.



OBJECT LESSON

A BILL

Bring a personal bill from home (a car payment, house payment, electric bill, etc.). Show the group the bill, and tell what kind of bill it is and how often you have to pay it. Ask the group to name examples of the kinds of bills we all have to pay. Note that all of us want to keep up with our debts, and we try to pay our bills in full and on time. Ask: *What happens when we fail to pay a bill on time?* Note that sometimes a company will attempt to work out a payment plan so the debt is satisfied.

Say: *Today's study of Jesus' death on the cross reminds us that there is one debt none of us can pay on our own; the cost of our sin is far greater than we can ever afford to repay.* Paul wrote in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death." Explain: *We can never work hard enough, earn enough, or do enough good things to repay the sin debt each of us has accumulated. Only death can satisfy our debt. Jesus' death on the cross paid the debt we owe but can never repay.*

Direct someone to read Matthew 27:50. Point out that Jesus willingly died for our sin, paying for it with His life.



Close by asking the group to reflect on the cross in a fresh way. Ask them to consider whether they have accepted the gift of salvation God offers each of us or if they are still carrying around that heavy burden of sin debt. Encourage them to take that step today if they have never done so. For believers, encourage them to share the wonderful news of Jesus' sacrifice with someone who needs to hear it this week.



DIG DEEPER

WHAT A SAVIOR!

Matthew and Mark record the statement from Jesus on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). This is a quote from David's Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning?"

Jesus felt God had deserted Him. Many have interpreted this statement as God turning His back on Jesus because He became sin on our behalf. Others have indicated that this is evidence that Jesus was indeed a human because He had experienced the feeling of being deserted by God Himself. How awful to place oneself in Jesus' position and ponder His fear of death, condemnation, and utter loneliness apart from God. Whatever our interpretation, we can be assured that Jesus felt separation from God during a time of intense distress to a greater degree than we will ever experience.

When Jesus felt separated from God and had completed His assignment to die for our sins, He "shouted again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit" (Matt. 27:50). Once Jesus had received the vinegar, "He said, 'It is finished!' Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (John 19:30). The predictions of the prophets—the Son of Man's ministry on earth, His sufferings, and His crucifixion—were once and for all fulfilled. With Jesus' last breath, the redemption of the world was accomplished. With that fulfillment, Jesus willingly gave up His Spirit for the sins of the world—for my sins and yours. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

MATTHEW 28:16-20

¹⁶ The **eleven disciples**^a traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, **they worshiped**,^b but **some doubted**.^c

¹⁸ Jesus came near and said to them, “**All authority**^d has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples **of all nations**,^e **baptizing**^f them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to **observe everything**^g I have commanded you. And remember, **I am with you always**,^h to the **end of the age**.”ⁱ

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Judas Iscariot killed himself after betraying Jesus, leaving only eleven of the original disciples.
- b** The disciples likely fell at Jesus’ feet to indicate their awe of Him, acknowledging Him as Messiah.
- c** The same word was used of Peter’s doubt in Matthew 14:31. In both instances, the doubt is followed by reverence.
- d** This phrase is reminiscent of the time when Satan tempted Jesus with authority over all the earth (Matt. 4:8-10). Through Jesus’ declaration, there would now be no need to wonder who was in charge.
- e** The word “all” indicates there are no exceptions. We must target every nation, tribe, and tongue for discipleship.
- f** The word used here means immersion. Baptism is an action that gives public witness to the relationship a person has with Christ. Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; for believers it also symbolizes death to and burial of the old life and resurrection to live differently because of Christ’s presence in their new life.
- g** The disciple-makers are to instruct and encourage those who become believers in all the ways of Christ as recorded in Scripture. It is a constant, ongoing process.
- h** This points to Christ’s divinity. No human could be present with so many people all across the world.
- i** The Holy Spirit will be with us throughout our physical lives, and when we die or Christ returns, He will be present with us throughout eternity.

NOTES

»» **WORSHIP** (Matt. 28:16-17)

- When the eleven remaining disciples met Jesus after His resurrection, they worshiped Him, although some had doubts.
- Note: Remind readers that understanding Jesus' identity leads to worshiping Him and obeying His directives.

»» **POWER** (Matt. 28:18)

- Jesus declared that He possessed all authority over creation.
- Note: Be careful not to imply that Jesus was lesser than or deficient prior to His resurrection.

»» **MISSION** (Matt. 28:19-20a)

- Jesus directed His followers to make disciples of everyone they encountered, baptizing and teaching obedience.
- Note: Characterize baptism as a public declaration of one's faith in Jesus. Be sure to emphasize that baptism is not the means of salvation.

»» **PRESENCE** (Matt. 28:20b)

- Jesus promised His presence to His disciples as they went about the work of making disciples.

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- Jesus can be worshiped even when we have doubts.
- As they go throughout the world, believers are to make disciples of Christ.
- Believers live in light of Jesus' power and presence.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What skill or unique knowledge have you taught to someone else? How did you teach them?

- Whether it's at home, church, or the workplace, we all have some skill(s) we teach others.
- We teach through example, by explanation, or by demonstration—there are many ways to teach.
- In today's study, we will explore the instruction that Jesus gave to all who follow Him to go and make disciples.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE MATTHEW 28:16-17

How did the disciples' immediately respond when they saw Jesus after His resurrection?

- Jesus' disciples worshiped Him.
- When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He quoted Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him" (Matt. 4:10). By accepting the disciples' worship, Jesus showed Himself to be the Lord.
- For us, worship and obedience must be a vital part of our relationship with God.

Why would doubt be included in the responses to Jesus' instructions after His resurrection? When you first heard of Jesus' resurrection, was your reaction one of a quick believer or a doubter? Explain.

- Although His disciples worshiped Jesus, "some doubted."
- Today we see responses to Jesus ranging from belief and acceptance to questioning and doubts to rejection.

What should we do with our doubts?

- God can handle our honest doubts and questions when we earnestly seek Him. We can have doubts while we worship.
- God desires for us to move from doubting to faith and obedience.

MATTHEW 28:18

What was the scope of Jesus' authority? How is His authority different from the authority of any other kings or rulers?

- Jesus had authority before the resurrection (Matt. 7:29, 9:6,8; 11:27, 21:23). But through the resurrection, God the Father granted Him "all authority" over creation.

What does Jesus' power mean for us?

- Jesus' declaration of His authority over all creation immediately precedes His commission for us to "go ... and make disciples" (Matt. 28:18). His authority is tied to our ability to make disciples.

MATTHEW 28:19-20a

What is the relationship between baptism and teaching disciples?

- Jesus instructed His disciples to go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching obedience.
- Note that baptism is a public declaration of a person's faith in Jesus, not a means by which a person is saved.

As His followers, how are we to carry out Jesus' instructions?

- Jesus instructed His disciples to extend their mission to the whole world. Christ still calls His followers to that today.
- We can "go" by praying, giving, and sharing our faith. This might mean going across the street, across the state, or across the ocean. Every believer can be part of the going and making disciples.

MATTHEW 28:20b

Jesus promised His presence. How do we see His presence in our lives today?

- Jesus promised His presence to His disciples "always."
- We do not have to carry out the Great Commission in going and making disciples in our own power and strength; Jesus is with us "always, to the end of the age."

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

In what ways can we fulfill the Great Commission?

- Pray faithfully for missionaries who are carrying the gospel message around the globe.
- Give financially to support global missions work.
- Consider going on a mission trip, either in the U.S. or overseas.
- Think about the places in your community where you encounter people from other countries and cultures. Look for ways to share your faith in conversations with people there.
- Remember that sharing the gospel with "all nations" begins at home. Ask yourself if there is a family member, neighbor, coworker, or friend who is not a believer, and look for opportunities to talk about your faith.
- **Personal Challenge:** Reflect on how you are doing as a disciple-maker. Remember that you don't have to depend on your own limited strength or resources. Jesus has promised His power and presence to go with us. Look and listen for opportunities to share the gospel every day.

A WORLD MAP

Display a map of the world. You can use a paper map or globe, or you can search for “world map” on the Internet. Identify your location on the map. Invite a few volunteers to name a location they have visited and then find it.

Point out that the world population today is more than 7,300,000,000 people. (For an up-to-date population figure, view the U.S. and World Population Clock at census.gov/popclock.)

Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 28:19. Note that in this verse, Jesus told His followers to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

Ask: *What is meant by “all nations”?* Stress that Jesus included everyone. Explain that no one is too bad, too far gone, too sinful, or too hopeless, so our goal should be to reach as many as we can with the good news of Jesus.

Ask: *Reaching the more than 7,300,000,000 people on earth sounds like an impossible task, so what is our part? What should we be doing to reach “all nations”?* Lead the group to discuss ways you can all be on mission together. Ask: *What can our group do to reach*



the surrounding community? How can we work together to reach people on the other side of the world?

Close by challenging the group to be disciple-makers to “all nations” as they go about their business this week.

DIG DEEPER

THE GREATEST COMMAND

Jesus has given us the great commandment:

“One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked Him, ‘Which command is the most important of all?’ ‘This is the most important,’ Jesus answered: Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:28-30).

We are to love God supremely, but we also have a Great Commission:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:16-20).

Not only are we to love God supremely ourselves, we are to teach others to do so as well. That’s what it means to make disciples. Everyone who becomes a believer is a disciple of Christ.

Here is the assumption of Scripture: If we have been converted to Christianity, then we will be a disciple of Christ. If we are indeed a disciple of Christ, then we will tell (evangelize) others about that relationship. Not all of us have the gift of evangelism, but all of us are called to proclaim what Christ has done and is doing in our lives. We are all given this task of disciple-making.

It’s important to note that Jesus did not tell us to make converts; He instructed us to make willing followers of God. Let us not forget that instead of solely focusing on converting people to Christianity, we need to follow through by making disciples of those who have been converted. This begins by helping people become like Christ through encouraging them to read and study the Scripture, to have personal conversations with the Lord through prayer, to worship Him both personally and corporately, to be faithful stewards of the resources He has given us, and to tell others about our relationship with Him. To do anything less is to fall short of both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

owers of the coming age,⁶ and who
away, because,^b to their own harm,
recrucifying the Son of God and holdi
to contempt.⁷ For ground that has
rain that has often fallen on it, and th
vegetation useful to those it is cult
receives a blessing from God.⁸ But if
thorns and thistles, it is worthless and
be cursed, and will be burned at the
⁹ Even though we are speaking th
friends, in your case we are confide
er things connected with salvation.
is not unjust; He will not forget you
the love^c you showed for His name
served the saints—and you contin
them.¹¹ Now we want each of you
strate the same diligence for the fin
of your hope,¹² so that you won't
out imitators of those who inherit
through faith and perseverance.

Inheriting the Promise

¹³ For when God made a promise
since He had no one greater to sw
wore by Himself:

¹⁴ ...



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THREE WAYS TO LEAD A DEEPER BIBLE STUDY

by Mike Livingstone



I've never met a Bible study leader who said, "I want to lead a shallow Bible study." Neither have I met anyone who attended a weekly Bible study with the hopes of being bored by pointless superficialities.

Regardless of our group members' levels of biblical knowledge or their spiritual maturity, depth is what we aim for as Bible study leaders—a depth that informs the mind as it also cuts to the heart (Acts 2:37).

Consider these three ways we can add depth to our Bible teaching:

1. EXPLORE THE BIBLICAL TEXT IN ITS CONTEXT.

Teaching that uses the biblical text as a jumping off point for our own objectives is not Bible teaching; it is proof texting. D. A. Carson said: "A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text." You might be a proof-texter if you are not examining the biblical text in light of its historical and literary context.

To lead a deeper Bible study means we allow the biblical passage in its context to set the agenda for the lesson and to speak for itself. Put simply, we say what the Bible says. Let's be Bible teachers, not proof-texters.

2. AIM AT THE HEART OF YOUR GROUP MEMBERS.

Various opinions exist regarding what constitutes deep Bible teaching. For some, going deep means telling people something they didn't already know (explaining the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words, for example). Deep may involve that, but deep goes beyond imparting new knowledge.

We can parse Greek verbs all day and yet never move out of the shallows of a text. We can impress group members with our knowledge of Bible culture and history yet still be superficial in our teaching of a passage. Why? Because the depth of teaching is measured not simply by the amount of biblical knowledge imparted; it is measured by how deeply the truth of the biblical text penetrates the heart.

We can mark the depth of our teaching at the point where the truth of God's Word intersects where the group members live. If you want to go deeper in your Bible teaching, be intentional about connecting biblical truth to where people are. In other words, aim not at their heads, but at their hearts in the biblical sense of the word *heart*—the totality of the mind, will, and emotions.

3. TEACH FROM YOUR HEART.

Tim Keller wrote a book titled *Preaching*, most of which applies equally well to small group Bible teaching. In it, he said: "If you want to preach to the heart, you need to preach from the heart. It's got to be clear that your own heart has been reached by the truth of the text" (p. 166).

His point is obvious: Leading a deeper Bible study involves more than preparing the right words to say about a passage; it involves the preparation of the teacher. We teach by who we are, not just by what we say. Consequently, a deeper Bible study is, to some degree, the overflow of what God is doing in the depths of the leader's heart. That's a very different proposition than merely going through the lesson material and presenting what's in the book.

Your leader guide and other lesson helps will help you add depth to the content of your teaching. Building relationships with your group members will help you connect God's Word to where they live. Your personal study of a biblical text in deep pursuit of God—and not just in search of lesson material—will take your teaching to another level.

Mike Livingstone is a content editor on LifeWay's adult ongoing Bible studies team, a position he has held for 23 years. Prior to coming to LifeWay, he served as a pastor and missionary in Kenya. He leads a weekly Bible study at his church and blogs at mikelivingstone.com. Find him on Twitter: @m_livingstone.

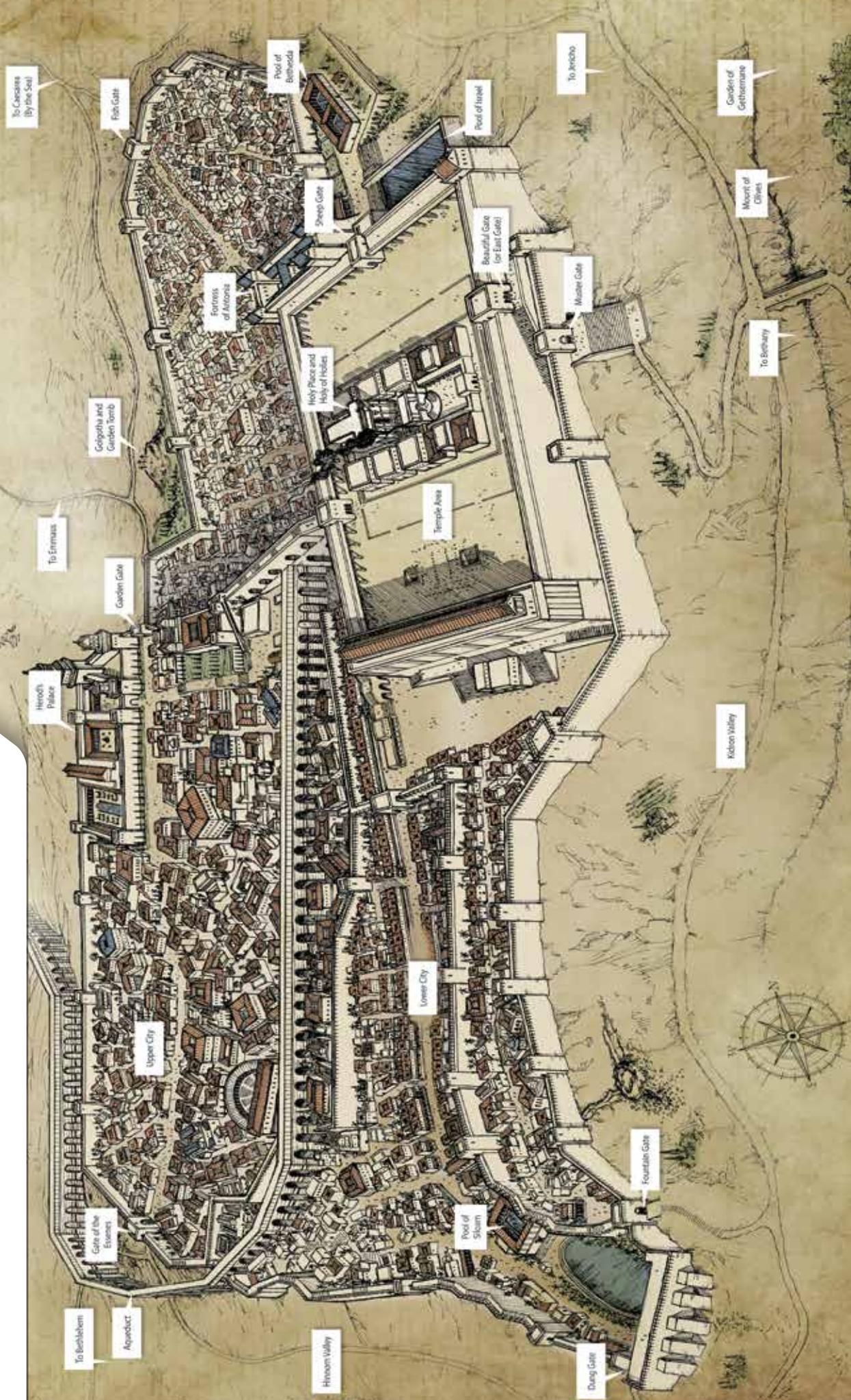
COMING NEXT QUARTER

PSALMS

- Session 1** **The Path** > *Psalm 1:1-6*
- Session 2** **The Past** > *Psalm 78:5-8,32-39*
- Session 3** **The Shepherd** > *Psalm 23:1-6*
- Session 4** **Our Response** > *Psalm 138:1-8*
- Session 5** **His Presence** > *Psalm 84:1-12*
- Session 6** **The Creator** > *Psalm 95:1-11*
- Session 7** **God Revealed** > *Psalm 19:1-14*
- Session 8** **His Love** > *Psalm 136:1-5,10-15,23-26*
- Session 9** **His Faithfulness** > *Psalm 146:1-10*
- Session 10** **The Confession** > *Psalm 51:1-17*
- Session 11** **The Cleansing** > *Psalm 32:1-11*
- Session 12** **The Protector** > *Psalm 141:1-10*
- Session 13** **The Longing** > *Psalm 42:1-11*

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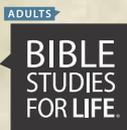
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