

- Tonight we begin a verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of Matthew
 - I hope you'll join us here weekly to walk side-by-side with our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth
 - Let's learn all we can about Jesus so that we might serve Him all the more, both here in church and in the world

Matt. 1:1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Matt. 1:2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

Matt. 1:3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram.

Matt. 1:4 Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon.

Matt. 1:5 Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse.

Matt. 1:6 Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.

Matt. 1:7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa.

Matt. 1:8 Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah.

Matt. 1:9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.

Matt. 1:10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah.

Matt. 1:11 Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Matt. 1:12 After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel.

Matt. 1:13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor.

Matt. 1:14 Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud.

Matt. 1:15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob.

Matt. 1:16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Matt. 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

- Beginning a study of any of the four Gospels in our Bible always requires some preliminary observations
 - During the 3+ years that Jesus ministered on earth, there were tens of thousands of people who witnessed His miracles and heard His teaching, so:
 - Theoretically, we could have many accounts of Jesus written by those eyewitnesses
 - But only the Holy Spirit can inspire or lead someone to author scripture, as Peter reminds us

2 Pet. 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2 Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- So what we have in our Bibles, we have because God moved someone to write it. In God's providence, only four men were moved by the Spirit to author an account of Jesus' life on earth
 - And those four accounts are the first four books of the New Testament
 - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (not to be confused with John, Paul, George and Ringo – if you don't get that joke, it means you're under the age of 50)
- The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are structured very similarly
 - They all report the events of Jesus' life on earth, ending with His death and resurrection
 - So naturally, these three Gospels report very similar things, as we would expect
- In fact, they are often called the Synoptic Gospels because they are so similar in their perspectives
 - The word *synoptic* is Greek, meaning "to see together"
 - These Gospels are called synoptic because those authors share a similar view of Jesus' life
 - But interestingly, two of three synoptic authors were not even disciples of Jesus; they never knew Him while He walked the earth
- Matthew was one of the twelve Apostles, but Luke and Mark became Christians only after Jesus ascended into Heaven
 - So how could Luke and Mark have seen the same things that Matthew saw?
 - The answer is that they reported things through the eyes of others
- Specifically, Mark was a traveling companion of the Apostle Peter while Luke was the companion of the Apostle Paul
 - So what Mark wrote in his Gospel is what Peter related to him from his experiences accompanying Jesus before His death and resurrection
 - And what Luke wrote in his Gospel, he received from Paul; and what Paul received,

he gained from the encounters he had with Jesus after His resurrection

- So the first three Gospels are similar because they record the experience of three men (Matthew, Mark and Luke) who were all eyewitnesses (or influenced by eyewitnesses) to the events of Jesus' life
 - Nevertheless, these three Gospels are not identical, which causes some people to question their trustworthiness
 - For example, only Matthew's and Luke's Gospels include a genealogy of Jesus
 - But Luke's genealogy is different than Matthew's – and we would hardly expect genealogies to be different
- And there are others differences across the first three Gospels
 - Which causes us to wonder if these differences mean we can't trust the Gospel accounts
 - And in particular for our study, we should ask, "Why are Jesus' genealogies different?"
- Before I address the question of the genealogies specifically, let's consider the general question of why differences exist at all and what does that say about the Gospels?
 - Imagine for a moment what if the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were identical?
 - What if each book was word-for-word exactly the same as the other two?
 - Would there be any value in having the first three Gospels being identical works? Why would God want to inspire such repetition?
 - In fact, wouldn't such perfection leave us suspicious?
 - Wouldn't we assume that one author merely copied another?
 - If these books were exactly the same, wouldn't we feel less confident in their inspiration, not more confident?
 - The Lord intentionally allowed each man's personality and memory to play a part in the formation of each Gospel, yet without making mistakes and without contradictions. In doing so, we actually gain greater confidence in their accuracy
 - Imagine you're a detective investigating the scene of a crime and you had four witnesses to the crime
 - You interview each witness separately and each one tells you exactly the same story, word-for-word
 - Would you find that a reassuring finding or cause for suspicion?
 - If their stories were identical, wouldn't you assume the witnesses prearranged their testimonies?
 - It's actually evidence of a conspiracy
 - In fact, in true detective work, if two witnesses have identical stories, they immediately think of it as a conspiracy
- Instead, you would expect each person's recollection to vary at least slightly from the others

- Many of the things the witnesses reported would agree, but at least a few details would also differ
 - One person would recall details that the others overlooked and vice versa
 - In the end, the detective would find the true story by assimilating all four witnesses' statements into a single account of what happened
 - Having multiple perspectives of the same event gives the detective a better understanding of what happened
 - And the differences between the accounts serve to fill in gaps in the other person's testimony and add a different perspective
- That's why the Lord provided His Church with four different perspectives on Jesus' life and words
 - Having four slightly different perspectives serves to increase our confidence in the authenticity of these accounts
 - And we gain the benefit of more information than one author could provide
 - Plus, the Lord could tailor each author's presentation to appeal to a particular audience
- Each Gospel author, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, wrote to record the events of Jesus life and ministry from his unique perspective
 - Mark wrote primarily to Romans of his day
 - Luke wrote to the wider Gentile audience
 - Matthew wrote to Jews dispersed throughout the empire
 - And John's Gospel is very different from the others because he wrote his account decades after the first three
 - So he purposely chose to focus on certain events the other writers overlooked
- So when we find one Gospel's account of Jesus' life differing from others, we combine and assimilate the accounts to gain a single record
 - We accept the reality that one author noticed or remembered things the others overlooked
 - And even if one account seems to contradict another, we have to work from the assumption that both accounts are true
 - Therefore, we seek a way to reconcile them, and there's always a way to reconcile them
 - We can do this safely because we know the Bible is the inspired word of God
 - The same God Who spoke the Universe into existence also spoke these words to us – He just used a man to record them for us
 - The same God who designed the forces of nature, gave life to everything and made the sun to rise each morning also shared His thoughts with you and me in this book
 - There is no misplaced word in this book, nothing is approximate, nothing is in error, everything is in harmony

- So if we can't make sense of something here, it's not because the Bible lacks sense
 - It's because we lack understanding
 - The Bible was written by an omniscient God, and our finite minds can't absorb all that an infinite God can reveal
 - But in time, if we submit to His word and allow the Spirit to instruct us through it, the Lord will make things clear to us
 - For He delights to reveal Himself to those who sit at His feet with open hearts
 - But as Jesus says:

Luke 10:21 At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

- So how do we understand the genealogy presented here in Matthew's Gospel? What's its purpose in the account of Jesus?
 - Both Matthew and Luke recorded genealogies for Jesus
 - And interestingly, Matthew and Luke are also the only two Gospels to record Jesus' birth story
 - Obviously, it makes sense that the two authors who chose to relate the birth story of Jesus also took an interest in His genealogy. So the two are connected –
 - And this connection also explains why their two genealogies are different
 - To see why, we need to remember Matthew's connection to Jesus
 - Matthew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus who were elevated to apostle, so like the rest of the apostles he was introduced to Jesus near the beginning of Jesus' ministry – right after the baptism of John
 - And like the rest of the apostles, Matthew knew nothing of Jesus prior to His baptism
 - In fact, Jesus spent his first 30 years of life on earth living and working in obscurity in a backwater region of the Galilee
 - So even if Jesus and Matthew had crossed paths during those years, Matthew wouldn't have given Jesus a second look
 - So neither Matthew nor Luke had first-hand knowledge of Jesus' birth, much less His family genealogy
 - So how did they gain all this information about His birth?
- If we compare Matthew and Luke, we find they are written from the perspective of two different eyewitnesses
 - In Matthew's Gospel, we find intimate details of Joseph's experience, while in Luke we find intimate details of Mary's experience

- In Matthew, we learn Joseph's inner thoughts, yet Matthew has no record of Mary's thoughts
- Conversely, in Luke's account we learn what Mary was thinking but there's no record of Joseph's thoughts
- In Matthew's account, we're given a description of what the angel told Joseph, but no mention of an angel visiting Mary
- In Luke, we have a description of what the angel told Mary, but no mention of an angel appearing to Joseph
- So evidently, Joseph was Matthew's source for the backstory on Jesus' genealogy and birth, while Mary was Luke's source
 - So naturally, each author's account reflects the perspective of their respective source
 - The genealogy in Matthew is the genealogy of Joseph's family
 - While the genealogy recorded in Luke was Mary's family genealogy
 - Mary was likely still alive when Luke wrote his Gospel, so he could have interviewed Mary
 - While Matthew probably received Joseph's account secondhand, perhaps from Joseph's other sons (most assume Joseph was dead by the time Jesus began His ministry because there's no mention of him)
- Knowing this, we read Matthew's genealogy understanding he was telling a story through it from Joseph's perspective – not as the father of Jesus, but as the husband of Mary
 - Turning to the genealogy itself, a genealogy is like a family tree, listing generations over time
 - Many people today are interested in knowing their family origins
 - There are websites that help you learn your ancestry
 - Most of us are drawn to the mystery and wonder of discovering our connections to people from the past
 - But it's not the size of our family tree that matters
 - It's how many nuts you find hanging on it...and every family has some
 - But for a Jew, keeping genealogy records wasn't merely a hobby, it was a crucially important part of being Jewish
 - God assigned the Jewish nation a special place among the nations of the world
 - He made covenants with that people and gave promises to the nation as a whole
 - Those covenants and promises were inherited through these family lines
 - The most important promise God gave Israel was to bring a Messiah, a Savior for the world, through the Jewish nation
 - So it was all important for the Jewish people to maintain a certain understanding of who was truly Jewish

- And genealogy records were used for that very purpose
- For example, when the Jews were preparing to return to Israel to re-establish themselves in the land of Judah after spending 70 years in exile in Babylon, some couldn't prove their ancestral origins

Ezra 2:59 Now these are those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, but they were not able to give evidence of their fathers' households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel:

Ezra 2:62 These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

- If you claimed to be a Jew, much more a priest or an heir to the throne of David, it was necessary to prove your claim
- Therefore, the Jews kept scrupulous genealogies for every tribe stored and carefully preserved in the temple in Jerusalem for centuries
- Similar to the Library of Congress, these records were open to the public, for any Jew to inspect their records or the records of others
- So Matthew opens his Jewish Gospel with Jesus' genealogy on Joseph's side and he does so to prove something about Jesus' claims
 - We have no reason to doubt Matthew's genealogy
 - Because in his day it would have been easy to verify or refute Jesus' genealogy
 - Anyone could simply visit the archives in the temple and look it up
 - Yet there is no historical record of anyone disputing the accuracy of Matthew's record of Jesus' genealogy
- So as we look at the names in this list, the question we need to answer is what was Matthew trying to prove about Jesus with this genealogy?
 - We find our answer by starting with a few observations of the names we find in the list
 - First, we see in v.2 that the list begins with Abraham
 - Matthew uses the man's covenant name, Abraham, and not his given name, Abram
 - Back in v.1, Matthew introduced the genealogy by calling it the record of Jesus, the son of Abraham
 - God made a covenant with Abram promising to bring a nation of people from his seed, meaning from his family line
 - And through this line, God says He would bring a certain Person to bless all nations, both Jewish and Gentile – and we know that was the promise of Jesus
 - God changed Abram's name to Abraham to mark His promise

- So beginning the genealogy with Abraham and calling Jesus the son of Abraham testifies that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham
- Secondly, Matthew also identifies Jesus as the son of David in v.1
 - Why mention David's name at all, especially before Abraham's name?
 - It's not very Jewish, because they always think of the father having greater authority than the son. Abraham had greater authority than anyone who came from him, including David
 - Once again, David received covenant promises from God concerning an eternal dynasty
 - The Lord promised David He would raise up a ruler from David's family line to rule Israel and the world forever
 - Therefore, inserting David's name before Abraham's name indicates that Jesus fulfills both covenants
 - Jesus is the son of David, meaning Jesus was the promised King coming in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant
 - And Jesus is the son of Abraham because He is the promised Seed sent to bless all nations, not just Israel
 - They are in this order because the Davidic covenant is uniquely Jewish – it is for the Jewish people; whereas the Abrahamic covenant is for all peoples. He puts the Jewish covenant first and the one that covers Gentiles second
- Thirdly, as Matthew tells us in v.17, we see that he arranged Jesus' genealogy into three groups of fourteen names
 - By comparing his genealogy to others in the Old Testament, we find that Matthew intentionally left out several names in Jesus' genealogy while adding a few names we wouldn't expect to find
 - For example, five kings in Jesus' family line are missing while four women have been added, which was uncommon
 - We might think that missing names would invalidate Matthew's genealogy, but the practice of skipping a generation here or there in genealogies was common in Judaism
 - Jews understood that jumping over a generation didn't invalidate a genealogy so long as the other names were accurate
 - For example, if I skipped your grandfather in your family tree but I included your great grandfather and father correctly, then your genealogy is still accurate
 - So Jews commonly left out names to produce numeric symmetry or to provide commentary on a family tree
 - In Matthew's case, he wanted to achieve both
 - So he dropped some of Jesus' ancestors to yield three groups of fourteen names to make a point
 - And he inserted four women to make a second point
- Matthew is pointing us to the themes of his Gospel, and we can see them clearly in v.1

- First, Matthew wants to show us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, the promised eternal King of Israel
 - Hebrew names can be assigned numeric values by adding up the numeric value of each individual letter in the name
 - We're told that the numeric value of the antichrist will be 666
 - And the numeric value of Jesus' full name is 749 (7 and 7x7)
- If we add up the Hebrew numbers for David's Hebrew name we arrive at the number 14
 - So Matthew arranged his genealogy into three groups of 14 to speak out the name David three times
 - Jesus is the eternal David, the King God promised to bring His people
- In fact, notice in v.17 how Matthew connects his first and second groups of names by mentioning David again
 - There were 14 generations (in Matthew's list) between Abraham to David
 - And there were 14 more from David to the Babylonian captivity
 - For 14 generations, David's descendants held power and for 14 generations they lost it
 - You can't help but notice David's prominence in this list, nor can you miss the point
 - After fourteen generations, a son of David has come to rule again
- Secondly, Matthew draws our attention to Jesus fulfilling Abraham's promise too
 - Notice that the four women inserted into the list were all Gentile women
 - Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites
 - Ruth was a Moabitess
 - Bathsheba was a Hittite
 - And three of these women were guilty of sexual sin of one kind or another
 - Matthew includes four Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy to testify that Jesus fulfills God's promise to Abraham to save Gentiles, too
 - Once again, notice how his second and third groups of 14 are connected by mention of the Jews' Babylonian captivity
 - The Babylonian captivity was a result of Israel's rebellion against the Lord
 - Through the prophets Jeremiah and Daniel, the Lord declared He was placing Israel under judgment for a time to give opportunity to Gentiles
 - This judgment period would culminate with the Messiah coming to rescue Israel after setting up His kingdom
- So Matthew's genealogy has been carefully constructed to introduce two themes
 - First, Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise God gave David to bring Israel a king
 - And secondly, He was the fulfillment of the promise God gave Abraham to bless

all nations

- David's name is listed first in v.1 because Jesus came to the Jews first, as their King offering a kingdom in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant
- And Abraham's name is listed second because after the Jews rejected Jesus and the kingdom, Jesus would turn to Gentiles in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant
- We will see Matthew develop these themes in his Gospel
- Finally, notice the way Matthew finishes his genealogy of Jesus
 - In v.16 he describes Joseph as the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born
 - He doesn't call Joseph Jesus' father, which makes sense because we know Joseph wasn't the biological father of Jesus
 - Mary was a virgin before she gave birth to Jesus
 - So although Joseph assumed legal responsibility for Jesus, he was not Jesus' biological father
 - Therefore, while Jesus was Joseph's heir, He was not Joseph's descendant
 - He only shared a physical relationship with His mother, Mary
 - As you look at Mary's genealogy in Luke's Gospel, you find that Mary also descended from David
 - So Jesus is an heir to the throne through His father and a biological descendant of David through His mother's genealogy
- So why did Matthew want us to know that Jesus was not physically related to Joseph? Wouldn't that hurt his case that Jesus was the rightful king of Israel?
 - Actually, it strengthens Matthew's argument to a Jewish reader who knew their Old Testament
 - Back in Jeremiah 22:30 the Lord pronounced a curse on one line of David's descendants, on a king named Jeconiah
 - God cursed the king for his disobedience declaring that no descendant of Jeconiah would ever sit on the throne of David again
 - If you look at v.11, you see that Joseph is a descendant of this cursed king
 - So if Jesus had been a physical descendant of Joseph, then Jesus would have been prevented by that curse from occupying the throne of David
 - Matthew couldn't ignore this fact
 - As I said earlier, any Jew could have easily looked up Jesus' family tree and learned of this connection
 - And you can be sure Jesus' critics certainly would have pointed to this connection to discredit Him if they could
 - So Matthew preempts any criticism by providing Joseph's genealogy, but doing so demonstrates that Jesus was not a blood relative of Joseph
 - Through Joseph, Jesus meets the requirements to be an heir to the throne

- And through Mary, Jesus meets the requirement to be a physical descendant
- But Mary's genealogy doesn't go through Jeconiah, clearing Jesus of the curse
- So according to Matthew, Jesus is the King promised to Israel and the Savior promised to the world
- A few years ago a Jewish doctor living on the East Coast was invited to a special church service by a Christian friend
 - The Christian man was suffering from a mysterious paralysis and had been confined to a wheel chair
 - His church scheduled a prayer service for his healing
 - So the man invited his family and friends to attend the service
 - He also invited a work colleague, a Jewish doctor, who had never set foot in a Christian church before
 - On the night of the service, the doctor arrived and took a seat in a pew
 - He quietly observed the proceedings with little understanding of what was going on
 - Until at a point near the end of the service the pastor issued an open invitation for anyone else to receive prayer
 - And at that moment and quite to his surprise, the Jewish doctor suddenly felt compelled to stand up and walk forward
 - As he reached the front, he stopped without saying a word waiting while a few elders gathered around him in prayer
 - The elders prayed over the doctor without even knowing his request, just allowing the Spirit to direct their intercession
 - The doctor remained silent through the prayer with his head bowed, and when they finished, he returned to his seat
- In that moment the Jewish doctor felt a love he had never known before
 - It seemed to be everywhere in the room and in himself at the same time
 - After the service ended, he left the church without telling anyone what he had experienced
 - But in the days that followed he couldn't shake the feeling, so he began a search for answers
 - He searched for someone or something that could explain what he encountered in that Christian church
 - He consulted his Jewish friends, he searched the Internet, he even called upon a Catholic priest in a downtown cathedral
 - No one could explain his feelings of awakening and love
 - So, out of ideas, the doctor ventured into a Christian book store and asked for a copy of the Christian Bible
 - This doctor had been raised in a strict Jewish home, so he had been taught all his

life to despise Christianity and the Bible

- Most Jews have never read the New Testament
- So they imagine it gives instructions on how to build stained glass buildings or how to kill Jews
- So as the doctor stared at the bookshelf of Bibles, he couldn't help feeling he was betraying his heritage and his people by consulting the manual of his enemies
- Nevertheless, something inside him, something stronger than hate and more compelling than loyalty, was calling him to read it
- So that Jewish doctor went home, opened the New Testament, and began reading at the beginning...in the Gospel of Matthew
 - And as he read chapter after chapter, his eyes opened wider, his heart beat faster
 - Instead of finding hatred and prejudice against the Jewish people, he was shocked to find a very Jewish story
 - He found an account of a humble servant sent to Israel with a salvation promised for all nations
 - And at that moment the Jewish Doctor realized Jesus was his Messiah
 - No human being preached the Gospel to this man
 - The Lord preached it to him directly through His word and the Spirit of God brought it to life in his heart
 - In that moment, the doctor was born again by faith in Jesus Christ
- I share that true story with you because it powerfully illustrates three unique qualities of the Gospel of Matthew
 - First, Matthew wrote his account to persuade a Jewish audience, people like the Jewish doctor
 - Matthew was a Jewish tax collector, who Jesus called to be an apostle, one of Jesus' chief disciples
 - Matthew was not looking for a Savior, but the Savior found him
 - So he wrote his account specifically for Jewish readers of his day, men and women who had also overlooked Jesus
 - And even after 2,000 years, his Gospel is still reaching Jewish men...men like the Jewish doctor
 - Secondly, Matthew's Gospel emphasizes the faithfulness of a sovereign God to fulfill His promises to bless Israel and the world through a Savior
 - God foretold everything that happens in this Gospel, by and large, through the prophets
 - And He carried everything out precisely as He promised He would, even the death of His Son
 - His challenge was to explain to the people in the moment that His death wasn't an end – it was a beginning

- Which is why my doctor friend felt so convicted by the Gospel of Matthew
- He saw the Lord at work through Jesus to fulfill Old Testament prophecies, promises he had been taught since he was a child
- Finally, the most important connection between Matthew's Gospel and my friend's story...this account was written to save souls
 - This isn't merely an ancient historical account or a Jewish version of a campfire story
 - Matthew didn't write this to stimulate your mind or tickle your funny bone
 - It was written to change your heart...to move us out of darkness and into the light of a salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah
 - Which is what He did for that Jewish doctor, who discovered a Jesus Who died for his sins and was resurrected to give him hope for eternal life
- We want any who hears these words to know the truth of Jesus as Messiah. No matter where you come from, no matter what you've heard about Jesus before, no matter how you've perceived Him from what others have said
 - No matter what you've done, no matter how many mistakes you've made, no matter how bad those mistakes are
 - In fact, the worse you are, the more you need Him – that's not cause to think you're unworthy, that's cause to embrace Him
 - He came for you because you're not perfect, because you made mistakes
 - The standard for Heaven, according to Paul in Romans 3, is perfection. The Glory of God. Equaling Him. Do you think you're equal to God?
 - The story of this book is that we too can be forgiven of our sins by a God who sent His only begotten Son to die for that reason
 - Jesus died on the cross to be your Savior
 - All your sins, everything you've ever done, wiped clean by that one sacrifice
 - That one sacrifice, and our faith in it, is all God requires
 - So that the penalty God requires for sin would fall on Christ instead of you
 - If only you would receive that free gift, if you would call upon His name, the Bible promises you will be saved
 - Jesus says that anyone who comes to Him, He will not cast out but will give eternal life
 - Come to Him today if you don't already know Him as Messiah

- Tonight we move into the birth account of Jesus
 - Since we've just started in February, it's like Christmas is taking an encore this year
 - And in a way, I think this is the perfect time of year to consider Jesus' birth account, and here's why
 - The story is somewhat fresh in our minds, having just recently celebrated the Christmas season
 - Yet we're not distracted with the social aspects of the holiday, so we can actually concentrate on learning
 - And despite the familiarity of this story, I think you're going to be surprised by some of the things which you'll learn
 - Because so much of what we know about Jesus' birth has been shaped by movies or Christmas carols or bedtime stories
 - So many of the important details have either been lost or changed from what's reported in the Bible
 - So even what you think we know may not be the truth
 - Thankfully, the whole story is still here for us in the Gospel, so let's revisit this account with fresh eyes
- Matthew's account of the birth begins immediately after his genealogy in Chapter 1, which we studied last week
 - So we pick up reading in Chapter 1:18

Matt. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

Matt. 1:19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

- Matthew starts saying the birth of Jesus the Messiah happened this way
 - And then he proceeds to tell the story from Joseph's point of view, as I explained last week
 - So imagine Matthew or perhaps one of Jesus' half-brothers sitting across from Joseph asking him to recall Jesus' birth
 - Joseph leans back and begins with his wife-to-be coming home one day pregnant
- Unfortunately, this has probably happened to many men over the course of history
 - And every single time this has happened, it's always meant one and only one thing
 - Mary's been foolin' around on Joseph
 - Like the time a man suspected his wife of fooling around...

A middle-aged couple had two beautiful daughters, but they decided to try one

last time for the son they always wanted. Soon, the wife became pregnant, and nine months later delivered a baby boy. The joyful father rushed to the nursery to see his new son, but was horrified to find an incredibly ugly baby. He went to his wife and said, "I cannot possibly be the father of that hideous child. Look at the two beautiful daughters I fathered. Have you been fooling around on me?" His wife confessed, "Not this time."

- Clearly, that wasn't the case for Mary, as Matthew explains to us saying she was with child by the Holy Spirit
 - Joseph eventually came to understand this was true
 - But in the moment, Joseph assumed what every husband-to-be would have assumed
 - He thinks Mary is guilty of cheating on him
- Mary and Joseph were betrothed Matthew says, which was an unique pre-marital status in ancient Jewish culture
 - It's not the same thing as being engaged, as we would say today
 - It's far more binding than an engagement is today, and yet it's still a step short of full marriage
 - To understand the difference, we must remember that marriages in Jesus' day were usually pre-arranged
 - The family of a woman of marrying age would negotiate with the family of an eligible bachelor to arrange a marriage
 - The family of the man had to pay the family of the woman a price for the bride
 - The price needed to be generous, because if the groom's family tried to bargain down the price of the bride, it suggested that they didn't think the girl was very desirable
 - It's like shopping for a wife at goodwill or Big Lots
 - But eventually, when the two families came to an agreement on a price, a deal was struck for marriage
 - At that point the bride was betrothed to her groom even though the two may never have met
 - Because money was exchanged, the betrothal was a legal arrangement
 - Legally speaking, the couple had entered into a preliminary form of marriage at that point
 - Months later, a formal marriage ceremony would take place where the couple would officially become husband and wife
 - Only at that time could the couple consummate their marriage in the marriage tent
 - If you don't know what the word consummate means, then you're too young for me to explain it...ask your parents
 - But prior to that marriage ceremony, the couple must remain chaste

- Both the man and woman were to remain virgins
- In fact, one of the reasons for waiting a year between the betrothal and marriage, was to make sure the woman wasn't already pregnant by another man
- It was part of a system making sure people did the right thing
- So that's the situation for Mary and Joseph at this point...they are betrothed, which means they haven't yet been formally married much less had relations
 - Then during this betrothal period, Mary turns up pregnant
 - And I love Matthew's choice of words when he says Mary was "found to be with child" like it was a chance discovery
 - We know from Luke's Gospel that Mary initially went to spend time with her cousin, Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist at the time
 - She stayed with Elizabeth three months before returning home, at which point her pregnancy was probably starting to show
 - So she knew she was going to have to tell Joseph eventually, and now that time had come
 - Can you imagine the conversation around Joseph's kitchen table?
 - Mary starts saying, "Joseph, I have good news and bad news..."
 - The good news is it's a boy!
 - Mary tells Joseph she's with child but then quickly denies being unfaithful to Joseph
 - She tells Joseph, "It's not what you're thinking. This is a result of the Holy Spirit."
 - In other words, God made me pregnant
- This is a significant moment in the story because Jewish theology did not acknowledge a Third Person of the Trinity
 - In fact, Jewish teaching didn't recognize the Trinity at all, even though we can find clear evidence of the three Persons of God in the Old Testament
 - You can't get past the second verse of the Bible without seeing the Spirit described as a distinct Person of God from the Father
 - Nevertheless, Jews never grasped this concept in their teaching of God
 - You can see an example of what I'm saying in Acts 19 when Paul confronts a group of Jewish men to know if they were truly saved

Acts 19:2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

- Those Jews said they had not even heard of such a thing as a Holy Spirit
- And neither had Joseph, not at this point

- So when Mary blames her pregnancy on the Holy Spirit, Joseph must have thought it was a ridiculous excuse
- It was as if she said aliens made her pregnant
- So Matthew tells us in v.19 that Joseph decides to end the relationship, though in a merciful manner for Mary's sake
 - Joseph sets about to divorce Mary
 - In v.19 my English translation reads that Joseph planned to send Mary away
 - But Matthew wrote his Gospel account in the ancient Greek language
 - And when we look at this account in Greek, we find that Matthew used the Greek word for divorce
 - So Joseph planned to divorce Mary
 - That was the natural response to this situation
 - A husband had the right to receive an unblemished bride, since that's what his family purchased
 - And since Mary and Joseph had not yet consummated their relationship, Joseph had no obligation to stay with her
 - Nevertheless, he decided to divorce her secretly, Matthew says
 - By secretly, we mean that Joseph wasn't going to press charges against Mary
 - Mary had committed a crime under Jewish law, a crime punishable by death by stoning

Deut. 22:20 “But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin,
Deut. 22:21 then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father's house,
 and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an
 act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house; thus you shall
 purge the evil from among you.

- Joseph, being a righteous man, could not marry a woman he believed to be immoral
 - But at the same time, his righteousness led him to show mercy to Mary by protecting her from stoning
 - So he planned to take her somewhere away from her home, somewhere where she wouldn't be recognized, so he could issue her a writ of divorce
- Now let's consider what Mary must have been thinking as she hears that Joseph is divorcing her
 - From Luke's Gospel, we know she had been visited by an angel to learn the news of her pregnancy
 - Plus, she knows she's never been with a man, yet she can clearly see there is a child growing inside her
 - Moreover, she was told her baby would be the long-promised Messiah

- That Savior that God has been promising to deliver to mankind since the Fall of Adam and Woman in the Garden
- There is no more important event in all human history than this birth of the Messiah, and God has placed Mary at the center of it
- So Mary is absolutely convinced that her pregnancy is a miracle ordained by God
 - Yet when she shares this news with Joseph, he doesn't believe her
 - Do you suppose Mary wondered if God was failing her at this moment?
 - Did she cry out demanding why God wasn't keeping her marriage together when she was serving Him faithfully?
 - Perhaps she supposed that God lacked the power to save her marriage or that God didn't care for her?
- The text is silent on Mary's response, but I don't believe she thought those things
 - I believe she remained confident in God despite Joseph's decision
 - I believe she knew the Lord would protect her marriage somehow
 - In other words, I believe she responded in faith
 - With a quiet confidence that no matter how bleak and dark her situation appeared, God had a good purpose in what was happening
- How do I know Mary had this confidence? Because of how she responded to the angel when she first learned of God's plan for her

Luke 1:31 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

Luke 1:32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;

Luke 1:33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

Luke 1:34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Luke 1:35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:37 “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Luke 1:38 And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

- Mary hears the impossible, that she will have a baby even though she's a virgin
 - When Mary asks the angel how this can be, the angel responded with that statement, “For nothing is impossible with God”
 - To which Mary says, “...may it be done to me according to your word”

- In other words, Mary accepted in faith what she had been told by the angel knowing God's word was certain and sure
- She believed that God could do impossible things
- So ask yourself this? What's easier for God to do...to bring a child out of a virgin's womb or save Mary's marriage?
 - How foolish it would have been for Mary to stare down at her baby bump knowing she was a virgin and then complain to God that He's ruined her marriage
 - What would she have expected God to say to that?
 - Maybe something like, "Calm down, Mary, I got this too."
- But don't we do the same thing to God sometimes?
 - When our world seems to be coming apart at the seams, we turn to God in frustration or fear and accuse Him of failing us
 - But in those moments, ask yourself this: what's more challenging for God? To part the Red Sea, or solve your relationship problem?
 - What's harder for Him? To speak the universe into existence or cure your illness or addiction?
 - What demonstrates God's love more? That He died on a cross to save you from your sins, or that He pays off your student loans?
- Hasn't God already proven His love for us sufficiently, and hasn't He already demonstrated His power to solve any problem He chooses?
 - Of course He has
 - So the real issue is are we willing to accept His will for our life even when we don't understand it or like it?
 - Can't we trust Him to be working on our behalf?
- We know God doesn't solve every problem in our life or give us everything we want, and I'm not telling you He will, because the Bible doesn't tell us He will
 - But the Bible does say that the Lord works all circumstances in the lives of believers to arrive at eternally good things for us and for His glory
 - And sometimes the good things God wants to accomplish in our spirit require that we first endure not-so-good things in our earthly lives
 - For example, if God wants to improve your prayer life, He may bring you hard trials that bring you to your knees
 - If He wants you to develop greater self-restraint or humility, He may expose your pride or test your patience in uncomfortable ways because that's the best way to get the result
 - And if He wants you to seek Him more earnestly and to depend upon Him more desperately, He may bring you to the end of yourself because the outcome is worth it
 - But no matter what circumstances God chooses to bring into our lives, we can't ever

question God's goodness or His ability

- Think back to Mary again...God gave Mary the blessing to birth the Messiah, so how could she declare God wasn't good to her?
- What better thing could she have received?
- And if God could supernaturally conceive a child in a virgin's womb, she should know He had the capability to fix her marriage
- In other words, God had already proven Himself to Mary to be good and powerful
 - So Mary had every reason to stay quietly confident in God even as Joseph declared he was divorcing her
 - And you too know God is good and that He can do anything
- That's the approach of faith: God has already given believers the blessing of His Son dying on a cross to pay for our sins
 - That is sufficient evidence to know that God is good all the time
 - So can we ever say God hasn't been good to us?
 - And God raised His Son to prove to us that He can resurrect us too into a new eternal body one day
 - Knowing that, what can't God do for us while we live in these weak dying bodies?
- I'm talking about maintaining a certain perspective...a faith in God and His promises...I call it, "living with eyes for eternity"
 - It's the perspective Mary had, knowing that nothing is impossible with God
 - And if God can do literally anything, the only question we need to ask is, what's best?
 - Because that's what God always does, whatever is best
 - So when He doesn't do what we expect, it's not because He's unkind or unable
 - It's because there was a better option for the sake of eternity
 - We may not understand why it's better, not right now
 - But I assure you, when everything is said and done, we'll see that God was right every time
- And then sometimes, in mercy, God will give us what we ask for, but only because it was the best thing
 - Which is exactly what God did in Mary's case for the sake of His Son

Matt. 1:20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Matt. 1:21 "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Matt. 1:22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

Matt. 1:23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”

Matt. 1:24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife,

Matt. 1:25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

- Matthew says in v.20 that even as Joseph was considering his divorce plan, an angel appears to him in a dream
 - This is the Lord showing up in a big way, ready to correct Joseph’s thinking
 - The angel addresses Joseph as son of David
 - We learned last week that’s a title that points back to the Davidic Covenant
 - The Davidic Covenant promised Israel that a descendant of David would occupy the throne forever
 - Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise, He is the eternal King Who rules over the world in the Kingdom to come
 - And Joseph is in the line of David leading to Jesus, so the angel draws Joseph’s attention to that bigger plan by calling him the son of David
 - It’s a wake up call to Joseph
 - Joseph’s mind was squarely focused on himself right now, considering how to divorce his wife and save his reputation
 - He was nursing his feelings of betrayal and hurt
 - He had given no thought to Mary’s explanation regarding the Holy Spirit except to dismiss it out of hand
 - So the angel is waking Joseph up so he might think about bigger things than just himself and his reputation
- Then in v.21 the angel explains to Joseph that his wife to be was going to bear a son, conceived of the Holy Spirit, Whom they would name Jesus
 - His Son would be the Messiah, the One God promised to send to save His people from their sins
 - This Child was to be the key to saving humanity from the judgment fires of Hell
 - And as Joseph hears the angel in his dream, it begins to sink in that the world didn’t revolve around Joseph and his problems
 - The Messiah’s arrival was going to require that Joseph be willing to marry a woman who got pregnant out of wedlock
 - It would be a sacrifice for both Joseph and Mary, but that was God’s requirement of His bondservant

- And this was no small request in that day
- Given how hard it was for Joseph to accept Mary's story of a virgin birth, how hard do you think it's going to be to convince other people?
 - In a strict culture like ancient Judea, this kind of scandal didn't just go unnoticed
 - Mary's friends and family naturally concluded she was immoral
 - And so did Joseph's family and friends I'm sure
- That's the price they had to pay to serve God
 - God required this young couple to begin their life together under a dark cloud and probably with few friends
 - We see them as blessed now, and of course in eternity they will undoubtedly receive great reward for their faithfulness
 - But in their earthly life, they followed in the footsteps of their own Child, suffering for the sake of God's glory
- So the angel tells Joseph not to fear taking Mary as a wife, she's not been unfaithful, so press on with the marriage plans
 - The reason Mary's pregnant is just as she explained...she was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit
 - This process is an unavoidable mystery to us
 - Certainly we understand that it happened, but we can't explain how it happened, biologically speaking, because it was a miracle
 - God supernaturally created the male component of conception and introduced it into Mary's womb to conceive a child without a man being involved in the process
 - But such an elaborate plan raises the question, why? Why go to such an effort to conceive Jesus?
 - Why not simply use the normal human process of conception to arrive at Jesus' birth?
 - We learned one reason last week
 - God's curse on King Jechoniah prevented any biological descendant of that man from ever holding the throne
 - Since Joseph was a descendant of Jechoniah, Jesus couldn't be Joseph's biological descendant if He was to rule Israel
 - But God could have solved that problem in other ways without requiring a supernatural conception
 - He could have chosen another man to be Mary's husband, a man who didn't descend from the cursed king
 - So we're still searching for the answer for why a supernatural conception for Jesus?
- The angel gives us another possible answer when he tells Joseph that Jesus' miraculous

birth is the fulfillment of prophecy from the Old Testament

- In vs.22-23 the angel mentions a prophecy from the prophet Isaiah
 - He quotes from Isaiah 7 where hundreds of years earlier the prophet told Israel this:

Is. 7:14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

- Hundreds of years ahead of time, the prophet told Israel that the Lord would send His people an unique sign to indicate when their Messiah had come to them
- That sign would be a virgin giving birth to a son
- Obviously, the word virgin refers to a woman who has never laid with a man
 - And since that’s the way conception happens naturally, the prophet is telling Israel their Messiah’s birth would be supernatural
 - It won’t happen through conventional means, which is why it would be a sign...it would stand out in an unique way
- But here again, that just begs a question...why use that particular sign? God could use any kind of sign He wanted
 - And in fact, God gives Israel many other signs of Messiah
 - God sends a star, magi, shepherds, angels and others to indicate Jesus was the Messiah
 - So why did the Lord also want our Savior to come by way of a supernatural conception?
- The full answer comes at the end of v.23, when the angel tells Joseph that child will be called Immanuel, which means “God with us”
 - We know that our Lord was not named Immanuel
 - There is no moment in the New Testament when that name is used for the Messiah
 - In fact, just a couple of verses earlier, the angel told Joseph his child should be called Jesus, which is pronounced *Yeshua* in Hebrew
 - So why say He will be called Immanuel?
 - The angel was saying that people will say this about Jesus, that He is God with us, and that’s why Jesus required a virgin birth
 - To explain why, I need to take you back to the beginning, the very beginning, to the moment of the very first human sin
 - When the human race consisted of only two people, Adam and his wife, who he called Woman, and they were alone in the Garden of Eden
 - Before the first sin took place, God told Adam that should he ever disobey the word of God, Adam’s sin would result in Adam dying spiritually

- To die spiritually means to have your soul consigned to a place of torment, forever barred from God's presence
 - The Bible calls this kind of death the Second Death, because it will follow the first death of your physical body – if you don't have the covering of Christ and have not been saved from your sin
 - This is the penalty God pronounced in advance for sin, and once the Lord issues His word concerning something, it cannot be changed and must be fulfilled
- As Lord tells us

Is. 55:11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

**It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

- Remember the moment near the end of Jesus' life, when he was coming into the city on a donkey, which we celebrate as Palm Sunday
- All the disciples were there and there was a large crowd declaring Him to be Messiah
- The Pharisees, who hated Jesus, didn't like that public proclamation and told Jesus to silence His disciples
- What did Jesus say? He said that if these do not cry out, the rocks will cry out, referring to a prophecy in the Old Testament (Zec. 9:9)
- That's the certainty of God's word – even if it requires rocks to say something, what He says will happen, will happen
- Likewise, God said to Adam, "the day you eat from it you will surely die". Said, done, in the books. It cannot be changed
- Furthermore, God's word decreed that Adam and Woman were to reproduce and fill the earth with their offspring
 - But God also required that all creatures, including mankind, should reproduce after their own kind or nature
 - In other words, what we are is what we will reproduce, and this word applied both physically and spiritually
- So once again, God's word must be carried out without exception
 - Therefore, when Adam and Woman disobeyed God, they became sinful human beings
 - They died spiritually, just as God promised
 - Their spiritual nature changed, becoming slaves to that sin nature
- And then later, when these two began to have children, these children shared in their sinful nature. We see this clearly in the story of Cain:
 - Cain didn't need to eat of that fruit, he came out with that sin already in his nature
 - He wasn't only the first human child, he was also the first murderer

- Clearly, something very bad had happened to the nature of humanity
- And that sin nature has been passing down from generation to generation ever since, and is the cause of all the pain and suffering and sin in humanity that you see everywhere
 - And along with it, the penalty of spiritual death has been handed down as well
 - Paul explains in Romans

Rom. 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned —

- So that's the state of all humanity, both in history and today
 - We are all sinners by nature, a nature we inherited from our parents, who received it from their parents
 - You could say we've all been born with a spiritual birth defect
 - That birth defect leaves us under condemnation right from the start, due to the penalty God pronounced upon humanity in the Garden
 - If you have sin, you must suffer the Second Death
 - After your body dies, you experience an eternity separated from God
 - Thankfully, that's not where the Bible story ends. The Bible also tells us that God so loved the world that He determined to make a way available for us to avoid this fate by His mercy and grace to us
 - He sent His Son, Jesus, to take the penalty for our sin on the cross
 - Jesus came to give His life as a ransom payment to free us from our debt before God
 - That if we believe in Him and in His death in our place, we would receive the gift of eternal life
 - Rather than judgment of eternal death which we deserved
 - That's the Gospel. That's the message of salvation
 - But if Jesus' death was to be an acceptable substitute in our place, then it was essential that Jesus not have sin of His own
 - If Jesus had been born in the nature of Adam, He too would have inherited Adam's sin nature just like the rest of us
 - And if Jesus were born with a sin nature, then Jesus would have been just as guilty as you and me
 - And therefore, His death would have merely been payment for Himself
 - It couldn't have been useful as a payment to cover someone else's sin debt
- So it was necessary that Jesus be our Immanuel, God with us, not God like us
 - Jesus was fully human, but He was also fully God

- Jesus was no less a human being than you or me, but He was greater than we are in that one sense
- Although we had an earthly father that made us like him, Jesus was like Adam – he had no earthly father
- Just as Adam’s body came to life because God breathed into him
 - The Hebrew word for breathe is *ruah*, the same word for spirit
 - So just as the Father conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit, it was by the Spirit that God gave Adam life
- God conceived Jesus supernaturally, therefore Jesus didn’t descend from Adam
- Instead, Jesus restarted the human race as a new Adam
 - That’s why the Bible calls Jesus the “Second Adam”
 - And that’s why our Savior had to come through a virgin birth
 - So that He could be a human being yet remain free from the original sin nature we all inherited
- Having been born without sin, Jesus then went on to live life without ever repeating Adam’s mistake
 - Jesus never disobeyed the Father, so Jesus was without sin
 - He experienced the temptation to sin, but unlike Adam, he never gave in to that temptation Scripture tells us
 - So that when Jesus went to His death on the cross, He suffered a death He didn’t deserve, for He had not committed any sin
 - And therefore His death could become a payment for you and me, to cover our debt before God
 - Jesus could serve as the perfect sinless sacrifice for you and me
- As Joseph awoke from his dream, he accepted the angel’s revelation and acted in faith
 - In v.24 Matthew says Joseph took Mary as his wife
 - Joseph set a date for the wedding and entered into the covenant prior to Jesus’ birth
 - In so doing, Joseph ensured that Jesus would legally be his descendant just as God intended
 - Yet Joseph also respected the place Mary had in the plan of God and the need for her to remain a virgin during this time
 - So in v.25 we’re told that he refrained from consummating the marriage until after Jesus’ birth
 - He acted in faith believing the angel’s report and did what was required
 - May I ask you, have you believed this report too? Do you believe the word of God concerning Jesus?
 - Do you believe He is the Savior sent to save you from your sins?

- Do you believe that He was conceived by a virgin to ensure He remained sinless for your sake?
- Do you believe He died on that cross 2,000 years ago to pay the price your sin requires?
- It's a crazy story, really: Your secret to Heaven is a convicted criminal who was killed 2,000 years ago on a Roman cross. That's it. That's the secret
- The world says it's by how hard you work, how good you are, how much penance you do.
- It's how much pain you suffer, how much sacrifice you make
- But Scripture says you can't do enough, and you can't sacrifice enough because there's only one Sacrifice God will accept
- Do you have the faith to act in keeping with what you've heard?
 - For Joseph, the action God required to live out his faith was to take Mary as a wife despite her pregnancy, which he did
 - But for you and me, the Lord has asked something much easier
 - He asks that we confess with our mouth that Jesus is our Savior, God sent to die for our sins, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead
 - If we do these things, we will be saved
 - Isn't it amazing how easy it is in human terms, yet how hard it had to be for God to make it possible? And yet, still some won't do it
- You've read the words yourself and the Spirit of God is testifying to the truth of these things in your heart
 - So I call upon you, if you have not yet placed your faith in Jesus Christ to confess Him now, to make that confession now, and not leave without obeying the call of the Gospel. For today is a day appointed for salvation

- Have you heard the story about the Texas nativity scene?

A small Texas town had a nativity scene in the town square. Everything looked as you would expect with a cradle, a baby, animals, and wise men. But the wise men were all wearing firefighting outfits and firemen's helmets. A visitor asked a local why the wisemen were dressed like firemen, and the local replies, "Because the Bible says the wise men came from a fire (pronounced "afar" in Texan).

- An old joke, but it's biblically correct
 - So tonight as we move into Matthew Chapter 2 we're going to be looking at those firefighting wise men
 - But interestingly, what we're not going to learn much about is Jesus' birth
 - Because Matthew didn't chose to cover the details of Jesus' birth at all (Luke gives us those details)
- Instead, Matthew moves directly to describing the immediate effect Jesus' birth had on the world
 - And in particular the effect Jesus' arrival had on two very different audiences: a Jewish king and Gentile magicians
 - So let's start reading the story that we all know so well (or think we know)

Matt. 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,

Matt. 2:2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

Matt. 2:3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matt. 2:4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

Matt. 2:5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

Matt. 2:6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah;
For out of you shall come forth a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

Matt. 2:7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. **Matt. 2:8** And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."

Matt. 2:9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place

where the Child was.

Matt. 2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

- Matthew briefly mentions the birth of Jesus, noting when and where it happened
 - The place was a little town of Bethlehem
 - Bethlehem is about 6 miles from Jerusalem as the crow flies, which was probably a 2 hour walk in Jesus' day
 - Today it's about a 20 min drive from Jerusalem and it's under Palestinian control in the West Bank
 - Bethlehem means the house of bread and it was best known in Jesus' day as the hometown of King David
 - That connection is no accident, of course
 - As we learned in our first weeks of this study, Matthew had two themes for his Gospel
 - First, that Jesus is the eternal king that God promised to David
 - Secondly, that Jesus is the Savior Who would bless all nations that God promised to Abraham
 - So to help us recognize the Messiah when He arrived, God told us beforehand that the Messiah would be born in David's hometown
 - That prophecy is given by the prophet Micah
 - Herod's advisors knew of this prophecy and they tell Herod about it in v.5
 - Matthew reminds us of the prophecy by quoting Micah in v.6
 - Micah said one day that little town would have the great honor of bringing forth the future eternal ruler of Israel (Mic. 5:2)
 - Micah's words were written over 700 years before Jesus was born
 - For centuries, the rabbis in Israel knew and taught that Bethlehem would be the place of Messiah's birth
 - And here we find Matthew boldly proclaiming that Jesus was the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy
 - But how did these magi know about it?
- The second thing Matthew noted about Jesus' birth was the date: he said it happened in the days of Herod
 - He's referring to Herod the Great, a ruthless tyrant who ruled Judea for 37 years and died in 4 B.C.
 - At this point, we need to understand a little history to appreciate Matthew's account of this man
 - The area we call Israel today was called Judea in Jesus' day
 - It sat between Syria in the north and Egypt in the South

- This entire region was conquered by the Roman Empire in 63 BC
 - After conquering the region, Rome permitted some of the previous Jewish rulers to continue governing the territory under Roman authority
 - Those rulers weren't actually Jewish...they were Idumaeans
 - Idumaeans were Edomites who descended from Esau, the son of Jacob who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew
- But the Idumaeans practiced Judaism and therefore they claimed to be Jewish, but that claim didn't fool the true Jews
 - The Jewish people knew that true Jews descended from Jacob and not Esau
 - So the Jewish people despised these pretenders and their Roman backers
- Of course, the difference between a Jew and an Idumaeen was lost on Roman authorities...they didn't care
 - So they forced the Jewish people to accept these governors
 - And in 39 BC, the Romans Senate named one of these rulers, a man named Herod, as the King of the Jews over all Judea
- For the next 35 years, Herod ruled over the territory of Judea with an iron fist, backed by the power of the Roman army
 - History named him Herod the Great because of his impressive building projects including the massive Second Temple of Jesus' time
 - But we should have called him Herod the Paranoid because he lived in constant fear that the Jews would kill him
 - He built massive fortresses to protect himself and killed anyone he thought might try to take his throne
 - He put many of his family to death during his reign, including his own children
 - As his death approached, Herod ordered that a large group of the most distinguished and loved men in Judea be arrested and held in prison
 - Herod commanded that on the occasion of his death, these men should be executed also
 - Since Herod was so hated for his tyrannical rule, he knew that the Jews of Judea wouldn't mourn his passing
 - So by executing these beloved men, Herod could ensure that the entire nation would be in mourning when he died – if not for him, at least for someone
 - Thankfully, Herod's successor decided not to carry out Herod's order and the men were released
- Going back to the text, Matthew tells us Jesus was born in the days of Herod, which means that Herod was still alive and ruling over Judea at that time
 - We know Herod died in 4 BC
 - And a careful review of the Gospels and of historical records from the time points to 5-4 BC as likely the years of Jesus' birth

- So Matthew is telling us that the true King of the Jews was born during the reign of a false king of the Jews
- Notice how Matthew repeats Herod's title "king" in v.3 again
- He wants to emphasize this contrast, because it's about to become a point of major contention in Matthew's story
- Herod receives special visitors who tell him they are in town to visit the king of the Jews
 - Can you imagine the expression on Herod's face when he heard them asking to see the king of the Jews?
 - These guys had some nerve asking Herod where they could find the king!
 - Remember, Herod lived his entire life in paranoia thinking someone else would come along to take his throne
 - So I think it's safe to say Herod was not pleased by what he heard from these guys
- Matthew calls Herod's visitors "magi" which is the name for a certain kind of magician or sorcerer from Babylon, present-day Iraq
 - Magi were astrologers who served in the court of the king of Babylon for centuries
 - We can trace magi all the way back to the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the book of Daniel, about 600 BC
 - Matthew says these magi came from the east, which confirms they came from Mesopotamia
 - Which means they walked about 700 miles, like walking from San Antonio to Kansas City, MO
- So why did these men walk that far?
 - When Herod asks that question, they tell Herod it's because they saw a star appear to them while they were in the east, in Babylon
 - Somehow, these magicians knew that the appearance of a special star was a sign that the Messiah had been born in Judea
 - And therefore they had come to worship Him
 - Their answer just raises a bunch of new questions, doesn't it?
 - For example, how did the magi know about the promise of a Jewish Messiah?
 - And how did they come to understand that a star appearing means His birth had arrived
 - And why would Gentiles, eastern astrologers no less, want to worship a Jewish Messiah?
- To get our answers, let's look at a few key details in the story
 - First, according to v.2, the star appeared in the east in Babylon
 - Conventional thinking assumes the star moved with the magi from the east to

- the west leading them to the Christ child
 - But that's not what the text says
- The text simply says they saw the star in the east and by that one sighting, they knew to start their journey to Judea
 - They then traveled to Judea without a star guiding them, for they already know the way to Judea
 - But they only knew the words Daniel wrote...they hadn't read the words of Micah
 - So these men don't know where in Judea the king would be born, so they do the next best thing...they go to the palace
 - Naturally, they assume Herod must know where his own successor would be
- Their choice to go to Herod is our best evidence that the magi weren't being guided by the star at this point
 - In fact, we don't see mention of a guiding star until v.9 where it reappears to guide the magi to Jesus in Bethlehem
 - In v.10 it says they rejoiced over seeing the star again, so only now has it reappeared it seems
 - The star then moves with them until it eventually rests on the house of Mary and Joseph
- So obviously this is no ordinary star
 - In fact, given how it behaves, it wasn't a star at all
 - The only reasonable explanation for a bright light that moves over the Son of God would be the Shechinah glory of God
 - That's the name for the brightness that accompanies the glory of God
 - The last time men witnessed the glory of God was at its departure from the temple of Jerusalem shortly before Babylon destroyed the city
 - You can read about that moment in the book of Ezekiel (Chapter 10)
 - For centuries before, God's glory had occupied the Holy of Holies in the Temple
 - But then – because of Israel's sin – it departed, and for 600 years it's been gone...until now
 - Isn't it interesting that the Lord removed His glory from Israel on the occasion of the Babylonian destruction on the city
 - And now after 600 years, it returns being accompanied by Babylonian magi?
 - It's like God is saying to Israel I've ended my time of exile from among you. The Babylonians' coming was the symbol that I'm gone and the Babylonians' coming back is the symbol that I'm back
 - My glory is now ready to return and dwell among you again in a new and special way
- So that explains how the magi found the Christ...the star, the Shechinah Glory of God,

led them to Him

- But how did they know to follow the star in the first place and why did they have any interest in the Messiah?
 - Remember these men were astrologers employed in Babylon to serve the Babylonian court with predictions and prophecies
 - They were part of distinguished brotherhood of astrologers that included men like the prophet Daniel
 - Daniel became a magi when he was taken captive as a young Jewish nobleman by Babylon in 600 BC
- God gave Daniel the ability to interpret prophetic dreams for the Babylonian king
 - Daniel also wrote a prophetic book foretelling the Messiah's arrival, which is the book of Daniel in our Bible
 - In his book in Chapter 9, Daniel specified the year the Messiah would arrive in Israel
 - And interestingly, Daniel chose to write that part of his book in the language of the Babylonians, in Aramaic
- So for nearly 600 years, Babylonian astrologers had a book written in their own language that predicted the precise timing for the Messiah's arrival in Judea
 - Daniel tells us he eventually became the leader of all Babylonian astrologers
 - While in charge, we must assume Daniel taught his fellow astrologers to anticipate the arrival of Messiah in the appointed year
 - And we know Daniel worshipped Jehovah while serving in the court
 - So those Gentile magi would have understood the power of Israel's God and of His promise to save them by His Messiah
 - So as Daniel's appointed year arrived, the astrologers began looking to the sky for a sign, believing in what Daniel taught them
 - And when that mysterious star appeared, they were ready to follow
 - They journeyed to Jerusalem to find the king
- So now back to Herod...he hears the magi story about the star, so asks the magi for the exact timing of the star's appearance
 - Obviously, Herod was trying to calculate the birth date of the child so he could know how old the child might be now
 - Matthew doesn't record the magi's answer, but given the distance they traveled, the star must have appeared many months earlier
 - So if you always imagined the magi visiting Jesus in the manger on the night He was born, that isn't accurate
 - They likely arrived a year or longer after Jesus was born
- In v.3, Matthew said Herod was troubled by the news of another king in Judea, and so Herod made all of Jerusalem feel his pain too

- To misquote an old saying, when the king ain't happy, ain't nobody happy
- We can understand why a paranoid king found the birth of a rival troubling
- But Herod practiced Judaism (supposedly), so why didn't he embrace Jesus the way the magi did?
- After all, if Gentiles from the land of Israel's enemies were willing to worship Jesus, why wouldn't a so-called Jew in Judea?
- The simple answer is Herod was more interested in maintaining his position of power on earth than in serving the living God
 - He valued his temporary happiness over an eternity of peace with God
 - Herod didn't want another king
 - And he's not alone
- Year after year, every time Christmas rolls around, the world hears the same message Herod heard, that of a King born to rule the world...
 - And year after year, many react the same way Herod did
 - Instead of asking where do I find Jesus, the world is troubled by the mention of His name
 - For them, this good news is anything but good
 - In fact, we've reached the point where even saying "Merry Christmas" can get you into trouble
 - The world is troubled for the same reason Herod was troubled
 - The intrusion of God into our world troubles ungodly and disobedient hearts
 - The Gospel pricks our conscience
 - It reminds us that God is not ambivalent about how we live and that one day, we must give an account before our Creator
 - The world reacts to the news of Jesus in the way a child reaching into the cookie jar reacts when he looks up to see Mom watching from the kitchen doorway
 - The world hates the suggestion that there is someone or something with power to judge them for their choices
 - So rather than submit to that authority and seek His mercy, they reject the message altogether or try to silence it
 - Just like Herod rejected Jesus and tried to silence Him too
 - In Herod's case, he knew there could only be one king and that the only way a new king could rule was if an existing king stepped down
 - So although Herod said he wanted to worship this new king, he was lying
 - Herod wasn't prepared to turn over the throne of Israel to anyone
 - More importantly, he wouldn't relinquish the rule of his heart to the God Who came to offer him forgiveness and redemption
 - Friends, that's truly what's at stake in this familiar story

- There's a new King in town...are you willing to worship Him or are you looking for ways to deny Him his throne?
- Have you made a place for Christ in your heart, as the Savior worthy of your worship?
- If you and I could speak to Herod today, I know he would tell us that he wished he had welcomed the new King gladly in his day
 - Herod would tell us that the glory he enjoyed during his earthly rule was nothing in comparison to the glory of Christ's eternal heavenly throne
 - He would plead with each of us not to push the Messiah away as he did
- Herod's worry over Jesus' arrival reminds us of Matthew's first theme: Jesus is the rightful eternal King Who rules in the line of David...He's the son of David
 - And those magi remind us of Matthew's second major theme: Jesus is the Savior for all nations that God promised, the son of Abraham
 - These Gentiles went to extraordinary lengths to find and worship a Jewish Messiah
 - They heard the promise in the word of God spoken through Daniel
 - Having believed that word, they then waited patiently for centuries for that word to be fulfilled
 - So that when the time came to meet this Messiah, they jumped at the opportunity
 - They came to Him bowing before Him to worship
 - They were willing to do what Jesus' own people were not willing to do in that day
 - They gladly walked through the door God has opened for all nations to receive salvation through Christ
 - That door is still open for all people today
 - But you don't have to walk 700 miles to find Jesus
 - As Paul says, Jesus is as close as your own mouth, for you only need to declare Jesus as Lord
 - Doing so because you believe He is the One God promised to send for you to save you from your sin
 - For we all have sinned and fall short of the glory, the perfection of God, so we all need a Savior
- That's what the Bible tells us to do if we have faith in Jesus Christ, just as the magi acted in faith to do as Daniel told them
 - Let's take a look at the rest of the magi's story to finish tonight

Matt. 2:11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures,

they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matt. 2:12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

- The magi are led by the star to the house where Mary and the Child, Jesus, are staying
- Notice they are in a house at this point, which makes sense
- It's been a year or more since Jesus was born...
 - He's not an infant in a manger somewhere
 - By now he's a toddler and the family has found a home to rent
 - Which means our nativity scenes are all wrong...the shepherds from the field and the magi never crossed paths
- Originally, Jesus' parents were living in Nazareth
 - But they traveled to Bethlehem because a Roman census required families to return to their ancestral homes to be counted there
 - Joseph's ancestors were from Bethlehem, so he took Mary there shortly before Jesus was born
 - And they stayed in Bethlehem a year or longer after Jesus' birth
- Somehow, the Lord has restrained the family so they would be available for the magi when they visited Jesus
 - I love that detail because it shows what God is willing to do to make sure those who seek Him will find Him
 - God summoned those magi and He made sure His Son stayed in Bethlehem long enough for them to get there
- I think He does that for all of us in a sense
 - God puts a call on our heart to know Him and to come worship Him
 - And you don't have to worry that you'll miss Him
 - He makes sure we find Him if we go looking
 - We don't discover God on our own, He reveals Himself to us in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ
- Then in v.11 we're told that as these men finally reach the child, they fall down and worship Him
 - What a strange scene that must have been to anyone watching
 - You have to understand that these magi were impressive dudes
 - The very fact that Herod was willing to grant them an audience and then didn't kill them for worshipping another king tells you something about the power and prestige of these men
 - They were impressive, wealthy and powerful men
 - On top of it all, they would have been dressed in the finest clothing, majestic

like a king themselves

- So now imagine these guys arriving at a modest Bethlehem home in all their splendor after traveling over 700 miles to see this king
 - And then they reverently walk in and bow to the ground...before a toddler rolling around and babbling on the dirt floor
 - That moment must have looked incredibly strange even to Jesus' parents
- These men were the first recorded Gentiles to worship the Messiah in Person
 - And yet they faced exactly the same test that everyone who has ever believed in Jesus Christ has also faced
 - They had to be willing to accept on faith that Jesus was their King, their Intercessor, their Savior
- Those men had no more proof that Jesus was Messiah than we have today
 - They had the word of God from Daniel telling them about the Messiah and how to find Him
 - But we do too
 - They had the glory of God pointing the way in the form of a star
 - But the Bible says we have the Spirit of God leading us to Jesus
- And just like us, when the time came for them to enter that little house and bow down to worship Jesus, they had to take a step of faith
 - In that moment, they encountered a Jesus Who wasn't sitting on a throne
 - He didn't perform miracles or speak words of wisdom, and He wasn't surrounded by angels or a court of worshippers
 - He was probably drooling and may have needed his diaper changed
- Nevertheless, those men were moved by faith to worship
 - Their faith led them to take that long walk
 - Their faith gave them the courage to confront Herod
 - And that same faith caused them to humble themselves in worship before a young child
- After worshipping the Lord, they proceeded to give Him gifts, for that was the custom in that day
 - When dignitaries from a foreign land came to pay respects to a greater king, they brought gifts
 - Of course, you couldn't give a king just any gift
 - You have to give a gift worthy of them, something that reflects their honor and importance
 - But what do you get for the guy who has everything?
 - God owns everything already
 - In truth, you can't give God anything valuable enough to equal His glory

- So the best you can do is give Him gifts that symbolize His glory
- Which is what these magi did
- Matthew tells us the magi presented three types of gifts to the Child Christ
 - Because there were three types of gifts, people have come to assume there were three magi
 - But that's an assumption only, and there's no reason to think it's true
 - All we know from scripture is there was more than one magi since the text refers to the magi as "they"
 - But there could have been 2, 3, 7, 20, 100 (I like to imagine 100 magi crammed into Mary's living room personally)
- The first type of gift they gave Jesus was gold
 - Obviously, gold was very valuable then just as it is today
 - We don't know how much gold they gave Jesus, but even a small amount of gold was precious
 - One gold Roman coin of that day, called an *aureus*, was worth about three months' salary for a soldier or laborer
 - That's about \$3,300 today
 - So Jesus' family probably received a considerable amount of money
 - But as I said, God already owns everything, so Jesus didn't need the money (later in the Gospels, Jesus pulls a coin from a fish)
 - So these magi aren't trying to make Jesus wealthy
 - The men were demonstrating their faith in Jesus by bringing him a gift that symbolized His kingship
 - Jesus was their King and so He received what kings receive, gold
- The second type of gift was a valuable spice called frankincense
 - Frankincense is a resin produced from the sap of certain trees in Arabia and Africa
 - When it is burned, it creates a strong incense
 - It was the main ingredient in the incense God commanded to be burned on the altar of incense in the tabernacle (Exod. 30:34)
 - The priests would burn the frankincense and its smoke would rise up in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies
 - Eventually, it would waft over and around the curtain and enter into the presence of God behind the curtain
 - In that way, burning incense became a picture or symbol of our prayers
 - Revelation 5 tells us that our prayers rise up like incense to God
 - And they reach God by way of an intercessor, Christ who brings our petitions before the Father
 - So these men gave Jesus frankincense because they had faith in Jesus as their High

Priest

- A priest burns incense on the altar before the presence of God as a way of interceding for man
- Just as Christ lives to intercede for us
- Finally, they gave Jesus myrrh, a most unlikely baby gift if there was one
 - Myrrh is another resin spice that comes from the sap of a different tree
 - Myrrh is also native to Arabia and quite expensive
 - It's very fragrant and often used in perfumes
 - It was also used in the tabernacle service (Exod. 30:23)
 - But it's most common use was in making an anointing oil used on dead bodies prepared for burial
 - Dead bodies don't smell very good, so to help cover that odor for a while, the body would be prepared with spices and oil
 - Jesus' body received this treatment after He died
 - So these men bring Jesus a symbol of His coming death, a death that would become a payment for their sin
 - What faith these men obviously had in Jesus!
 - They were even willing to acknowledge Jesus' coming death as a sacrifice for their sins
 - And they made this confession through this gift even as Jesus was still just a baby
 - These men knew Jesus was their eternal King, their High Priest and their Sacrificial Lamb
 - They gave Him gifts to represent all three
 - And in the process, God used these men to make Jesus' poor family temporarily very wealthy
 - Next week, we find out why Jesus' family needed that wealth
- But for now, ask yourself do you know what these magi knew about Jesus? Do you have the faith these men had?
 - Or are you like Herod...the king who thought he had everything, but actually had nothing?
 - Everyone in the world is like one or the other of these two
 - Everyone is either trying to rule their own heart or they have placed their faith in Jesus as their King
 - You're either praying to Jesus as your High Priest, or you're praying to yourself and no one else
 - You're either depending on Christ's payment for your sin, or like Herod, you will one day pay that price yourself

- Those magi heard the word of God and placed their faith in that report
 - And I urge you to do the same tonight
 - Please your faith in Jesus Christ, your King, your High Priest, your perfect sinless sacrifice given to save you from your sins
 - You only need to confess your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and you will be saved

- In our teaching last week, Matthew showed us the contrast between Herod's reaction to Jesus and the magi's reaction
 - Herod called himself the King of the Jews, yet he refused to yield his throne to the true King
 - While the Gentiles from Babylon, Israel's enemy, traveled a long distance to worship the Jewish Messiah
 - The opposite reactions of Herod and the magi illustrate the Davidic and Abrahamic Covenants working together
 - Jesus is the King God promised to bring from David's family line
 - And He is the Savior for all nations God promised to bring from Abraham's family line
 - Jesus is the Son of David and the Son of Abraham
 - But notice that in this case, the fulfillment of these two promises leads to opposite reactions
 - Herod is rejecting Jesus while Gentiles are embracing Jesus
 - That trend will continue throughout Matthew's account, and we'll attend to it from time to time
- For now, let's return to Chapter 2, following the departure of the magi

Matt. 2:13 Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

Matt. 2:14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

Matt. 2:15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

- The magi depart, and an angel makes an appearance to Joseph in a dream again
 - This is the second time Joseph has received instructions from an angel in a dream
 - The first time was when Joseph learned that Mary's story about being pregnant by the Holy Spirit was true
- This time, the angel warns Joseph he must flee to Egypt to escape Herod
 - Because Herod is going to try to kill the baby Jesus
 - The threat is so imminent that the angel tells Joseph to get up
 - That is, to wake up and leave the house that night without waiting for the morning
 - Herod's rampage was set to begin the next day
- So Joseph obeys and wakes Mary, packs their things and heads out the door

- We don't know where they stopped in Egypt, but it's only 60 miles to the Egyptian border
 - They could travel that far in about 3-4 days
 - If they went all the way to the capital of Egypt, Alexandria, it would mean a 500-mile journey
 - They probably stayed there several months or longer, until Herod died we're told in v.15
- Now we understand why the Lord directed the magi to lavish the baby Jesus with such valuable gifts
 - The gifts that Mary and Joseph received were worth many thousands of dollars
 - And now as they flee in the middle of the night, they're going to need those gifts to fund their travel and time in Egypt
- These items were more portable than cash and more easily spent
 - Small pouches of gold coins or spices were easily carried and could be traded anywhere
 - So the Lord in His sovereignty ensured that the family would be equipped for their flight
 - And He also ensured that Egypt would be willing to receive them
- Because at this time in history, Rome had conquered Egypt, so it was part of the Roman Empire
 - This allowed Joseph and Mary to travel there freely
 - But the Egyptian province was not under Herod's authority, so he could not enforce his orders in Egypt
 - This made Egypt a safe haven for anyone in Judea seeking to escape Herod's tyranny
 - But even before the Romans came along, Egypt had long been a place of refuge for those in the land of Judea
 - Back when Judea was called the land of Canaan, Abraham fled to Egypt to escape famine
 - As did Jacob's family when Joseph ruled in Egypt
 - As you probably remember, Jacob brought his family to Egypt because Joseph encouraged them to join him to escape a coming famine
 - The people of Israel ended up spending several hundred years in Egypt
 - And during that time, the people of Israel were enslaved by a new Pharaoh who despised Jews
 - Their bondage eventually resulted in the Lord sending Moses to free God's people during the Exodus
- The Exodus story holds a deeper connection to the events we're seeing here
 - Notice in v.25, Matthew tells us that Jesus' time spent sojourning with His parents in

Egypt was a fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah

- Matthew quotes from the prophet Hosea...here's what Hosea wrote in context:

Hos. 11:1 When Israel was a youth I loved him,

And out of Egypt I called My son.

Hos. 11:2 The more they called them,

The more they went from them;

They kept sacrificing to the Baals

And burning incense to idols.

Hos. 11:3 Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,

I took them in My arms;

But they did not know that I healed them.

- The context of Hosea tells us that the “youth” and “son” in that passage is referring to the entire nation of Israel
 - God is calling the people of Israel, His son
 - Notice in Hosea 11:2, that God refers to this son as “they” meaning Israel
 - And remember earlier in Exodus, God said this to Moses:

Ex. 4:22 “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.

Ex. 4:23 “So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.””

- So it's common for the Lord to refer to His people Israel as His “son”
 - And in Hosea, the Lord says Israel His son spent time in Egypt before God called them out, referring to the Exodus
 - But if the prophet was writing about Israel, why did Matthew interpret Hosea to be giving a prophecy about Jesus?
- Matthew is using a method of interpretation common among Jewish rabbis
 - In fact, rabbis recognized four methods of properly interpreting Scripture
 - All four methods are ways the Lord expected us to understand His word
 - Yet only one method is appropriate for any given passage
 - So the hard work is knowing which of the four methods is the appropriate way to understand a given Scripture
 - In this case, Matthew applies a method of interpretation the rabbis called *remez* in Hebrew, which means “suggestion” or “picture”
 - This method recognizes that some Scripture is given to us as a picture of later things to come

- In the case of Hosea 11:1, the prophet was describing Israel's Exodus in literal terms
- But he was also presenting Israel's departure from Egypt as a picture of the Messiah's life
- The Lord created an intentional connection between that earlier event and the events of Jesus' life
 - And in this way, the Lord can teach us something about Jesus from what we know about the Exodus
 - In this case, the Lord's picture is that of a son of God coming out of Egypt to enter into Israel
- The picture confirms that Jesus is the Son of God
 - Just as the Lord brought His first-born nation out of Egypt, so the Lord is telling Israel to expect His only begotten Son to come into the land out of Egypt
 - The effect of this picture is to give us confirmation that the Father called Jesus His Son
- Now obviously, before Matthew wrote His Gospel, we probably wouldn't have seen this connection
 - Only after Jesus' flight took place could someone put the two together
 - But that's how Scripture often works...only after later things are fulfilled do earlier prophecies make sense
 - That's how God prefers to reveal Himself...
 - It's like a game of Jeopardy...
 - The Lord first gives us the answer to a question we never thought to ask
 - And then later, He gives us the question and we suddenly see how the two will fit together
 - And in doing so, we come to recognize that the earlier writing was inspired, for how else could it have happened?
 - For example, Hosea gave us the answer to a question we didn't even know to ask, which is how does the Messiah enter the land?
 - But later, after Jesus' life plays out, we can see that Jesus as the Son of God repeated Israel's footsteps, as Hosea wrote
 - God does this in His word so that as we make these connections, we witness the wisdom and sovereignty of God at work in the smallest of details
 - It's like God's calling card in His word, to show us we can trust what we read in these pages
- As we move through Matthew, I will continue to show you the various ways the text of scripture may be interpreted properly
 - But even now, I want to issue a warning about interpreting scripture in general
 - We don't have the right to just make up meanings on our own

- That's not proper interpretation of the Bible
- There's a lot of that going on today in and around the church
- And it's created a lot of poor theology and bad ideas about God and His word
- Honest and sincere efforts to uncover the meaning of God's word will always rely on certain and sensible rules of interpretation
 - So that we allow the text of Scripture to guide us to the truth
 - Because every passage of Scripture has only one meaning, the meaning assigned to it by God Himself when He inspired the author to write it
 - Our job in studying Scripture is to discover that assigned meaning, not to invent our own meaning
- As Peter told us in His word

2 Pet. 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2 Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- Peter says that no view of scripture is a matter of our own interpretation
- If you've ever heard someone begin an interpretation of a verse in the Bible by saying "This verse means to me..." then you've watched someone violating Peter's rule
- Because that's not how we uncover the truth of the Bible...or the truth of *anything*
 - Have you ever heard someone say "What the math equation 2+2 means to me is..."?
 - Of course not, because there is only one right answer to the question 2+2 and it doesn't matter what we think it means
 - It only matters what it actually means
- That's the same approach we need to take to the study of Scripture
 - We want to honestly seek for what the text of Scripture actually means – what God meant when He wrote it
 - We don't want to rely on opinions or guesses, because the whole point of studying the Bible is to arrive at THE truth
 - In this case, Matthew tells us plainly how to understand these passages, so we can rest in that understanding
- Let's go back to the study, and specifically look at Herod's reaction to the birth of Jesus

Matt. 2:16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.

Matt. 2:17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was

fulfilled:

Matt. 2:18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more.”

- Earlier, you remember Herod had questioned the magi as to when they saw the star appear so that he would know how old the Messiah was at that point. He also told the magi to report back on the location of the Messiah once they found him
 - That was Herod’s mistake
 - He should have followed the magi instead
 - Because the magi were warned by the Lord to go home another way so as to avoid Herod and keep Jesus’ location a secret
 - By the time Herod discovered that the magi had departed, it was too late to find them or learn Jesus’ whereabouts
 - For a normal, rational, well-adjusted human being, that would be the end of it
 - But Herod was anything but normal or rational
 - By this point, Herod was already standing at death’s door, so he should have nothing to fear from an infant king
 - Based on historical records, we assume he was suffering from kidney disease and gangrene, which takes a while to kill a person
 - So Herod knew he would die soon
 - So it was unlikely that the new baby king would be old enough to take Herod’s throne before Herod died naturally
 - And Herod couldn’t have been worried about his sons inheriting the throne because Herod had three of them killed
 - So Herod could have left well-enough alone and never been threatened by this new king
 - Nevertheless, his paranoia and ego led him to take drastic action to prevent this young king from even having the chance
 - Matthew says in around 4 BC, Herod ordered all male children two years old or younger in and around Bethlehem to be killed
 - So on Herod’s order, Roman soldiers marched the few miles from the garrison in Jerusalem to Bethlehem
 - And they summarily executed every male baby they could find
 - Herod’s stipulation that children two years old and under should die gives us a hint as to what the magi told Herod in answer to his question about the appearing of the star
 - Notice Matthew says Herod’s orders were based on the magi’s response

- The magi must have told Herod the star appeared a year or more earlier
- So to be sure he kills the Messiah, Herod orders that babies up to 24 months will die
- There must be a special place in Hell for this man, sitting right next to Hitler and whoever invented telemarketing
- Matthew tells us that the deaths of so many children sets all of Bethlehem to mourning
 - And once again, Matthew tells us this event is a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy
 - In this case, the prophecy comes from Jeremiah 31
 - Let's look at Jeremiah in its context

Jer. 31:15 Thus says the Lord,
 "A voice is heard in Ramah,
 Lamentation and bitter weeping.
 Rachel is weeping for her children;
 She refuses to be comforted for her children,
 Because they are no more."

Jer. 31:16 Thus says the Lord,
 "Restrain your voice from weeping
 And your eyes from tears;
 For your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord,
 "And they will return from the land of the enemy."

Jer. 31:17 "There is hope for your future," declares the Lord,
 "And your children will return to their own territory."

- This passage is similar to the one we studied in Hosea earlier
 - Like Hosea, Jeremiah's passage is not a prophecy about the Messiah, not specifically
 - Jeremiah is giving Israel a prophecy concerning the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian army
 - The prophet was warning the people of Israel that the Lord was preparing to send a great calamity upon the people in the city
 - It would be judgment against Israel for their sins against God
- The Lord fulfilled this prophecy in 605 BC, when the army of Babylon invaded Judah
 - The army devastated Judah and killed many Jewish soldiers
 - The army took many sons of Israel captive as slaves, hauling them back to Babylon, many never to return
 - When that happened, the mothers of these sons were lamenting greatly, as you would expect
- When Jeremiah writes that "Rachel" was weeping, he uses the name of Jacob's favorite wife as a symbol for all the mothers of Israel

- The mothers of Israel would weep over their sons lost to captivity in Babylon
- And they could not be comforted
- Yet in the midst of their misery, the Lord reassured the people of Israel that their suffering was not the end of the story
 - That event would actually give Israel cause for hope for the future
 - Babylon's destruction of Judah was part of a larger plan of God's to purge idolatry out of Israel
 - To bring His people back to Him in faith and humility
 - And this was a very good and very necessary thing in the long run
 - You see, in the years before the Babylonian captivity, the people of Israel had strayed very far from the Lord
 - So far, in fact, that at times the people had been led by evil kings to engage in demonic religious rituals
 - At times, the people of Israel even engaged in human sacrifice, killing their infant children on altars praying to the satanic god Baal
 - So the Lord sent the Babylonian army into the land to conquer His own people and haul them off to Babylon in chains
 - In doing so, the Lord broke the people's will to follow after idols
 - Never again in history has Israel engaged in widespread idolatry, all because they suffered such great loss in Babylon
 - So while it was a great hardship for Jewish mothers to see their sons taken away into captivity, it was better than allowing the status quo to continue
 - In fact, it was a cruel irony that the mothers of Israel wept over these sons given that so many mothers willingly sacrificed their sons
- So once more, we find Matthew looking back on a moment in Israel's history and interpreting it according to a certain approach
 - In this case, Matthew is using one of the other four methods of Biblical interpretation
 - This method is called *drash* in Hebrew, which means "explanation"
 - This method recognizes that there are certain principles found over and over again in God's word
 - When you come across passages that conform to these principles, you can draw connections between them
 - These connections help us recognize these theological principles and make better sense of them
 - One of these important Biblical principles is at work here in Matthew Chapter 2
 - And it's also at work in Jeremiah 31, which is why Matthew connects them
 - Matthew wants us to learn something about the terrible circumstances in Bethlehem by considering what happened earlier in Jeremiah

- So what is that principle that connects these two moments?
 - Well, it's best summarized by another well-known verse found in the book of Romans

Rom. 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- In Romans 8:28, Paul describes the same principle at work in Israel in Jeremiah's day and in Jesus' day
- The principle holds that our world is full of sin and evil and hatred, so as a result bad things will happen constantly
 - We see the proof of this on the news and in our neighborhood and in our family and in our own lives
 - Sin is everywhere and so its effects are everywhere
- The Bible doesn't promise believers that bad things will never happen to us or that we will escape life on earth unscathed
 - On the contrary, we will know pain and suffering
 - After all, trying to live in this sinful world without suffering its effects is like trying to swim in a pool without getting wet
 - It's not possible...if you get in that pool, then you will be saturated like anyone else
 - And if you live in a sinful fallen world, you're going to get hurt
- But the Bible also promises that even in the midst of these bad things, God is still on His throne
 - He is still in control of everything and He has great and wonderful things planned for His children
 - And He is at work ensuring that all of life's circumstances will come together to produce eternally good outcomes for His children
 - But sometimes, the only way to produce the very good things God has planned in eternity is by allowing bad things to happen to us here and now
- So the principle tells us we can always trust the Lord is working in the midst of our trials and turmoil and fear and troubles
 - Throughout scripture, the Lord reminds us of this principle so we won't forget it
 - Even His design for childbirth reminds us of this principle
 - God instituted that a woman would endure pain in bringing forth life so He could create a picture of what Jesus would do for us
 - A difficult and painful event precedes the joy of new life
 - Just as the pain of Jesus' death was necessary to make possible the joy of our new spiritual birth
 - And our lives on earth mirror this principle too

- Our suffering now is a result of sin, and God is not the author of sin
- But God uses the suffering we experience in life to produce spiritual benefit
- He's working to prepare us for the moment when we enter the Kingdom in our new eternal bodies at our resurrection
 - By that moment, everything necessary to ensure we are ready for eternity will have come to pass
 - Including the trials that God used to mold us into His image
 - We grow spiritually much better during trials than during the good times
 - Our prayer life, our study of God's word, our willingness to repent and reconcile with others are all more likely when we're facing difficulties
- In Jeremiah's time, God ultimately used the suffering of Israel's mothers over having lost their sons to Babylon to produce great repentance among all the hearts of Israel
 - And that repentance cured Israel from ever chasing after idols again
 - It restored the nation's desire for their true God
 - And it ensured that when Jesus came to bring them salvation, God's people were still there to hear Him
 - So Matthew quotes Jeremiah to remind us that the terrible events in Bethlehem must be understood according to this same principle
 - We need to recognize these circumstances were part of the love of God at work for the sake of Israel and the world
 - But it will take spiritual maturity to understand it
 - Which is why God's word reminds us of this principle over and over again, and why Matthew quotes Jeremiah here to explain it
 - The deaths of these children were a necessary evil to lead to the greatest good the world has ever known
 - After the children were killed in Bethlehem, Herod was satisfied with his atrocity and he lost interest in finding the Messiah
 - As a result, Jesus was able to survive his wrath
 - Because Jesus lived, He could become our perfect sacrifice
 - Because Herod was satisfied, the salvation God promised for all mankind was possible
 - Because Jesus was protected while He was vulnerable to an evil one, you and I will receive Christ's protection from the Evil One
- Our God is a God of resurrection
 - He brings dead things back to life
 - He takes great loss and turns it into great gain
 - He wipes away tears, He takes away pain, He gives us relief from sin
 - He promises to do things in the eternal realm, but not necessarily here and now

- And so Matthew quotes Jeremiah to remind us that the mourning in Bethlehem will one day give way to joy
 - Just as the Lord turned the weeping of Jewish mothers in Jeremiah's day into rejoicing over the nation's repentance
 - So too the Lord is prepared to turn the weeping of Israel and the world over evil and sin, into rejoicing for our salvation
 - Their pain in losing a child is to be replaced with the eternal joy of knowing Jesus and His righteousness
- We've all suffered in one way or another, and it's easy to get absorbed in it, especially when it seems never ending
 - But never forget that you have overcome this world by your faith in Jesus Christ
 - The enemy can fire shots at you and sometimes, they're really strong
 - But he can't touch your eternal future and he can't rob you of your peace before God
 - And one day very soon, this world will pass away and at that point, all the suffering of this world will fade away with it
 - That's what Matthew wants us to remember, that God works all things together for good for those who love Him, to those called

Matt. 2:19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said,

Matt. 2:20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."

- Turning once more to the text, we're not told how long Jesus spends in Egypt, but it's probably not longer than a year
 - Because as Matthew tells us, they waited until hearing that Herod was gone
 - Since we know Herod died in 4 BC and Jesus was probably born near the end of 6 BC
 - And the magi arrived after Jesus was already about a year old
 - So they probably spent a year or less in Egypt
 - Whatever wealth they received from the magi was probably just enough to cover their expenses during that time
 - Wouldn't it have been an encouragement to this young family as they watched God provide in perfect proportion to their needs?
 - They didn't know they were going to Egypt, so they couldn't have planned to pay for it, but God provided valuable gifts
 - And once they were there, they had no idea how long they would stay, but the gifts God provided lasted just long enough
 - So that once they returned home, they were no longer rich, but they never

lacked

- Joseph learns the news of Herod's death through the angel vine
 - By now, Joseph is probably becoming accustomed to getting directions this way
 - It must have become obvious to these parents that raising the Savior of the world was not something that God was going to leave to chance
 - They were going to get lots of helpful parenting advice
- The angel says get up and go to the land of Israel with the Child and Mary
 - So Joseph leaves as instructed
 - We'll see what happens next when we return to the study next week
- But let's finish tonight taking one more look at the connection between this story and the account of Exodus
 - Because with the rest of the details of this story, we're now able to see that there is an even greater connection between the two stories
 - This picture goes much deeper than Hosea's connection to Egypt
 - It turns out many elements of the Exodus story match up to the story of Jesus' life and work
 - In fact, the key figure of the Exodus story, Moses, is a picture in the Bible of Jesus
 - For example, Moses originally fled Egypt because the Pharaoh sought to kill him
 - This is mirrored by Jesus fleeing the promised land when Herod seeks to kill him
 - Secondly, in the Exodus account, the Pharaoh commanded that every male Hebrew child be killed by casting them into the Nile
 - And here we see another king, Herod, ordering every male Jewish child killed in Bethlehem
 - Furthermore, Moses was rescued from that death sentence by a mother taking him out of the Nile
 - While Jesus will be rescued by His mother taking Him across the Nile
 - Both stories turn on a similar event
 - In Exodus, we're told the Pharaoh dies, and so it's time for Moses to return to free His people, Israel, from bondage
 - And in Matthew, Herod dies so Jesus' family is told it's time to return so Jesus can free His people, Israel, from bondage to sin
 - In both cases, an angel of the Lord said return because the one seeking your life has died
 - Moses returned with his family, just as Jesus returned with his family
- We see the point clearly, don't we? The Lord isn't just the author of Scripture...He's the author of History
 - God orchestrated both the events of Moses' life and of His own Son's life to bring

about exactly what He wanted to achieve

- And then He instructed men to write these things in ways that clearly show us these connections
- And He did all these things because He loves us and doesn't want us to remain ignorant of what He was doing for our sake
- Remember this as you live out the history of your life, including the dark moments that feel like your life is crashing down around you
 - Everything you're experiencing has already been designed by a God who loves you so much that He was willing to die for you
 - And even if He hasn't revealed every detail of our future, we can still be sure it has a good ending
 - Because we know that one day, we will leave all this mess behind and we will receive our reward in eternity with Christ
- And from that vantage point – and only from that vantage point – we'll finally be able to appreciate why everything had to happen the way it did
 - And we'll be praising Him for it
 - So let's begin that praise even now...for God is good

- Tonight, we move into Chapter 3 of Matthew
 - And as we do, we find Matthew leaving Jesus' childhood so he can tell the story of how Jesus entered into ministry
 - It's always fascinated Bible students that the Bible gives us relatively little detail about Jesus' early life
 - Only Luke records details between the birth and the start of Jesus' ministry
 - And even then, Luke only gives a single story of Jesus left behind in the temple by His parents
 - We can assume some things that are likely to be accurate, based on our understanding of ancient Jewish life and customs
 - For example, at age 13, Jesus would have experienced His Bar Mitzvah, the Jewish rite recognizing a boy's transition to manhood
 - Luke's story of Jesus' trip to the temple for the Passover at age 12 was probably preparation for his Bar Mitzvah
 - Later, at age 17, Jesus was probably made an apprentice to his earthly father in his trade of carpentry
 - Carpentry in that day meant working in stone as a stone cutter, as well as with wood
 - So Jesus would have been learning how to work with His hands under the instruction of Joseph
 - But Jesus would have also been apprenticing under His Heavenly Father's instruction, preparing for His profession in ministry
 - Jesus being fully God and not descended from Adam, He had a perfect sinless life
 - But being fully human as well, Jesus had to learn as we all do
 - He would have had the Holy Spirit as His teacher, as do we
 - And so it required years of time for Him to be prepared to fulfill His purpose in ministry
- But then, there came that point when the Father was ready for His Son to reveal Himself to the world and to begin His ministry
 - At that point, Jesus was going to speak and act in ways to demonstrate His deity
 - He would teach with great authority and insight
 - He would perform supernatural miracles
 - And He would have perfect understanding of God's heart, while understanding the inner thoughts of His enemies
 - But human beings can't do these things
 - And because Jesus took the form of man, He too lacked the power to do these things on His own initiative
 - Jesus required the Father to enable Him in these things

- To equip Jesus by the Spirit for ministry
- That's one of the things we're going to look at as we study this chapter
- But now in Chapter 3, we jump forward about 30 years to the moment Jesus enters into His ministry
 - And that story begins with the account of another man, called John, the son of Zacharias
 - Otherwise known as John the Baptist

Matt. 3:1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

Matt. 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matt. 3:3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'"

Matt. 3:4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Matt. 3:5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan;

Matt. 3:6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

- John the Baptist was a cousin, once-removed, to Jesus
 - John's mother, Elizabeth, and Jesus' mother, Mary, were first cousins
 - Both mothers knew they were bearing special sons
 - Men who would serve God in significant ways
 - John was born about 6 months before Jesus
 - So we can assume both John and Jesus knew each other and probably played together as children, at least occasionally
 - But we also know that at some point, their lives diverged
 - John and Jesus lived in separate parts of the country and their families had very different ways of life
 - Jesus' earthly father was a manual laborer in the Galilee
 - While John's father was a priest serving in the temple in Jerusalem twice a year
 - So the two sons likely saw less and less of each other as they grew older
 - More importantly, John did not grow up knowing that his cousin, Jesus, was the future Messiah
 - In fact, no one outside Mary and Joseph knew the full story about Jesus

- After Joseph was gone, only Mary would have known this truth
- So Jesus grew up in obscurity, as did John
- You may remember the account in John's Gospel where Jesus and Mary attend the wedding in Cana
 - Mary asks Jesus to perform a miracle, to which Jesus rebukes His mother for asking Jesus to reveal Himself prematurely
 - The key point from that story is that Jesus came to earth with a specific mission
 - And His mission ran according to a timetable set by the Father
 - So until the Father was ready to reveal His Son, no one thought Jesus to be anyone other than a carpenter's son in Galilee
- But then, the time came for Jesus to be unveiled to the world as the long-promised Messiah
 - At that time, Jesus was about 30 years old, according to the Gospel of John
 - And Matthew says "in those days" John began preaching in the wilderness of Judea
 - Judea is Judah's tribal territory of southern Israel that extends from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the Jordan river in the east
 - And from just north of Jerusalem to the Negev desert in the south
 - In the middle of Judah, there is a mountain range that runs north-south
 - The prevailing winds blow from the west off the Mediterranean Sea, bringing moisture into Israel
 - As those winds collide with the mountains, the air cools and releases its moisture on the western foothills
 - Then the air passes over the mountains as a hot, dry wind creating a vast desert wasteland on the leeward side of the mountain down to the Jordan river
 - That desert is called the Judean Wilderness
 - At some point during his 20s, John left his home and retreated into this harsh desert region
 - John spent most of his time in the lower Jordan river valley, north of the Dead Sea and northeast of Jerusalem
 - He survives off the land, as Matthew tells us in v.4, dressed as a prophet in mourning and having minimal contact with people
 - To this remote location, people were walking great distances from Jerusalem and all Judea to hear John's message
 - As they heard him preaching, they began to confess their sins
 - And then they entered into the Jordan river with John, and they allowed him to baptize them
- Somewhere during his time in the wilderness, Luke says the Lord spoke to John to give him his ministry of baptism, from which he gets his name

- The word “baptism” comes from a Greek word that means, “to dip” or “sink into water”
 - Jews were well-acquainted with baptism
 - Jewish practices found in both the Law and in tradition made frequent use of ceremonial washings
 - Some washings involved little more than hand washing, while others called for the entire body to be submerged in water
 - Some of these ceremonial cleansings required “living water” which is the Jewish term for water that is flowing or moving
- Practically speaking, this explains why John ministered in the desert wilderness by the Jordan river
 - The Jordan was the main source of moving water suitable for whole body immersion near Jerusalem
 - There were also spring-fed pools and baths in Jerusalem and other cities and towns where baptisms took place
 - But these pools were under the control of Jewish authorities who were opposed to John’s message and ministry (as we’ll see)
- Jewish baptisms didn’t have the same spiritual emphasis that our Christian baptism has today
 - Generally, they were part of the Law or rabbinical teaching that grew out of the Law
 - They were associated with a concept in scripture called ritual cleanliness
- The idea was that sin has made us spiritually “dirty” and we needed cleansing before God
 - Obviously, we can’t wash away our sin with water
 - But God gave Israel these physical washing rituals to help them understand their need for spiritual cleansing, which comes from God
 - And so Israel practiced these washings regularly as a constant reminder of their need for God to wash them clean
- A Jew was required to wash at various times, usually by full-body immersion, to remove ritual uncleanness
 - The Law itself requires such washings in connection with various feasts or specific situations in Jewish life
 - The rabbis had also added other requirements for washings including for those who were converting to Judaism
 - But John’s baptism was neither a baptism of conversion to Judaism nor was it a baptism for ritual uncleanness
 - In other words, John was using water immersion in a completely new way, unrelated to any requirement found in the Law or rabbinical teaching
 - John’s baptism was something new, something the Lord gave him, a baptism

connected to a new message

- The Bible tells us John was preaching a three-part message
 - Matthew gives us two of those parts, while Luke gives us the third part
 - The first part of his message was a call to action
 - The second part of his message gave cause to act
 - And the third part of his message required a promise
- The first part of John's message, his call to action, was a single, powerful word: Repent
 - Repent, or repentance, is a word Christians hear often, but for all its familiarity, it's not well understood
 - It doesn't mean to feel sorry or to regret having done something wrong
 - It literally means a change or a turn in our thinking
 - You could say to repent is to change your mind
 - Specifically, repenting means to change your mind about your sin
 - Where before we gave no thought to our sin or of God's perspective on our sin
 - But now, we have repented – changed our thinking on the subject – and we have become greatly concerned over our sin
 - Even more, we are deeply troubled by what God thinks of our sin, and so we have turned to direct our attention toward Him
 - That's what the Bible means when it calls people to repent
 - It's asking us to face the reality of who we are and Who God is
 - We must recognize we are sinners, people who have disobeyed God's commands, and therefore we have offended Him
 - Knowing we have offended God, we should be concerned for what will become of us at the moment we face Him for judgment
 - While the concept of repentance was not new to Israel, John was applying it in a powerful new way
 - John was calling God's people to get right with God
 - Because despite the Jews' external piety and religious devotion, in reality, they were largely a Godless people
 - So John calls Israel to collectively change their minds about their comfortable co-existence with sin
 - And to turn their thoughts toward considering how God might judge them
- Secondly, John's message gave the people cause to act in repentance, because John declared that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand
 - A Jew of John's day would have understood what John meant by the Kingdom of God, but we probably need a minute or two of explanation
 - The Old Testament prophets told Israel that the Lord would one day set up a new Kingdom on the earth

- This Kingdom would rule the entire earth and all nations would be under the authority of the King of this Kingdom
- The Kingdom would be centered in Israel and the Jewish people would be the chief nation among all nations
- And the Jewish Messiah would be the ruler of this Kingdom
- The Lord promised this Kingdom at various points in the Old Testament, including in His covenants to the patriarchs and to David and Solomon
 - And for centuries, the Jewish people had heard the Jewish prophets reminding them it was coming
 - The last of those prophets was Malachi
 - But Malachi died 400 years earlier, and since then, the Lord hadn't spoken a word to Israel about the Kingdom
 - So for many within Israel, the promise of a coming Messianic Kingdom seemed more and more unlikely
 - Many had stopped expecting it and even fewer were prepared for it
- But now, a new prophet had emerged in the wilderness, a man declaring once again that the Kingdom of God was coming
 - More than that, this prophet was saying the Kingdom was actually *at hand*
 - When we say something is "at hand" we mean it's on the verge of appearing, it's imminent
 - Like when we see a woman nearing the end of her ninth month of pregnancy, we might say the birth of her child is at hand
- This was intended to be motivation for these people to heed John's call to repent
 - The prophets foretold that the arrival of the Kingdom of God would coincide with the resurrection of God's people and a judgment to follow
 - We see this clearly in the book of Daniel

Dan. 12:1 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued."

Dan. 12:2 "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."

- Daniel was told that at the end of this age, following a time of great distress on the earth, the Kingdom would appear
- At that time, God's elect would be rescued
- They would "awake" from the dust of the ground, meaning they would be resurrected
- And then a judgment would follow, with some being welcomed into the Kingdom and

others being excluded

- So when a new prophet declared that this kingdom was about to appear, Israel had good reason to care
 - They felt the same way employees feel when they hear the boss is going to be walking by their desk
 - Or the way students feel when their teacher says there will be a pop-quiz tomorrow
 - They felt motivated to clean up their act, to prepare for the test
- In other words, John's announcement gave Israel the motivation they needed to heed his call to repent
 - They knew that if they continued in their present ways, they wouldn't be ready for God's arrival
 - They would miss the Kingdom because their life of sin and disregard for God would bar them, as the prophets foretold
- Finally, in Luke's Gospel, we learn the third part of this message: the promise of the forgiveness of sins

Luke 3:3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

Luke 3:16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Luke 3:17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Luke 3:18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

- The third and most important part of John's message: the Gospel
 - That the Messiah was about to arrive for His people
 - The Messiah would be greater than John or any other prophet because He would offer His people forgiveness of their sins
 - He would also have the power to judge so that those who do not receive Him would come under His condemnation
 - So John was offering Israel the solution to their sin, the same solution God had offered through the earlier prophets
 - A Messiah, a Savior Who would come to save Israel from their sins
 - That all who place their trust in Him will not be disappointed
 - That the Lord is willing to extend mercy to us through this Messiah for any who accept Him as Lord

- In a nutshell, that's what the baptism of John meant for those who took part in it
 - When they accepted John's baptism, they were accepting His message
 - They were repenting, turning away from their sinful lives to prepare their hearts to meet God
 - They were anticipating the arrival of the Kingdom promised to Israel because they wanted to be included in it
 - And they were acknowledging they needed forgiveness for their sins, and so they placed their faith in the promise of Messiah
 - Remember, the word "baptism" comes from a Greek word meaning, "to dip"
 - It refers to the way a cloth was dyed by dipping it into bowl of liquid
 - When the cloth was pulled up out of the liquid, it had taken on the color of the liquid
 - It had been baptized
 - In the same sense, anyone who submitted to the baptism of John was accepting John's teaching concerning the coming Messiah
 - And therefore, they were committing themselves to follow whoever John named as the Messiah
 - John assured his followers that the Messiah was soon to appear
 - And we learn in Chapter 1 of John's Gospel that John himself was waiting to learn the identity of the Messiah too
 - And then, when John learned that Jesus was the Messiah, he directed those he had baptized to leave him and to follow Jesus
 - For example, later in Acts 19, we read a story of Paul coming upon some Jewish men in Ephesus who John had baptized decades earlier

Acts 19:1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.

Acts 19:2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

Acts 19:3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."

Acts 19:4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

Acts 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

- These men accepted John's baptism because they trusted in his teaching that the Messiah was soon to appear
 - But apparently, they had left Judea before Jesus' identity was revealed

- So when Paul found them in Ephesus decades later, they had still not realized the Messiah had arrived
- When Paul revealed that Jesus was the One John identified as Messiah, they quickly placed their faith in Jesus
- They were doing what they had committed to do when they took John's baptism
- Looking back at Matthew's gospel, he tells us that John's ministry was itself a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy
 - In v.3, Matthew says that John's ministry fulfilled Isaiah's words when he told Israel that a prophet would precede the Messiah's arrival
 - As we did last week, let's go back to the source and see this quote in its context

Is. 40:3 A voice is calling,

**“Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.**

**Is. 40:4 “Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;**

**Is. 40:5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”**

- You remember, I taught last week that there are four proper ways we can interpret scripture
 - Each of these methods stands in addition to a purely literal view of the text
 - So we never deny the literal interpretation
 - But in many cases, we can look beyond the literal to see something more
 - And Israel's rabbis who studied scripture found four additional ways scripture could be understood beyond the literal
 - Last week, we saw Matthew using two of those methods called by their Hebrews names of *ramez* and *drash*
 - The *ramez* method recognizes that scripture can sometimes picture something greater than what's written literally
 - While the *drash* method saw principles common across seemingly unrelated passages of Scripture
 - Here, we see Matthew quoting Old Testament scripture once more, and this time, he's using a third method of interpretation
 - This method is called *pechat* in Hebrew, which means “simple” or “straight”
 - This method views the Scripture as meaning just what it says and nothing more

- It's a purely literal interpretation of the text and most often, it's the proper method for interpreting the Bible
- Matthew tells us that we should use this method to understand what Isaiah wrote in Chapter 40
 - That Isaiah 40:3-5 was speaking literally about the work of John the Baptist
 - John was the voice sent to Israel, calling out to her from the wilderness
 - And the effect of this voice would be to make a smooth way in the desert, a highway for God
 - Rough ground would become easy to walk on, rugged terrain would become like a broad valley
 - And then the glory of God would be revealed, seen by all flesh according to the Word of God
- We know the voice in the wilderness refers to John's voice, but what of the various metaphors Isaiah uses to describe his work?
 - First, Isaiah says John clears a way for the Lord in the wilderness
 - That "way" refers to a way into the hearts of the people of Israel
 - John was announcing Jesus' arrival for probably 6 months before Jesus arrived
 - In doing so, John was preparing their hearts to accept Jesus once John announced Him
 - In the same way, Isaiah says the terrain of Israel would become easier to walk through
 - We know there were no geographical changes to Israel's countryside when Jesus appeared
 - So here again, these are metaphors describing the hearts and attitudes of the Jewish people
 - Israel's disinterest in their sinfulness and their hard-heartedness toward God are compared to rough terrain or high mountains that can't be crossed easily
 - But because of the work of John the Baptist, hearts were awakened, attitudes softened, and repentance had taken hold
 - Like rough ground plowed and flattened to make for an easy walk
 - In practical terms, the Lord was simply following the custom of the day
 - When kings or other dignitaries planned a trip, they commonly sent people ahead to ensure they were properly received
 - For example, elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus is planning to go to Samaria, and some disciples go ahead of Him to arrange a place for Jesus to sleep
 - And even today, when our President is going somewhere, an advance team goes ahead to ensure the trip goes smoothly and that a crowd is prepared to greet him
 - But in spiritual terms, John the Baptist is a beautiful example of God's grace and mercy for His people

- The Lord extended infinite mercy and grace to the world when He placed His innocent Son on a Roman cross to save sinners like us
- The Bible says that's the highest example of love the world has ever seen or will ever see
- But God is so good, that He went the additional step of ensuring His people didn't miss Jesus at His coming
 - He sent someone ahead of Jesus to soften Israel's hearts, to remind them of His promises and to ensure He would be received
 - He even foretold Israel that Jesus' forerunner would come
 - That's mercy, that's love
- But why send such an odd character to announce the Messiah?
 - John is living an isolated existence in the desert, looking like a homeless bum
 - He has honey and locusts stuck in his beard
 - There were probably rumors floating around back home that John was demon-possessed or crazy
 - Yet the Lord chose this man to announce Jesus' arrival
 - The answer comes in the next passage, which we will touch on briefly tonight

Matt. 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Matt. 3:8 "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

Matt. 3:9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

Matt. 3:10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- John the Baptist is confronted by two groups of religious authorities, Pharisees and Sadducees
 - We'll take time in future weeks to get to know these men better, including their motivations
 - But tonight, let's focus on the differences between these men and John the Baptist
 - And the contrast couldn't be more stark
 - These men were the supreme religious authorities in Israel
 - They were upright, trained and approved in the finest schools, respected within society...and in the end...dead wrong
 - Apart from a few who believed in Jesus, these leaders were not men moved by

the Spirit

- Therefore, they didn't understand the very Scriptures they taught others, as Jesus said to one Pharisee named Nicodemus

John 3:9 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"

John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"

- So from outward appearances, the Pharisees and Sadducees were experts in God
 - Yet the truth was something very different
 - They were far from God and ignorant of His Word, though they had memorized most of it
 - And they persecuted anyone who dared to challenge their authority among the people
- Meanwhile, we have John the Baptist, who has nothing to commend himself to the people
 - He's untrained, unapproved, rough and unconventional
 - He appears out of nowhere, claiming unprecedented revelation from God Himself
 - And now, he's drawing a responsive crowd
- How do we explain this? The religious authorities certainly wanted to know
 - In my Bible, v.7 reads that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming for baptism, but that's not an accurate rendition of the original Greek text
 - It should read "coming to John's baptism"
 - They weren't coming to submit to John's baptism, they were coming to see and investigate John's Baptism
 - And more than that, they came with the intention of discrediting John
 - John immediately recognizes their evil intentions, likely having been warned by the Lord earlier
 - And so John attacks them calling upon them to repent too
 - We'll look at his attack and their response more next time
 - But already, we can see why the Lord would choose such an unlikely messenger to herald the arrival of His Son, Jesus
 - He wanted his messenger to stand apart from the religious hypocrisy of the day
 - God could have raised up anyone to do this job
 - He could have given them a knowledge of Himself and a heart to obey, and told them to preach the same message
 - Even a Pharisee could have been called into this ministry had God desired
 - In fact, wouldn't a Pharisee have been the more natural choice?

- Yes, and that's exactly the reason the Lord didn't want a Pharisee
- It's the same reason why the Lord called John to disappear for a time into the wilderness
- And why He took on such a strange appearance and lifestyle
- God used these things to put distance between His true messenger, John, and the established religious authorities who did not speak for God at all
 - At the same time, God made sure John could be identified with the persecuted prophets of Israel's past
 - Because God typically called the most unlikely of men to speak for Him
 - Goat herders (Amos), shepherds (David), meek (Gideon), unimpressive sorts
 - Rarely would He call a properly trained and noble individual
 - Because the Lord didn't want us explaining their expertise and knowledge of God in strictly human terms
 - Remember how the first apostles were treated when they began to teach about Jesus?
 - They were confronted by these same religious, so-called experts as John faced, and here's what they said about the apostles

Acts 4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Acts 4:14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

- They were amazed that such untrained men could speak for God in such powerful ways
 - And they have nothing to say in response to what they see God doing
 - God silenced these so-called experts with the work of unqualified men
- Not a lot has changed in the Church since these times...God is still working in a similar way
 - As Jesus observed in His own prayer to the Father

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

Matt. 11:26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

- God calls us, unqualified men and women, to serve Him – spiritual infants
- Because He knows how our hearts and minds tend to work

- When we see someone of great pedigree, someone accomplished and trained by the finest religious institutions speaking for God, we assume that's what it takes to know God
 - We assume these people found God because of all that training
 - And therefore, we assume we can't know the deep things of God or find them on our own
 - It's that kind of thinking that leads us to believe we need priests or imams or other religious types to bring us to God
- But God isn't found in ivory towers or through PhDs
 - He doesn't reveal Himself to the proud or haughty
 - He isn't interested in furthering our personal reputations
 - The Lord reveals Himself to those who seek Him humbly, to infants
 - To those who heed John's call to repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand
- God chose John the Baptist to announce the Messiah to mock the self-importance of Israel's religious leaders, who were leading His people astray
 - And He reveals Himself today in similar ways, to ordinary people like you and me
 - While in many cases overlooking the proud, religious experts of our day
- I speak from personal experience...I'm just missing some locust and honey in my beard
- But just because the Lord chooses to call the unqualified to serve Him, he won't leave us untrained
 - John the Baptist couldn't hold a candle to the training and accomplishments of those men who challenged him
 - But he had something they didn't...the truth of God's Word
 - Revealed to him by the Spirit of God
 - A truth God withheld from those pompous posers
- We have everything we need in the pages of the Bible

- Last time, we left John the Baptist at the Jordan with the Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious elite of his day
 - Let's pick up again in v.7 and re-read the encounter

Matt. 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matt. 3:8 “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

Matt. 3:9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

Matt. 3:10 “The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- As I taught last time, these men were the reigning experts in Israel on matters of God and piety
 - Since Israel was governed by a religious law, these religious men were also the governing rulers of the people (under Roman occupation)
 - So as with any government, these politicians were divided into political parties or factions
 - And like today, these factions covered the spectrum from radical to orthodox, conservative to liberal
 - The Pharisees were the religious conservatives of Jewish politics
 - They were the descendants of Ezra and the scribes
 - They studied and memorized the Law of Moses and the associated volumes of rabbinical writings that had developed over the centuries
 - They interpreted these laws and enforced them in Jewish society
 - Pharisees took a conservative, literal, hardline view of their rules
 - They enforced the letter of the law with threats and intimidations
 - But like most pious self-righteous religious authorities, the Pharisees were hypocrites
 - Listen to how Jesus described them

Matt. 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Matt. 23:24 “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

Matt. 23:25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-

indulgence.

Matt. 23:26 “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Matt. 23:27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.

Matt. 23:28 “So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- The Pharisees held their grip on power by holding these rules over the heads of the people
 - They were self-proclaimed gatekeepers of Heaven, dictating what Jews must do to please God
 - And they determined who had met the rules and who hadn’t
- The Pharisees exploited the people’s desperation to be approved by God and used their religious power to become powerful and wealthy
 - Another quote from Jesus

Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Luke 16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

Luke 16:15 And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.

- So to understand the Pharisees, remember the Pharisees convinced the people they held the keys to entering the Kingdom
- And they exploited this power to make themselves rich (sound familiar?)
- On the other end of the Jewish political spectrum, were the Sadducees
 - Sadducees were the liberal religious leaders
 - Sadducees thought the Pharisees took religion too seriously and too literally
 - The Sadducees rejected many basic teachings of Scripture including the reality of resurrection and the existence of angels or even of a spirit
 - Because of their liberal views, they focused less on Scripture and the supernatural and more on earthly politics and accomplishment
 - The Sadducees’ power came from having control over the temple operations in Jerusalem
 - Herod’s temple was a massive and complex operation at the center of Jewish

life

- The Sadducees were responsible for all that happened inside the temple
- They had authority over the temple guards and priests, and they presided at any criminal trials conducted in the temple
- And most importantly, the Sadducees managed the temple funds, which meant they had control over the purse strings
 - Every Jew was required to tithe between 20-30% of their annual income to the temple
 - So a tremendous amount of money flowed into the Sadducees' coffers every year
 - By itself, such wealth gave the Sadducees significant power over the people
- If that weren't enough, the Sadducees also held a majority of seats on the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel over the Jews
 - So the Sadducees were the party in power in Jesus' day
 - They retained their power by maintaining a cozy relationship with the Roman officials ruling Judea
 - In contrast to the Pharisees, who openly despised the Romans
- So the Pharisees and Sadducees were rivals for political power in Israel
 - And given their significant political differences, it's surprising to see these two groups aligned on any matter
 - Pharisees and Sadducees couldn't even agree on opposing Rome
 - So it took a significant threat, a common enemy, to get these two groups to join forces
 - And John the Baptist was one such enemy
 - John was the exact opposite of the two groups
 - He has no pedigree, and his teaching agreed with neither groups
 - John not only opposed the status quo in Israel, he called for others to do the same
 - Therefore, his teaching threatened to erode the power base of these two groups
 - So from the point of view of a Pharisee or a Sadducee, John was a revolutionary that needed to be silenced
 - Even as the Pharisees and Sadducees jockeyed for power in Israel, both groups' success depended on the status quo
 - To them, John represented a third party disrupting the delicate balance
 - So these leaders have come out into the wilderness to challenge John's work
 - They've heard of the crowds and the strange rituals John was conducting
 - But what truly concerned these men was John's message that the Messiah was soon to arrive

- The Jewish people had long waited for the promised Savior
 - Over the centuries, Israel's rabbis studied Scripture to know when and how the Messiah would arrive and what He would do once He appeared
 - So it fell to these religious leaders to confirm for the people when God had fulfilled a Messianic prophecy
 - So when someone like John made Messianic claims (like the Messiah had come or was soon to arrive), these men would come to investigate
 - But these religious leaders assumed that the coming Messiah would look and sound a lot like them
 - The Pharisees assumed the Messiah would look like a Pharisee, while the Sadducees thought He would look like a Sadducee
 - Each religious sect believed they were poster children for godliness
 - And so when the Holy One of Israel came, they were sure they could spot Him
- The same thing is still happening today
 - Every pious group believes they've cornered the market on God
 - Mormons believe God is a Mormon living in Utah
 - Muslims believe God is a Muslim in Mecca
 - Catholics think God makes His home in the Vatican
 - And every deeply religious person believes that when they meet God, He'll remind them of themselves
 - Because when people invent ideas about God, we naturally project our preferred assumptions upon Him
 - People do this, never stopping to wonder whether those assumptions are rooted in anything true or real
 - But what about us? What about Christians? Can we do this too?
 - Well, to the extent we rely on the word of God, then we avoid this problem
 - By His Word, we can truly know God and understand Him for Who He has revealed Himself to be
 - But on the other hand, if we depart from a reliance on God's Word, then we too can remake God in ways that affirm our wrong thinking
 - We might remake God into a God of prosperity
 - Or a God of healing or a God of social justice or a God of mystical signs and wonders
 - We project our hopes and desires upon Him, making Him one-dimensional, and in so doing, we diminish God
- The only true and proper way to understand God is by studying what He has revealed to us in His Word about Himself and His purposes
 - We can't imagine something else – something we prefer – and project that thinking onto God, expecting it to be true in the end

- That's not spiritual insight...that's a fantasy
- God is Who He is, and He's very unlike you and me
- God is holy, righteous, pure, omniscient and all powerful
 - We'll never meet anyone or experience anything truly like God this side of Heaven
 - And so when God appeared as Man, our Messiah, Jesus Christ, He affirmed absolutely no one
 - Jesus validated no one, nor do God's true representatives when they are speaking and operating by the Spirit, as was John
- But to the Pharisees and Sadducees, someone like John certainly didn't qualify as a representative of God
 - Even though God's Word told Israel to expect to hear a voice crying in the wilderness, announcing the coming of the Messiah
 - Nevertheless, these religious elites saw nothing in John that looked like the God they had assumed was coming for them
 - Yet these men were members of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council of Israel
 - So they were obligated to investigate and authenticate any Messianic claims
 - And based on their decision, the people of Israel would be instructed on whether to accept or reject John's movement
 - John knew what was going on, of course, and he knew they would oppose him since his message undermined their way of life
 - So John decides to land the first blow
 - In v.7, John calls these men a "brood of vipers"
 - The Greek word translated "brood" is literally the word "offspring"
 - John is calling these men children of a deadly serpent, which is a not-so-subtle reference to Satan
 - Spiritually speaking, John is saying these men were children of the devil
 - And if you think John is being harsh, remember what Jesus said about these same men

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

- John and Jesus both called these men children of Satan, because in a literal sense they were
- Like all unbelievers, these men found their spiritual source in Satan

- They were born with a nature shared with the devil, a nature of sin and rebellion
- Everyone is born this way, according to Scripture, born into sin
 - But the sin of these men goes further, because even as they oppose God, they portray themselves as speaking for God
 - Notice John asks sarcastically, who warned them to flee from the coming judgment
 - Remember, I said last time that John's message included a call to repent because the Kingdom of God was at hand
- But John knew these men hadn't come out in response to his call
 - They weren't afraid of the coming judgment because in their mind, they were going to be just fine
 - Here again, if you imagine God looks and thinks a lot like you, then you're not going to be worried about meeting Him
 - On the other hand, the more you understand your sinfulness and your need for God, the more you will cry out to Him seeking His mercy
- So John warns them in v.8 to do just that, to turn from their sin while they still had opportunity
 - He tells them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance, which was the prerequisite to receiving the baptism of John
 - To bear fruit in keeping with repentance means to demonstrate a true desire to change their sinful ways
 - John told the Pharisees to show some evidence they had repented, which is what John had been telling everyone
 - In Luke's Gospel, we learn some of the ways John was counseling people to bear fruit

Luke 3:10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?"

Luke 3:11 And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise."

Luke 3:12 And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

Luke 3:13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to."

Luke 3:14 Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

- But of course, John knows the religious leaders had no interest in such things
 - So anticipating their response, John refutes one of their common claims: that they were children of Abraham

- The religious leaders taught that being a physical descendant of Abraham was sufficient to assure every Jew entrance into the Kingdom
- They referred to this teaching as “the merits of the fathers”
- It taught that all Jews were credited with the righteousness of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on the basis of their bloodline alone
- And therefore, repentance wasn’t necessary...every Jew held a get-out-of-hell-free card
- John says don’t suppose that you can say this and be assured of Heaven
 - They thought themselves special because they were born into the right family
 - But John says that counts for nothing
- John says God could even raise up children, meaning followers, from stones if necessary
 - In Hebrew, the words “stone” and “children” rhyme, so John is making a play on words, like a schoolyard taunt
 - And it’s literally true, when you remember that God made the first man from dirt
- So, being a child of Abraham was not a notable achievement
 - If God could raise up children of Abraham from stones, then the Pharisees and Sadducees were nothing special
 - No, entrance into the Kingdom and God’s presence starts with repentance
 - A changing of one’s outlook away from sinful rebellion and toward faith in God
 - And John says the opportunity to make that change was drawing short
 - In v.10, John says that the axe is already at the root of the trees, ready to cut down any that doesn’t bear the fruit of repentance
 - John is speaking in metaphor, but his imagery is easy to follow
 - The axe represents the Messiah’s judgment, and as John has been preaching, the time of that judgment was coming soon
 - It was already at the root of the tree, so to speak, ready to judge the tree’s worthiness
 - The trees were the people of Israel, of course, trees God had “planted” in the hope they would produce good fruit for the Master
 - The fruit pictures a person’s deeds done in keeping with repentance
 - So those Jews who demonstrate a true, heartfelt repentance in anticipation of God’s mercy were the ones producing good fruit
 - Now a farmer would never cut down a tree that was producing good fruit...he would let it stand and continue producing
 - But a farmer eventually cuts down unproductive trees
 - So John was teaching that those who accepted John’s baptism in anticipation of Jesus’ coming were going to withstand the coming judgment

- But those who failed to bear good fruit would be judged worthless and suitable only to be thrown into the fire, which is a picture of hell
- That was going to be the fate of these religious rulers
- Next, John elaborates some more on that coming judgment

Matt. 3:11 “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matt. 3:12 “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

- John opens saying, “as for me, I baptize with water”
 - In saying this, John is describing the nature of his ministry, of course
 - But he’s also diminishing his importance as well
 - His ministry was *merely* one of baptizing in water, a symbolic action
 - Now his ministry was important, yes, but only because it pointed to the Messiah’s greater ministry which was soon to come
 - John says that the one “who is coming after me is mightier than I”
 - John appreciated that his personal ministry was nothing if it did not glorify Christ
 - His ministry was a success only if it led people to Jesus
 - I think that’s a safe rule for how we should conduct our own personal ministries, too
 - If what you’re saying or doing brings people to Jesus Christ...
 - To knowing Him in faith, to following Him in obedience, to serving Him in love...
 - Then you’re on the right track
- On the other hand, if our efforts in ministry do little more than call attention to ourselves or draw people to following us, then we’ve gone wrong somewhere
 - We’re following in the footsteps of the Pharisees, thinking we have something inherently worthy inside us that God needs
 - Remember, God once spoke through the mouth of a donkey in the Old Testament
 - So what great thing of value do you think you bring to this relationship?
 - We need to think like John the Baptist, who said elsewhere speaking of Jesus, “He must increase but I must decrease”
 - John knew his place, because he understood his place in relationship to the Son of God
 - In v.11, John says he was not even worthy to carry Jesus’ sandals

- Carrying another man's sandals meant something very specific to Jews in that day
 - The Talmud describes the duties of a slave as including taking a master's dirty shoes off his feet at night
 - And carrying his clothes to the bathhouse
- So John was clearly saying he was so unworthy in comparison to Jesus that he could not even qualify to be Jesus' slave
 - And of course, if John the Baptist is not worthy to qualify as Jesus' slave, then how could any of us qualify to be Jesus' slave?
 - Yet the Bible calls Christians slaves or servants of Christ
 - How can we be servants of the Messiah if we aren't worthy?
- The answer is grace
 - Unmerited favor...God giving us a position of honor and blessing that we don't deserve
 - And doing so merely on the basis of His mercy and love
- That's what John was preaching to these men and to these crowds
 - He was telling these leaders they couldn't merit what they thought they had coming
 - You could only have it through repenting and seeking God's mercy and grace
 - And the Lord was prepared to grant mercy to those who humble themselves in this way
- Finally, John issues a final warning to these men, saying that the One Who follows John will conduct a much more powerful type of baptism
 - At the end of v.11, John says the coming Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire
 - To understand what John is saying, you have to visualize the scene taking place here
 - In this moment, picture John by the river, with a crowd of followers waiting to be baptized
 - At the edge of the crowd stand these religious leaders looking on and scoffing
 - So as John speaks these words in v.11, imagine John beginning with his eyes scanning the repentant crowd of followers seeking God's forgiveness
 - To these people, John says the coming Messiah will baptize you in a much greater way
 - He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit
 - Of course, we know John is referring prophetically to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that came upon the Church at Pentecost
 - But now, as John continues his sentence, his gaze shifts from the crowd to those scowling faces of the religious leaders

- And as John's eyes meet theirs, he completes his thought "...and fire"
- That is to say, Jesus will baptize these hard-hearted unbelievers not with the Holy Spirit but with fire, a judgment fire
- John had just used that same metaphor of fire burning to describe the future destiny of anyone who did not repent
- So here, John pointedly says these unrepentant religious leaders would see a baptism too... a baptism of fire
- John has presented a clear and stark choice
 - Either we are baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit
 - Or else we will be baptized by Jesus with judgment fire
 - Either we are consumed by His forgiveness and mercy
 - Or else, we will be consumed by His wrath
 - There is no third option
- And just to make sure we get the point, John gives us one more metaphor
 - In v.12, John uses the metaphor of a harvest, of Jesus harvesting the good grain (*i.e.*, the "fruit") while consuming the chaff
 - Harvesting is a common metaphor in the Bible...we're going to see it multiple times in Matthew's Gospel
 - It pictures God coming to claim those who are His, while separating out those who are not
 - The grain seed (which is the fruit of the stalk) is harvested because it is valuable and desirable to God
 - While the chaff is cast off and burned because it is worthless
 - So will it be for all humanity at God's judgment
 - And to be clear, the Bible's not talking about living a perfect life to earn God's favor or maintaining a "church" life
 - John is talking about a true heart change
 - Truly turning away from our old thinking and beliefs and toward a new understanding of God
 - Of recognizing our own unworthiness before God and accepting His mercy given to us through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ
 - That's bearing fruit
 - So to paraphrase John's words, don't suppose for yourselves that you came from a good Christian family and that's good enough to get you into Heaven
 - And don't suppose that because you have a Godly spouse or parent, that you get credit by association
 - And don't think that the time will go on forever and there will be no judgment
 - Or that you get some second chance to know and receive Christ

- We each get one life, the Bible says, and then comes judgment
 - And since we don't know when our life ends, then just as John said, God's axe is laid at our tree
 - One day we face Him, one day we will be held to account
 - When we come to that day...a day some of us may face very soon...will we be ready?
 - Will we go into that moment like a Pharisee?
 - Proud of your heritage, proud of your knowledge and accomplishments
 - Assured of your eternal future, or so you think, merely because of these worthless accomplishments?
 - You're cold-hearted and hard-headed
 - Unwilling to admit your sin before God, unmoved by God's Word
 - And unable to accept God's mercy
 - Or maybe you take life like a Sadducee?
 - Too sophisticated to believe in supernatural things, like a spirit or resurrection or the Kingdom
 - So absorbed by earthly things and worldly power and wealth that you're unconcerned about what lies beyond this world
 - You don't have time for God or the Bible, much less to consider a judgment or hell
 - You're blissfully ignorant and determined to stay that way
 - Or maybe you're like one of John's followers
 - You know yourself...you know who you are and what you've done, things you're not proud of
 - And you believe what you read in the Bible, that of God and His holiness and of a coming judgment and of hell and eternal punishment
 - You know the end of the world is coming, or at the very least, you know your life will end one day
 - And when that day comes, you want to be ready to face the Lord
 - So like those men and women, who streamed out to see John by the Jordan, you're eager to receive God's mercy
 - You dearly want His assurance that He has forgiven you
 - You want to know your sins have been forgiven and that you have peace with God
 - So who are you? The good, the bad or the ugly?
 - If you think you're good enough for Heaven and so you don't need to worry about repenting, then friend, let me say you are overestimating yourself
 - And if you're the bad boy or girl who rebels against authority assuming that

there is no coming judgment, then friend, you are underestimating God

- And if you know you're ugly, a sinner who needs God's mercy and desires to have Christ's payment on the cross to cover your debt before God, then friend, let me assure you that you have it now
- The Bible says

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

Rom. 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

- In our previous study, we learned about Sadducees and Pharisees, the antagonists in the story of the Gospel
 - We'll have opportunity to talk more about them many times during our study of Matthew's Gospel
 - So for now, let's set them aside to move forward in the chapter
 - Tonight, we pick up in Chapter 3 at v.13 with the first mention in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus as an adult
 - And it comes at the moment Jesus begins His ministry, the moment when He transitions from private life to public life

Matt. 3:13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.

Matt. 3:14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"

Matt. 3:15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.

Matt. 3:16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him,

Matt. 3:17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

- Jesus travels out from His home in Galilee to find John, seeking to be baptized
 - John immediately objects to Jesus' request
 - John says to Jesus that he (John) had need to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around
 - Naturally, we assume that John knew Jesus was the Messiah
 - And therefore, John felt it was inappropriate for him to baptize Jesus
 - But in reality, the opposite was actually true
 - At the moment these two men met in the desert, John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah
 - For if John had known Jesus was the Promised One, he would have been willing to baptize Jesus without question
 - Let me explain...
- To understand this situation properly, we need to consult John's Gospel where John the Baptist retells the story of this encounter

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:30 “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’

John 1:31 “I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.”

John 1:32 John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

John 1:33 “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’

John 1:34 “I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

- Notice first, that this passage begins with the phrase “the next day”
 - We’re on the day after John baptized Jesus, and on that day, John knows Jesus is the Messiah
 - How does John say he came to learn of Jesus’ true identity?
 - He says it was because after he baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove and landed on Jesus
- But then in v.31, John adds that he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah before that moment...and he repeats this statement in v.33
 - So John didn’t know Jesus was the Messiah when Jesus came asking for baptism
 - He only knew after the event took place
- And why was John so determined to convince us that he didn’t know in advance?
 - I think it’s because it probably seemed suspicious that John names his own cousin as the Messiah
 - People might have questioned why John selected a family member to be the Messiah
 - To defend his choice, John insists he didn’t know in advance...
 - Only after the baptism had completed, did the dove appear to confirm Jesus’ true identity
 - This was the sign God told John to watch for, to know the Messiah
- Now if John the Baptist was in the dark about Jesus’ true identity, then we can be certain everyone else was too
 - This fact reinforces for us the true humanity of Christ
 - He lived an absolutely normal human life, because He *was* fully human
 - Jesus was not a superhuman or Clark Kent figure who could stop bullets and see through walls
 - Jesus’ life prior to this moment was unremarkable
 - He truly was just a man, without anything to suggest He was God and the Creator

- Yet, Jesus was sinless, so apparently a person can live a sinless life without drawing much attention to himself
 - I know the feeling (*joke*)
 - This would also explain why the Gospels contain so little detail of Jesus' early years
 - Why record details of a mundane, ordinary life?
- So John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah until after the baptism happened
 - He only learned the truth because he saw the sign God foretold of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove after he baptized Jesus
 - And even if John had thought Jesus might be the Messiah, that would have *increased* John's desire to baptize Jesus
 - After all, the Lord had told John that he would learn the Messiah's identity by a baptism of the Holy Spirit
 - So if John had suspected Jesus was the Messiah, John could only have confirmed his suspicions by going through with the baptism
 - So if John didn't suspect Jesus was the Messiah, why did he hesitate to baptize Jesus?
 - I think the reason goes back to Jesus' sinless nature
 - Remember, John probably knew Jesus well...they were cousins only 6 months apart in age
 - They probably grew up playing together from time to time
 - And so, John surely knew his cousin was the last person who needed to repent of a godless, sinful life
 - Remember, John was ministering to tax collectors, Roman soldiers and prostitutes, the lowest of the low, performing a baptism of repentance
 - These people knew they were far from God
 - They were ashamed of their lives and felt convicted to get right with God
 - They were repenting, seeking to change their lives and to return to God
 - But Jesus...Jesus was a blameless, upright man
 - John knew Jesus to be the one person in the family Who always seemed to do and say the right thing...the loving, selfless thing
 - So of all the people John knew, Jesus was easily the last one who needed to receive his baptism
- So when John saw his godly cousin, Jesus, coming out to join that rogues' gallery of repentant sinners, John was incredulous
 - John says if one of us should be repenting to the other, it should be me repenting to you, Jesus
 - John wasn't calling Jesus the Messiah
 - He was simply saying I have more sin than you do, so I need you to baptize me

- Of course, John was both right and wrong
- On the one hand, John was right that he had more sin than Jesus
 - In fact, John didn't realize how right he was
 - John had infinitely more sin than Jesus because Jesus was perfect, sinless, God incarnate
- But John was also wrong to think that Jesus shouldn't be baptized
 - Because Jesus wasn't coming to receive a baptism of repentance
 - Jesus had no need to repent
 - He was coming to John to serve a difference purpose
 - Jesus was obeying the command of His Father and ensuring that John would likewise obey his calling
- Specifically, Jesus says this moment was fitting to fulfill all righteousness
 - The Greek word translated fitting literally means to be clearly seen
 - In other words, Jesus is saying, "in doing this, we will be displaying righteousness as we obey the Father"
 - Jesus didn't need to be baptized for repentance, but He did need to receive John's baptism to be obedient to the Father
 - And that meant it was required to fulfill all righteousness
 - But if Jesus' baptism by John wasn't a baptism for repentance, what specifically did it achieve?
 - First, it served as the capstone moment in John's ministry of announcing the coming Messiah
 - John was raised up by God as the voice crying in the wilderness, declaring the Messiah was soon to arrive
 - For the past 6 months or so, John had been obeying that call, baptizing all those who believed his message
 - And now that the Father was ready to reveal Jesus as Messiah, John's ministry was coming to an end
 - It was time for John to step aside, to retire so to speak, and handoff to Jesus
 - That handoff would take place through a baptism moment
 - So the act of John lowering Jesus into the water and raising Him up, symbolized John's passing the baton to Jesus
- Secondly, Jesus' baptism served as the moment the Father unveiled Jesus as Messiah, empowering Him to begin His public ministry
 - In v.16, Matthew says that as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened
 - And at that moment, John saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Jesus
 - The resting of the Spirit of God upon Jesus is the moment Jesus obtained

supernatural power

- The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to accomplish the miracles He used to authenticate Himself to the crowds
- This the mystery of God taking on flesh
 - Paul describes it this way

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

- Before coming to Earth, Christ existed in the form of God
- God's form is a mystery to us, but whatever that form is, Jesus had it
- He had equality with God, or as John says, Jesus the Word was with God and was God
- Yet Jesus did not consider His position something to be grasped or to cling to
 - He was willing to forgo His form as God and His position of equality with the Father
 - To do that, Christ had to empty Himself – literally in Greek, it means Jesus made His form void, putting it aside
- And in the place of the form of God, Jesus assumed the form of a man, a servant of God
 - Can a man walk on water? Can a man heal disease with just his word? Can a man raise people from the dead?
 - No, only God can do those things
- And when Jesus emptied Himself, giving up the form and power of God, to take on the form of flesh, He gave up the ability to do these things
 - Jesus never gave up His identity...He was always God
 - But when He became man, Jesus did give up His form as God and His power as God
- In other words, Jesus didn't just look like a man, He was a man
 - The writer of Hebrews, quoting the Psalms, puts it this way:

Heb. 2:6 But one has testified somewhere, saying,
“What is man, that You remember him?
Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him?
Heb. 2:7 “You have made him for a little while lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And have appointed him over the works of Your hands;

- The Father made Jesus a little lower than angels for a while

- Who is lower than an angel? Mankind
- This is what it meant for Jesus to become man...it meant entering into the very Creation He made
- And by entering into it, He chose to become limited by it
- So if Jesus were to perform miracles to authenticate His ministry and message, where would the power for those miracles come from?
 - The answer is, the Holy Spirit
 - The Third Person of the Godhead came upon the Second Person of the Godhead to empower Him for His ministry on earth
 - By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus validated His claims to the Messiah, the Son of God foretold in Scripture
 - So every time Jesus performed a miracle before the people, it was actually a work or testimony of the Holy Spirit
 - The Holy Spirit testified that Jesus was the Messiah
- We can see multiple examples in Scripture confirming this understanding
 - First, the Gospels make frequent mention of the Spirit's role in directing and empowering Jesus' ministry
 - In Matthew 4, we'll see Jesus led into the wilderness by the Spirit
 - In Matthew 12, we'll see Jesus Himself crediting the Spirit for His power to cast out demons
 - In that same chapter, Jesus says that when the Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus' miracles, they were guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit
 - Also, Luke reports that Jesus' communion with the Father while He lived on earth was made possible by the Holy Spirit
 - It was as if the Spirit served as a conduit connecting Jesus with the Father in Heaven
 - And this conduit operated in both directions
 - Because in Acts, we're told that God revealed His will to Jesus and the apostles by means of the Holy Spirit
 - Then, we find an intriguing moment in Mark's gospel when Jesus could not perform miracles in His hometown, Nazareth

Mark 6:1 Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him.

Mark 6:2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"

Mark 6:3 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and

Joshua and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.

Mark 6:4 Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.”

Mark 6:5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

Mark 6:6 And He wondered at their unbelief...

- Mark says Jesus could not perform miracles in Nazareth, except for a few isolated healings
- Mark didn't say Jesus “would” not perform miracles, but rather Jesus “could” not perform them
- Clearly, Jesus wasn't in full control of when and where He used His miraculous power
 - Jesus was dependent on the Spirit to empower Him for ministry according to the will of the Father
 - Since the Nazarenes refused to believe in Jesus, the Spirit declined to do more than a few miracles
- Finally, it's notable that there is no record of Jesus performing any miracles prior to His baptism
 - Jesus' very first miracle was turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana
 - That event happened in the week following His baptism with John
- So in taking on flesh, Jesus voluntarily relinquished His form as God along with His power
 - Therefore, Jesus required the power of the Holy Spirit to perform the miracles He would do in His earthly ministry
 - And the moment the Holy Spirit arrived to begin that work, was when Jesus received His baptism
 - Jesus' water baptism provided a picture to the onlookers around the river, a symbolic representation of the arrival of the Holy Spirit
 - So that just as Jesus' physical body was immersed in water, so was Jesus' spirit immersed with the Holy Spirit
 - Now Matthew also tells us that Jesus' baptism was accompanied by a theophany, or a physical manifestation of God
 - The Holy Spirit's arrival was portrayed as a dove landing on Jesus
 - Obviously, the Holy Spirit is not a dove, so this was a vision God created to communicate the Spirit's arrival
 - But the choice of a dove was significant
 - The first mention of the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2 uses a Hebrew verb translated as “fluttering”
 - It is commonly used to describe a mother bird hovering over her nest

- Jewish rabbis had concluded that the Spirit took the form of a dove as it fluttered in Genesis 1:2
- So to a Jew, the dove was a clear symbol of the Spirit
- And then to make sure John got the message, the Father spoke from Heaven testifying that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah
 - He was the One in whom the Father is well-pleased
 - To be well-pleased is a typical biblical understatement...the Father is saying He couldn't be more pleased than He is in His Son
 - This is the first of three times the voice of the Father is spoken audibly from Heaven in support of His Son
- But remember, this vision and the voice were only witnessed by John
 - John alone was told to look for such a vision as confirmation of the Messiah
 - No one else in that moment was privy to this vision
 - Notice in v.16, the text says "he" (singular) saw the heavens open and the dove descend, not "they"
 - And in John's Gospel, John the Baptist says that he saw this sign and he testifies that Jesus is the Son of God
 - In other words, the crowds were expected to receive John's word as the prophet of God
 - The word of the prophet alone was to be sufficient, and the baptism moment served as the moment for that testimony
 - Only John needed supernatural confirmation to ensure he understood the truth he was to proclaim
 - That's still true today generally...God reveals Himself to His people by the word of His prophets in our Bible
 - Those men received supernatural manifestations of God in many cases, to validate they were hearing from God
 - But we're expected to receive their testimony on the basis of faith
- So the very next day, John the Baptist was declaring that Jesus was the Lamb of God
 - But John still didn't fully grasp all that was coming for his cousin
 - He knew Jesus was to be a sacrifice for sin, but John didn't immediately appreciate that Jesus would also reign as King
 - In fact, later in the Gospel of Luke, we find John the Baptist sending some of his followers to ask Jesus if He was the Expected One?

Luke 7:19 Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"

- John's question is confusing to us

- John seemed completely convinced of Jesus' identity the day after His baptism
- So why was John still wondering months later?
- John had been influenced by a misunderstanding of Scripture by the Jewish rabbis of that day
 - Over the centuries, the rabbis of Israel had read Old Testament passages that foretold a Messiah dying for the sins of Israel
 - They had concluded God was sending a suffering prophet to die for the sins of His people
 - But they also read OT passages declaring a Messiah would reign over a worldwide Kingdom
 - So they also concluded that God would send Israel a conquering King to sit on the seat of David
 - Since they couldn't understand how one Messiah could both die and conquer, the rabbis concluded that God would send two Messiahs
 - One Messiah would be a suffering servant sent to die, while another Messiah would come as a conquering, reigning King
 - Obviously, we know the rabbis came to the wrong conclusion
 - There would not to be two coming Messiahs...there would be one Messiah who would arrive twice
 - Jesus came the first time as a suffering prophet to die for our sins
 - And He will return to earth a second time in power and glory to reign over all the earth as King
 - In the meantime, He lives to intercede for us with the Father as our High Priest
 - So after the dove arrived, John realized that Jesus was the suffering prophet, the Lamb of God
 - But later, John starts to wonder if Jesus might be more than just the suffering servant
 - Perhaps Jesus would also be Israel's conquering King
 - So to be sure of his suspicions, John sent His disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Expected One, meaning the other Messiah
 - Jesus' answer to John confirmed that Jesus fulfilled all the Messianic promises, not just some
- So John's baptism of Jesus brought John's ministry to an end and it began Jesus' ministry...but it served one more purpose
 - It established a model for Jesus' followers to repeat so we can identify with our Lord
 - Just as Jesus received water baptism to fulfill all righteousness so are His followers called to do the same
 - As Jesus commanded at the end of Matthew, in a passage commonly called the Great Commission

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Matt. 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Matt. 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- As I mentioned in an earlier week, the Greek word translated baptize means to dip
 - So the concept of baptism is to be immersed or dipped into water
 - Furthermore, notice that in the text in v.16. Matthew describes Jesus as “coming up” from the water
 - You don’t come up out of a sprinkling experience
 - Plus, if all John wanted to do was sprinkle people with water, he wouldn’t have needed to travel all the way to the Jordan river to baptize
- So from all evidence, the biblical act of baptism is always and only immersion of the entire body into water
 - Sprinkling some part of a person’s body does not constitute a baptism
 - That is merely a manmade ritual with no spiritual significance
 - And so it does not substitute for a baptism
- Furthermore, only a proper baptism fulfills righteousness, as Jesus said to John
 - Because only full immersion in water can serve the purpose God had in instituting baptism, both for Jesus and for us
 - The imagery of baptism is very specific and quite profound
 - Paul explains the meaning of baptism in Romans 6

Rom. 6:3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

Rom. 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Rom. 6:5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,

- Paul makes a comparison between baptism and Jesus’ death and resurrection
 - Paul is talking about our baptism by the Holy Spirit
 - When we placed our faith in Jesus Christ, confessed Him and were saved by our faith, we received the Holy Spirit
 - Scripture calls the moment the Holy Spirit came to dwell inside of us, the baptism of the Holy Spirit

- Every believer has this experience at the moment they come to faith in Jesus
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit is how we are born again spiritually
 - So just as our Lord had the Spirit of God land upon Him, so have we received the Holy Spirit also
 - Jesus blazed the path that we follow by faith in Him
- Paul says that the baptism of the Holy Spirit resulted in our spirit being identified with Christ
 - So that by our faith, what is true for Christ has been credited to our heavenly account
 - Beginning with His death on the cross
 - So Paul says we have been baptized by our faith into Christ's death, so that when the Father looks upon His children he no longer sees our sins
 - By the arrival of the Holy Spirit, we are united with Christ in His death so that our sins rested on Christ as He hung on that cross – they died with Christ
 - But more than that, Paul says we have also been united with Christ in His resurrection
 - Once again, because the Holy Spirit has come to live in us, we will follow in Christ's footsteps
 - So though Christ died, yet He lived again, rising from the dead by the glory of the Father
 - And so will those who have placed their faith in Him
 - So by the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the moment we believed in Jesus, we immediately came to share in His death and in His resurrection
 - We don't need to die to pay for our own sins
 - Christ's death has paid that price for us
 - And we don't need to worry that the death of our body will be the end of us
 - Because the same Spirit Who raised Jesus' body will raise us
- But we share one more aspect of baptism with Jesus...no one can see the moment the Spirit came to live in us
 - That crowd that surrounded Jesus didn't see the Spirit
 - They didn't hear God's voice
 - They only saw Jesus' body enter the water and come back up
 - Similarly, when you came to faith in Jesus Christ, no one saw a dove landing on you
 - You didn't start to glow or levitate
 - You believed, you confessed, you were saved
 - The Spirit came to make His home in your heart, but that moment was invisible to everyone
 - But just as the Father didn't want Jesus to remain a secret, neither does He want

Jesus' followers to remain invisible

- He wants us to testify, and to help us accomplish that purpose, He has given us the beautiful picture of water baptism
- As a believer enters the water to be baptized, he or she is telling a story, a spiritual story, a story that can only be told in pictures
- The water of our baptism represents the earth, the ground in which we bury dead bodies
 - So as a believer is lowered into the water, we're picturing the burial of a body
 - And as we raise that person up out of the water, we're picturing resurrection
 - That's a physical picture of what has already happened by the Spirit in our hearts
- Just as Jesus was immersed in water to represent His immersion by the Holy Spirit, we too are called to do the same
 - We enter water to testify that we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ's death and resurrection
 - No one saw the Spirit, but anyone can see the water
- Now perhaps this is the first time you've understood the baptism in this way, in the way the Bible explains it
 - The baptism Jesus commanded for His Church follows in His footsteps
 - First, it's an act to fulfill righteousness, meaning to obey God
 - Water baptism does not make us righteous any more than Jesus' baptism made Him righteous
 - Secondly, water baptism is a coming-out party of sorts
 - It associates us with Jesus, declaring us to be followers of the Messiah
 - Just as Jesus' water baptism announced Him to the world as our Messiah
 - Thirdly, our water baptism inaugurates our public service in the body of Christ, just as it began Jesus' public ministry
 - Our opportunity to serve the Lord is set loose when we obey the call to be baptized
 - Because the first command every believer receives is to be baptized
 - But if we will not obey His first command, Jesus isn't going to move on to step #2
 - He will wait with us, expecting us to do what we've been asked
- Finally, just as Jesus' baptism marked a transition between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry, so does our baptism mark a transition
 - Every believer has an old life and a new life, an old self and a new self
 - Depending on when you came to know Jesus, that old life might have been rather brief or it might have been decades

- But regardless, every believer has a before and after story
- The moment of your faith in Jesus is a private dividing line between those two worlds
- But your water baptism is the public dividing point, the moment when you embraced your new life and declared it was all you wanted
- Every believer is expected to follow the Lord's footsteps in baptism, as in everything else
 - That's why we're called Christians...the word literally means "little Christs"
 - It was originally coined to mock Jesus' followers, but the Church soon embraced it because it's a perfect description of what we want to be
- Now perhaps when you were an infant, your parents took you to a church and had someone sprinkle water on your head
 - They dressed you up, took pictures, got a certificate and had a party
 - And thereafter, they told you that you were baptized
 - If that's the only kind of "baptism" you've ever received, then on the authority of Scripture, I must tell you that you have never been baptized
 - If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ but you have never walked into the water to be baptized as Jesus commanded, then you still owe Jesus a baptism
 - We would love to help you obey that command, to fulfill all righteousness in your walk with Christ
 - VBVF will hold a baptism later this Spring, and we want to include anyone who has placed their faith in Jesus, but has yet to receive baptism
 - If that's you, then please see me immediately after this service so I can discuss it with you

- Last week, we studied Jesus' baptism
 - And as we did, we focused on the purpose and meaning of that event
 - Specifically, why Jesus came for a baptism of water
 - We said Jesus wasn't coming to receive a baptism of repentance, as were the other people by the river
 - Jesus needed no repentance
 - Instead, Jesus was coming to be baptized for other reasons
 - As I taught last week, Jesus' baptism accomplished several things
 - As Jesus told John, His baptism was fitting to fulfill all righteousness
 - Or we could say Jesus' baptism was a public act of obedience to the Father, necessary for righteousness
 - First, this moment was the handoff point between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry
 - Secondly, it inaugurated Jesus' public ministry, made possible by the baptism of the Holy Spirit to equip Jesus
 - Finally, it established a pattern for Jesus' disciples to repeat as we follow in His footsteps
 - Then as Jesus was baptized, the Father confirmed His pleasure in Jesus' obedience
 - The Father said Jesus was His beloved Son in Whom He was well-pleased
 - A ringing endorsement by God of the One sent to earth to redeem mankind from their sins
 - The Father's statement was only heard by John the Baptist, Matthew told us
 - But undoubtedly, John reported it to others so they could know that Jesus was the long-awaited Son of God
 - And eventually, John's testimony was recorded in the Gospels for everyone to know
- But as the Father revealed the identity of His Son, there was someone else listening on that day, someone else who heard the Father's words
 - He is a powerful and important character in the story of Jesus, and he too, desperately desired to know the identity of the Messiah
 - He waited nearby that day, watching the proceedings intently and listening to every word
 - He knew the time for the Messiah's arrival was at hand, and he expected John the Baptist to lead him to Him sooner or later
 - But like everyone else, this powerful figure had no choice but to wait by the river until John revealed the Son of God
 - In fact, by the time of Jesus' baptism, this character had been waiting longer – much longer – than anyone else on earth
 - He hadn't just been waiting years or even a lifetime...he had been waiting for

millennia

- His name was Lucifer, otherwise known as Satan
 - He had been waiting for the Father to reveal the Messiah so he could destroy that Promised One
 - Because Satan knew this Messiah was coming to destroy him
- Satan first appears in the third chapter of the Bible, when he confronts Woman in the Garden and ultimately tempts her and Man into sin
 - At that point, Satan's already full of hatred for God and speaking nothing but lies
 - So we wonder, how did Satan become this horrible adversary of God?
 - Surely, God did not create Satan this way, for we know the Lord is not the source of evil
 - Satan's backstory is important to understanding what's happening in Matthew 4, so let's take a moment to do some homework
 - Our homework takes us out of the Gospel of Matthew for a little while tonight, back to the Old Testament, beginning in Ezekiel

Ezek. 28:12 “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God,
“You had the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

Ezek. 28:13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;
The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;
And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
Was in you.
On the day that you were created
They were prepared.

Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,

From the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;

You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.

I cast you to the ground;

I put you before kings,

That they may see you.

Ezek. 28:18 “By the multitude of your iniquities,

In the unrighteousness of your trade

You profaned your sanctuaries.

Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;

It has consumed you,

And I have turned you to ashes on the earth

In the eyes of all who see you.

Ezek. 28:19 “All who know you among the peoples

Are appalled at you;

You have become terrified

And you will cease to be forever.”””

- This passage describes Satan, called the “King of Tyre,” falling from a place of honor to become who we know him to be today
 - Time doesn’t permit me to examine this passage with you in depth (that must wait for the resumption of our Ezekiel study later this year)
 - So for our purposes in studying Matthew 4, let’s focus on three details from this passage
 - First, in v.12, notice Satan’s original created nature
 - Satan was created in perfection, just like everything God creates
 - Ezekiel says Satan was created full of wisdom and perfect in beauty
 - The word “full” in Hebrew carries the sense of completeness or an abundance
 - And “perfect” can mean entirely consumed
 - So Satan was complete in wisdom and completely consumed in beauty
 - That means that no created thing possessed greater wisdom or was more beautiful than Satan
 - Imagine the wisest person who ever lived
 - Consider the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen in Creation
 - Satan exceeded both
 - Furthermore, the Lord testifies in v.15 that Satan was blameless in his ways from the day of his creation
 - Satan was without sin, perfectly obedient to the Father from the beginning of his existence
 - Which confirms that God did not establish sin – neither the sin of mankind, nor

the sin of Satan

- Secondly, in v.14, notice what job God assigned Satan as his service in Heaven
 - The text says Satan was the "covering cherub"
 - Cherubim are the highest order of heavenly beings, and Satan was the wisest and most beautiful of these angelic creatures
 - Scripture says Satan is one of these creatures
 - Moreover, Satan held the most coveted position in Creation, serving God as the covering cherub
 - That phrase may ring a bell for you, because it comes from the instructions given to Moses on how to build the tabernacle
 - Specifically, cherubim were part of the design of the Ark of the Covenant, which we hear about in Exodus

Ex. 37:6 He made a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.

Ex. 37:7 He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat;

Ex. 37:8 one cherub at the one end and one cherub at the other end; he made the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at the two ends.

Ex. 37:9 The cherubim had their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces toward each other; the faces of the cherubim were toward the mercy seat.

- The Ark was a rectangular box covered in gold
- The lid of the Ark was called the mercy seat
- The lid was called a seat not because someone sat on it, but because the glory of the Lord would rest on it in the tabernacle
- To honor and protect the glory of the Lord, the lid included two golden cherubim standing on either end
 - The cherubim had wings that stretched over the center of the lid, forming a canopy
 - That's why the cherubim were called covering cherubim, because their wings covered God's glory
 - In the book of Hebrews, we're told that the plans God gave Moses for building the earthly tabernacle were based on a heavenly pattern
 - Specifically, Hebrews says the earthly tabernacle was modeled after a heavenly tabernacle that operates in God's presence
 - Which means the design of the Ark for Israel's tabernacle was based on the Ark that resides in the heavenly tabernacle
 - So just like the earthly tabernacle had covering cherubim, so the heavenly tabernacle had a real covering cherub

- And that cherub was none other than Satan himself
- Thirdly, in Ezekiel 28:16-18, the Lord describes the moment of Satan's fall into sin
 - Scripture says the first sin happened because of the abundance of Satan's trade
 - Because of Satan's lofty position, he was filled internally with violence and then he sinned
 - Satan was personally covering the glory of God in the heavenly tabernacle
 - No created thing was closer to God's presence than Satan
 - Furthermore, Satan knew he was special, beautiful and more powerful than anything else in Creation
 - So one day, Satan's special qualities and his unique place near the glory of God caused his heart to be lifted up (pride) and to be filled with violence
 - Violence is a physical act of force intended to kill, steal or destroy
 - So what violent physical act did Satan perpetrate?
 - He tried to take the mercy seat by force, seating himself in the place of God
 - In v.18, we're told Satan's attempted coup profaned the heavenly sanctuary, leaving it defiled
 - At that point, the Lord rejected Satan, casting him from the heavenly tabernacle to the earth, where he later corrupted mankind
 - Notice in v.19, the Lord also declared that Satan would one day be judged for his sin
 - He would cease to be forever
 - Later, after the fall in the Garden, the Lord clarified that Satan's defeat would come at the hands of the Messiah
 - That the Son of God would personally defeat and condemn Satan for his rebellion
 - There's a certain irony to all this
 - Under the Law, the mercy seat in the tabernacle was the place of atonement
 - It's called the "mercy" seat because it was the place Israel received mercy from God for their sin
 - But before Satan fell, there was no need for a mercy seat because there was no sin to forgive
 - So I wonder if while Satan stood guarding a heavenly mercy seat, he ever stopped to wonder why does my job even exist?
- So having fallen, Satan goes on the prowl over the whole earth like a lion, full of pride and violence, opposing God and God's people
 - Satan still desires to take God's place, but now, he also has a new goal
 - He intends to destroy that Promised One coming to defeat him
 - He doesn't know Who it will be or when He will arrive

- But Satan knew that if he could destroy the coming seed or if he could tempt Him into sin, then the Messiah would fail
- So Satan has remained ever vigilant, taking any opportunity he can to strike against anyone that could threaten him
 - For example, Satan struck at the first generation of the “seed” of Adam and Eve corrupting the first son, Cain, and murdering the second son, Abel
 - Later, he tried to corrupt the seed of men by ordering his demons to mate with women to produce the Nephilim of Genesis 6
 - But each time, the Lord sidestepped Satan’s efforts to preserve the line of the seed
- Later, when the Lord revealed that the Promised Seed would come through the descendants of Jacob, Satan began to focus his hatred against Jews
 - He tried to use Pharaoh to destroy all the male children of Israel
 - But God granted Moses an escape
 - Over the centuries, Satan continued battling Israel, either to destroy them or corrupt their line to stop the coming of Messiah
 - But each time, the Lord has protected His Son to ensure He could arrive as promised
- But now, the time has come for that protection to be withdrawn, for Jesus to face the enemy not as a conquering King, but as a mere man
 - Jesus has lived for about 30 years in quiet and anonymity
 - When His family returned from Egypt and settled in Nazareth, Satan didn’t know Jesus’ identity
 - No one knew His identity, except Mary and Joseph
 - But now, the Father has announced to the entire spiritual world that Jesus is the One the Father promised to bring
 - The word is out and of course, Satan immediately takes a personal interest in destroying this One
 - For so long, he sought to find and kill this Man sent to destroy him
 - And now he has him, and we can only imagine how eager Satan must have been to kill or corrupt the Messiah
 - That’s what we’re going to study in Chapter 4, the effort Satan made to compromise Jesus so that he could nullify Jesus’ mission
 - But now, you also know why it’s important to understand the nature of the incarnation, of God taking the form of man as Jesus did
 - If you enter into the story of Jesus’ temptations thinking that Jesus retained His omnipotent powers, then the temptations seem a bit silly
 - Like a child trying to sink a naval battleship by throwing pebbles at its side
 - It hardly seems like a fair fight, and we certainly don’t perceive Jesus as having been in jeopardy

- For that matter, even Jesus' long period of fasting might seem like much ado about nothing since God has infinite power
- But that's not how to approach Chapter 4 of Matthew
 - As I mentioned last week, in His identity Jesus was fully God, no less deity than He was while in Heaven
 - But as Paul taught us, Jesus emptied Himself, not counting His equality with God the Father something he had to keep
 - Instead, he voluntarily relinquished His form and position, the things that made Him equal with the Father
 - And instead, our God took the form of man, full man, sharing all the same physical, mental and emotional limitations we know
 - Including the ability to experience temptation
 - Remember, Scripture says this about God:

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

- God in His heavenly form, His full and true form, cannot be tempted by evil
- So had Satan come before Jesus in His full form as God, Jesus could never have been tempted
- Chapter 4 would have been a completely meaningless chapter of the Bible
- But then, we hear this concerning Jesus while in the form of man in the book of Hebrews

Heb. 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Heb. 2:18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

- Jesus was made like us, that is, He became a man no different than we are so He could take our place in death as a propitiation
- And along the way to the cross, Hebrews says Jesus was tempted in the things He suffered
- Obviously, that refers to the temptation to avoid the pain of the cross
- We can certainly understand Jesus' feeling that way, because that's the way any one of us would feel if we were in His shoes
 - But that's exactly the point I'm making from Scripture
 - Jesus was just like us...feeling the temptation to do the wrong things, except He never succumbed to that temptation

- As Hebrews says again

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

- So if God in His eternal form cannot be tempted, yet Jesus in His human form was tempted, then clearly Jesus was not superman, He was just man. His identity was God, but his form was man
 - He did not have superpowers, which is why the Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism
 - But that also means Satan's attacks had real effect
 - Jesus was placed in jeopardy
 - Had he succumbed to Satan's attacks, He could have died or been led into sin
 - He didn't have any special ability you don't have – He had His will and the Holy Spirit. What do you have?
 - And as such, Jesus would have nullified His purpose and mission to be our Savior and Satan's destroyer
 - And yet, these temptations were absolutely necessary for Jesus to accomplish His mission
 - Jesus had to set humanity straight by taking Adam's place as the federal representative of humanity
 - Adam chose to believe in Satan's word, which were lies, instead of heeding God's Word, which was the truth
 - When he did this, Adam single-handedly handed Satan dominion over his soul and those of his offspring
 - And by his failure to resist Satan's temptation, Adam put all of us in bondage to sin
 - Jesus came to fix that problem, to redeem us from that bondage
 - But to do that, Jesus had to become our federal representative in place of Adam
 - Which is why He had to take the form of man...not merely the appearance of man but our actual form
 - And then Jesus had to face the tempter, as Adam did
 - Only this time, Jesus would make different choices, which qualified Him to be our sinless representative, beyond Satan's reach
- Which brings us, finally, to the opening of Chapter 4 of Matthew, and the story of Satan's efforts to prevent Jesus from qualifying as our sinless New Adam
 - Let's read the opening of the chapter

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matt. 4:2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

- Sometime soon after His baptism, Jesus wanders deeper into the wilderness
 - The Judean wilderness is a barren, hot mountain desert of rocks, sand and a few isolated shrubs or lone tree here or there
 - It's unforgiving land where survival is difficult
- Jesus enters the wilderness because the Spirit leads Him there, Matthew says
 - In Mark's Gospel, the language is more dramatic

Mark 1:12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.

- According to Mark, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness
- Here again, this reminds us that Jesus in the form of man, depended on the Spirit to understand the will of the Father
- The Spirit has led Jesus to this desolate place, specifically to make Jesus available to the devil for temptation
 - The enemy is going to have three opportunities to tempt Jesus into disqualifying Himself as our Redeemer
 - Again, these are opportunities for Jesus to chart a new course for humanity, one that is the opposite of the course established by Adam
- And to make sure that we have no doubt concerning Jesus' worthiness, the Father has stacked the deck against Jesus. In fact, it's interesting to compare Him to Adam
 - When Adam fell into sin and brought the rest of us with him, he had everything going his way
 - He lived in literally perfect circumstances
 - He lived in a cool and pleasant Garden, specially designed for Adam, well-watered and full of food
 - Moreover, Adam was not alone, since he had his wife to help him
 - And most importantly, he walked with God in fellowship
 - Furthermore, Adam had only one rule given him by God, only one law
 - He couldn't eat of a single tree in the garden
 - So long as Adam observed that one rule, he had no cause for concern
 - And even that one restriction wasn't much of a temptation, since he had so many other trees to turn to for food
 - I'm sure he could barely count all the varieties of fruit available to him

- So the deck was stacked against the enemy
 - Man lived in idyllic bliss, he had an infinite number of ways to remain obedient and only one way he could sin
 - The enemy had the most minimal of temptations to offer and had to find a way to make Adam resent the one and only rule God gave him
 - Despite having all the advantages, nevertheless, Man and Woman fell into disobedience
 - The Lord couldn't have made Adam's test any easier, and still, Adam fell
- But now, as Jesus sets out to prove Himself as our Second Adam, the circumstances will be quite different
 - The odds are stacked against Jesus
 - Jesus will be in a harsh desert, hungry and without friends
 - He will face an enemy who has already won and is fighting to keep what he has gained
 - And Satan will be allowed to tempt Jesus not once, but three times, while He's in a weakened state
 - And Jesus will face these attacks as Adam did, as a mere man, without the Father's protection or the Spirit's supernatural power
 - He doesn't even have the ministry of angels until the temptations are over – He's by Himself
- Notice in v.2, even before the temptations begin, Jesus fasts for forty days
 - Now perhaps you assumed Jesus survived this experience because He was God and God can do anything
 - Well, as I mentioned earlier, that's not the case
 - Jesus' body experienced these things in just the same way that our body would, with no extra advantage
 - Or perhaps you assumed that the 40-day period was an exaggeration for the sake of dramatic effect
 - You assume Jesus didn't really go without food for that long
 - No one can go that long without eating
 - But that's not true, either
 - Under Jewish custom, religious fasting generally took one of two forms
 - Fasts were either a food fast or a food and water fast
 - A food fast meant only drinking water, while a food and water fast meant consuming nothing whatsoever
 - Obviously, a person can't survive without water for very long, so a food and water fast only lasted a few days
 - But the human body can survive a considerable time without food...weeks

- So a food fast could last anywhere from a day up to forty days, depending on why the person was fasting
 - That's the type of fast Jesus endures here
 - He eats nothing for 40 days, and of course, he grows weaker as time goes along
- But the body has a fascinating response to long-term fasts of this type
 - In the first few days of the fast, the body's hunger response increases dramatically and energy levels drop considerably
 - But then, after those early days, hunger fades and strength returns as the body begins converting fat stores to energy
 - And for the most part, for the next 5 weeks, the body continues to function reasonably well, burning fat and losing weight, of course
 - I've spoken to people who have endured this very kind of fast
 - The person experiences hunger now and again, but not as strongly as you probably assume
 - They report having gone to work and lived otherwise normal lives for most of that time
 - They were more tired, a little weaker, and they lost a ton of weight, but in general they could endure it
 - But then about 40 days into the fast, everything changes
 - After 5 weeks, the body has largely exhausted its fat stores
 - And it realizes it needs a new source of energy very soon
 - So at that point, the sensation of hunger kicks back in...now with a vengeance
 - The person gets very hungry...so hungry that all they can think about is food
 - You may have read stories of what people enduring starvation are willing to do
 - They resort to eating dirt or shoe leather or wood
 - Their hunger drive has become so intense, it compels them to do things normal people would never consider
 - That's the state Jesus was in
- So notice in v.2, Matthew remarks that after 40 days, Jesus became hungry
 - This isn't merely a bit of humorous understatement on Matthew's part
 - He's describing what most Jews who had experienced fasting would have understood
 - The 40-day point is the worst possible time to be tempted
 - You're at your weakest physically and you're incredibly distracted by the sudden return of intense hunger
 - The drive to survive is so strong, it can overwhelm every other thought or desire
 - Only our urge to breathe is stronger than our hunger drive

- And it's under these extreme conditions that the enemy steps in to tempt Jesus
 - We're going to wait until next week to examine the three temptations in-depth
 - For now, let's finish tonight considering Satan's goal and methods in these temptations
- First, Satan's goal is to make Jesus disqualify Himself
 - It's not enough for Satan to kill the Messiah himself
 - For even if Satan were permitted to kill Jesus, the Father would simply raise Jesus up from the dead to continue His mission
 - After all, this very thing happens three years later
 - So Satan must find a way to cause Jesus to voluntarily disqualify Himself, by taking an action that is contrary to the will of the Father
 - In other words, as he did with Adam, so must Satan do with Jesus
 - He must bring Jesus to the point where Jesus willingly goes against the Word of the Lord
 - To do this, Satan relies on two key tactics
 - First, he depends on the strength of his lies
 - Secondly, he exploits the weaknesses of our flesh
 - He twists the truth to make his temptations sound reasonable, perhaps even to seem consistent with God's desires
 - And he works to harness our natural desires so that we convince ourselves to take his bait
- He followed this same system with Woman in the Garden
 - He twisted the word of God when he spoke with Woman, questioning whether God's Word could be trusted
 - And then, he provoked Woman to gaze upon the tree's fruit with renewed interest
 - Satan drew her attention to the fruit's enticing appearance
 - And he gave her the suggestion of great things to be gained if she ate
 - And so she did
 - Satan will use similar tactics to lead Jesus into sin
 - Satan will twist Scripture to tell Jesus lies, not just once as with Woman, but three times
 - And he will try to tempt Jesus into sinning, not just one way, as with Woman, but three different ways
 - The apostle John offers us a convenient summary of the three ways we can be tempted to sin

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes

and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

- We can be tempted by the lusts of our physical body, our flesh
- We can be tempted by the lust of our eyes, which refers to desires that captivate us and distract us from following God
- And the boastful or vain glory of life, which is anything that appeals to our pride or sense of self-worth apart from God
- Every temptation we can name fits into one of these three categories, and Jesus will be tempted by all three methods
 - Tempted to give in to His body's demand for food
 - Tempted by a vision of what He could gain without the need to experience the suffering of the cross
 - Tempted by His pride to defend His honor and reputation as the Son of God
- Later this week, we remember Jesus' death on the cross, the moment He gave everything for us by dying in our place to pay the price required for our sin
 - I'm sure as you spend time with your family or perhaps in fellowship with believers in a Sunday morning service, you will be thinking about what Jesus did on that day
 - Certainly nothing could be more important than that moment
 - But I hope you may also give a few moments of thought to what Jesus endured even before the cross
 - Of how and why He was even qualified to hang on that cross
 - You see, Jesus didn't just save us by His death
 - He saved us by His perfect, sinless life given in place of our worthless, sinful, rebellious life
 - In a sense, we could say dying was the easy part
 - Yes, dying on a cross is truly horrible, but Jesus isn't the only person in history to experience crucifixion
 - In fact, there were two other men experiencing it right next to Him on that day
 - No, the truly unique thing Jesus did, perhaps the most difficult thing He did, was living as a mere man yet without giving in to temptation
 - And not just one time...but every day of His life



Matthew - Lesson 4B

Chapter 4:1-4

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- The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu, author of the book, “The Art of War,” famously wrote that you must know your enemy
 - Victory on the battlefield begins with an understanding of the strengths and tactics of your adversary
 - Military experts have studied and fought according to Sun Tzu’s principles of war for thousands of years
 - But his advice doesn’t just apply to wars fought on the field of battle between soldiers and tanks
 - It also applies to the spiritual battle that every Christian knows or will know during a life spent walking with Christ
 - We all experience spiritual warfare in one form or another
 - Some of us experience a greater degree of attack, some of us suffer greater losses, some of us resist with greater strength
 - But regardless of these differences, we all struggle against the enemy
 - And therefore, we can all benefit from learning more about the enemy we face, his strengths, his tactics, and his goals
 - And by that knowledge, we will be better prepared to respond to his attacks in the right ways
- Of course, the enemy I’m talking about is Satan, along with his legion of demons who do his bidding
 - Last week, I taught an introduction to Jesus’ temptations in Chapter 4, by explaining Satan’s backstory from various Scriptures
 - We looked at how Satan was created, the duties he performed for God in the heavenly realm, how he fell into sin
 - I said that Satan is now on the prowl, always ready to oppose God and His people
 - Secondly, I explained the reason Jesus had to face this adversary in a series of temptations
 - Fundamentally, Jesus came to earth as a man to solve the problem of sin
 - He came to be our New Adam, to restart the human race
 - All of us are born with a sin nature, which we inherited from Adam
 - And Adam’s sin was the direct result of a temptation offered by the great tempter, Satan
 - So now, Jesus has come to start things over, to hit the reset button on humanity, so to speak
 - To do that, Jesus must live the life Adam should have lived, but didn’t – the life none of us can live, because we share in Adam’s fallen nature
 - Having lived the perfect life, Jesus could then die to pay the price for our sin
 - So that as we place our faith in that payment, we may be born again spiritually in His image and nature
- So Jesus, as our New Adam, must correct the chief mistake Adam made, the one that plunged humanity into sin

- He must prove that He is different than Adam, that He has a different nature
 - He must face the same situation Adam faced, yet triumph where Adam failed
 - But to demonstrate Jesus was truly qualified to be our new Adam, the Father required Jesus to endure temptation far beyond what Adam faced
- Jesus will face three temptations, not just one
 - And He will face them in a greatly weakened physical state, with his body desperately seeking relief
 - And He will be alone, without the ability to rely on His supernatural power, fully vulnerable to temptation as Hebrews told us last week
 - As one commentator wrote,

“Just as metal has to be tested far beyond any stress and strain that it will ever be called upon to bear, before it can be used for any useful purpose, so Jesus has to be tested beyond limits before God can use him for His purposes”

- So now, as we turn to Chapter 4, and read the first of Jesus’ temptations, we want to learn three things tonight
 - First, we want to understand the enemy’s tactics, his goals
 - That is, how he works to corrupt our spirit and deny God our obedience
 - Secondly, we want to understand the specific nature of each temptation, the offer Satan made to Jesus
 - Finally, we will study Jesus’ response to the temptation so we might learn how we too should resist
- Satan’s first temptation is linked to the opening verses of the chapter, so let’s reread those as we start in the text tonight

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matt. 4:2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

Matt. 4:3 And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

Matt. 4:4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

- Following His 40-day fast, Jesus became ravenously hungry, which is the usual pattern for people who pursue this kind of extended fast
 - The body has consumed all available fat stores and is now desperate for a new source of energy
 - And so Jesus’ hunger response came roaring back
 - The instinct to eat after so long is so all-consuming, that a person has a hard

- time contemplating anything other than eating
- Your brain is slow and easily confused for lack of fuel
 - You feel drugged, like you have taken too much cold medicine
- And it's in this severely debilitated state that Jesus must now face the most powerful created being in all the Universe
 - Remember, we learned last week that Satan was the wisest, most beautiful thing God created
 - And also that Satan is a member of the highest class of angelic beings, called "cherubim"
- But about now, some of you are saying, "Yeah, but Jesus is God so Satan doesn't stand a chance"
 - But you'll remember that Hebrews told us that when Jesus took the form of man, He became for a little while lower than the angels
 - And Paul told us that when Jesus took the form of man, He voluntarily emptied Himself of His form as God
- So if Satan is the most powerful angelic being, and Jesus is lower than the angelic realm at this time...
 - Then we must conclude that Satan has more power than Jesus, more guile, more strength, at least right now
 - And so this is truly a David vs. Goliath moment in Scripture, with Jesus playing the role of David, not Goliath
- Now that seems backward to us, I know
 - But it's important to understand this situation from that perspective
 - Because it means Jesus' only defense in this situation is to draw upon the same resources every believer has in this battle
 - We have our faith in the Word of God and its power to guide us away from harm
 - And we have our personal determination to obey it
 - As we'll see, Jesus depended on these things alone to fight Satan
- So in v.3, the enemy brings his first temptation
 - Before we look at the specific nature of this temptation, let's make sure we know our enemy, specifically what's Satan's goal
 - Satan's goal is to lead Jesus to disobey the Father
 - Back in Chapter 3, the Father had just declared that He was well-pleased in Jesus, His beloved Son
 - So now, Satan meets Jesus in the wilderness hoping to corrupt that testimony
 - Satan wants to make God eat His own words, no pun intended
 - It's the same thing Satan tried to do to Job when the Father gave Satan access to that man for a time
 - Satan assumed that given enough motivation, he can make Job (or Jesus) eventually disobey the Word of the Lord

- In Job's case, Satan used trial; in Jesus' case, Satan uses temptations
- Ultimately, this is always Satan's goal when he attacks God's people
 - He puts pressure on us in the hope we will rebel as he did, either of one kind or the other
 - He wants us to follow his path of rebellion rather than continuing on the path of righteousness
 - He's fighting God through us
- This fight is all about who gets the glory...
 - Because whom you obey, you glorify
 - When we obey God, we give God glory

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- By our good works, we're giving testimony that God is the One Who is worthy to receive honor and obedience
- Conversely, when we disobey God by giving into Satan's temptations, or to our flesh, we give Satan glory at God's expense
 - We are testifying by our sinful works that we agree with Satan's lies, rather than with the truth of God's Word
- Perhaps you haven't thought of your sin in that way before
 - But truly there is no in-between, it's either one way or the other
 - As the Lord told Israel

Ezek. 20:39 “As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord God, “Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.

- Now Satan knows our new spirit in Christ wants to obey God, to please Him
 - So if he is going to pull us off track, he needs a hook, some distraction or motivation that he can use to move us away from obedience
 - And that leads us to a study of his tactics
 - Satan has two primary tactics to cause us to disobey God, and both are evident in his temptations of Christ
 - First, Satan discredits the Word of God
 - Notice how he begins speaking to Jesus by saying “If You are the Son of God...”
 - This is similar to the statement he used to deceive Woman in the Garden

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the

Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?”

- As he did in the Garden, Satan calls into question the trustworthiness of the Word of God
 - In this case, Satan wonders if Jesus is truly the Son of God promised in the Word, probably thinking of Psalm 2

Psa. 2:7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord:

**He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.**

**Psa. 2:8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.**

**Psa. 2:9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”**

- The Word says the Messiah will be the Son of God
 - And the Father has just declared at the baptism of John that Jesus is that long awaited Son of God
 - So now, Satan casts doubt on that Word, asking if it’s really true
 - In other words, perhaps the Father was lying at the river, or maybe He lied back in Psalm 2
 - Either way, we can’t be sure the Word of God is correct, can we?
- Now if Satan’s victim doesn’t have a firm grasp on God’s Word, then that person is going to be deceived by Satan’s deception
 - After all, he’s the wisest creature God ever made
 - As soon as he has a person disconnected from a reliance and trust in the Word of God, that person’s fall is virtually unstoppable
 - Satan is well on his way to gaining the person’s allegiance
- Which then leads us to Satan’s second major tactic: tempting us to disobey
 - Satan uses temptation to motivate us to act in disobedience
 - Having already placed a seed of doubt in our minds concerning God’s love or His forgiveness or His fairness or something else in His Word, all that remains is to give us a reason to take up sinning
 - So if Satan’s first step was untethering us from the anchor of God’s Word, then his second step is giving us a little push in the direction of sin
- Satan’s temptations can be classified into three categories, according to John

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

- John says that everything that is of the fallen world can be grouped into one of these three categories
 - First, we may be tempted in lusts of the flesh
 - The lusts of the flesh are any desire of our physical body for gratification
 - Principally, we're talking about things like food, drink, sexual pleasure, chemical addictions, anything that stimulates our body
- Certainly, our body has basic needs that we must give some attention to just to be healthy
 - But when the desires of our physical body overwhelm or interfere with our spiritual objectives in life, then our body has become our own enemy
 - And at that point, we are called to discipline it, restraining its desires
 - Placing them in subjection to the Spirit's counsel, so that we can remain obedient to Christ
- Secondly, John says we may be tempted by the lust of the eyes
 - Even though John uses the word lust again, and even though our eyes are a part of our physical body, this is actually a different category
 - The lust of the eyes doesn't refer to satisfying a physical need of our eyeballs, for your eyes have no physical need as such
 - For example, you don't feed your eyes
 - Instead, the lust of the eyes is a euphemism meaning a desire for novelty, excitement, intrigue, spectacle, titillation, and the like
 - In today's language, we might call it "chasing the shiny object"
 - It's a distraction of the heart triggered by something that caught our eye
 - Lusts of the eyes would include preoccupations like shopping or hoarding material things
 - Or various obsessions or fixations, like hobbies that consume all of our available time, *etc.*
 - It's any tendency to let the things of this world distract and consume us
 - Now here again, we all have stuff and we all have interests and hobbies
 - These things are not evil in themselves
 - The question is, do they interfere with your spiritual walk?
 - And when they do, then it means they have become a tool of the enemy to bring you into disobedience
- Finally, John says we can be tempted by the boastful pride of life
 - This category includes anything that enflames our ego or our vanity or magnifies our sense of self-worth beyond what is due
 - Our pride of life can be enflamed when we receive accolades or it can be provoked when someone diminishes us
 - And in those moments, our sin nature will come to life, soaking up the accolades like a drug
 - Or else rushing to defend our ego in the face of the attack

- While some self-esteem is healthy, generally, we all have too much self-esteem
 - What we really need is a lot less self-esteem and a lot more Christ-esteem
 - When our pride leads us to defend our desires or interests or reputation more than Christ's, we're vulnerable to the enemy
- Now all three of these categories of temptation target our physical body in some area, whether our body, mind or emotions
 - And therefore, we could label these three areas of temptation as temptations of the body, the mind and the soul (emotions)
 - Satan entices our body by feeding its lusts
 - He distracts our mind with worthless obsessions
 - He enflames our soul with delusions of grandeur
 - Satan's goal, remember, is not merely to manipulate us, but to lead us into disobeying the Father, leading to an end of what God is building
 - As James said

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- So in Jesus' case, Satan's first temptation takes the form of a test
 - Satan proposes a way Jesus can prove that the Word of God is true concerning His identity
 - Satan asks Jesus to reproduce the miracle that God performed for Israel during the Exodus, summarized in Psalm 78

Psa. 78:17 Yet they still continued to sin against Him,
To rebel against the Most High in the desert.

Psa. 78:18 And in their heart they put God to the test
By asking food according to their desire.

Psa. 78:19 Then they spoke against God;
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"

Psa. 78:20 "Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out,
And streams were overflowing;
Can He give bread also?
Will He provide meat for His people?"

Psa. 78:21 Therefore the Lord heard and was full of wrath;
And a fire was kindled against Jacob
And anger also mounted against Israel,

Psa. 78:22 Because they did not believe in God

And did not trust in His salvation.

Psa. 78:23 Yet He commanded the clouds above

And opened the doors of heaven;

Psa. 78:24 He rained down manna upon them to eat

And gave them food from heaven.

Psa. 78:25 Man did eat the bread of angels;

He sent them food in abundance.

- The Word says that the Lord provided miraculous bread for God's people while they lived in the wilderness
 - They were in desolate surroundings, and the Lord sent bread from heaven
 - So Satan proposed that should Jesus repeat this miracle now, He could show that the Word of God was accurate concerning His identity
- Now it's no coincidence that Satan has proposed this specific miracle, of course
 - Obviously, Satan is attacking Jesus at His weakest point
 - Jesus hasn't eaten in 40 days, so naturally the desire to eat food would be a major temptation
- We honestly can't appreciate how much Jesus would have felt the urge to succumb to this temptation, to find food at this point
 - Just think how hard it is for you to stop yourself driving through a fast food restaurant on your way home when you're hungry
 - How much harder would it be if you were fasting?
 - Now imagine how great the temptation would be if you could turn stones into tacos on demand?
- Satan knew that food would be Jesus' greatest temptation at this point
 - In this case, he's trying to stop Jesus' fast because it was not a voluntary act
 - Jesus was commanded by the Father to fast 40 days as a part of this trial or test
 - The number "40" in Scripture is the number of testing or trial
 - So Jesus cannot eat without sinning
 - Obviously, the Father is going to permit His Son to eat when this trial is over
 - But Jesus can't cut the trial short without committing sin
 - And I would submit to you that Jesus might have been allowed to make the stones into bread without sinning
 - But what happens to a starving person when you put bread in front of them?
 - If it's hard for Jesus to obey the Father's call to fast now, how much harder will it be if a loaf of bread appears in front of Him
 - And Satan knows this, so he wants to bring Jesus to His breaking point
- So Satan has disguised his temptation as a test to prove the truth of God's Word concerning Jesus' identity
 - Now defending the truth of God's Word sounds like a noble cause, doesn't it?

- And it is, but this just shows you the supreme craftiness of Satan
- Satan's suggesting that Jesus can defend the Word of God...*by disobeying the Word of God*
- Have you ever heard someone justify their desire to divorce and remarry by saying, God wants me to be happy?
 - Or to justify their decision to spend long hours at work and away from their family by saying, God expects me to be a good provider?
 - Or maybe a Christian justify a romantic relationship with an unbeliever by saying, God wants me to bring them to faith?
 - These are examples of how Satan twists God's Word in our minds, so he can then tempt us into disobeying that Word
- So now that we have an understanding of Satan's tactics, let's take a look at Jesus' response in v.4
 - Mustering all His strength and fighting a mind dulled by lack of fuel, Jesus recalls the perfect Scriptural rebuttal from Deuteronomy 8:3

Deut. 8:3 **“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.**

- Now remember, Satan asked Jesus to turn stones into bread, recalling the miracle God did in the wilderness to bring manna
- Because making bread appear out of nothing in the desert was one of God's calling cards, if you will
- Jesus does it again in John 6 – it was an obvious indication of deity
- But Jesus' response draws on the very same lesson Satan was using – that of the provision of manna in the wilderness – to refute his claims and expose the flaw in Satan's argument
 - In Deuteronomy 8:3, the Lord said that before He gave Israel manna, God purposely allowed His people to go hungry for a time
 - He delayed their provision of manna for a time, so their stomachs began to growl, and it was a test of their faithfulness
- He did so to teach His people an important lesson
 - God was teaching Israel that their chief concern shouldn't have been sustaining their physical lives
 - Because God could bring them bread out of thin air anytime He desired
 - When God said manna would appear, it appeared
- So the lesson was, heed My Word and good things will follow
 - As Jesus says elsewhere

Matt. 6:33 **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these**

things will be added to you.

- On the other hand, continue in your ungrateful, disobedient unbelieving hearts and destruction will follow
- So while Israel was seeking for food for their bodies, they were ignoring their need to nourish their souls
- Now God wasn't asking Israel to choose between physical bread or spiritual bread
 - He was asking them to put these needs in the proper priority
 - We should seek to please God above pleasing ourselves, even in matters of food
 - When we seek to fulfill our physical needs above our spiritual needs, we sin
- Which is why Jesus quotes this verse to refute Satan's request
 - Deuteronomy 8:3 teaches that obedience to the Word is even more important to God than supplying our physical needs
 - And since God had instructed Jesus to fast, He could not break it without sinning
- Secondly, that passage affirms Jesus as God's Son
 - Remember, in Exodus and elsewhere, God calls Israel His firstborn son
 - So Deuteronomy 8:3 teaches that God's "son", Israel, were made to experience a fast for a time in the wilderness as a test of their hearts
 - So this verse can also be understood to be an indirect reference to the Messiah Himself
 - That God's Son was made to fast in the wilderness too, as a test of His heart
 - What a perfect response
- Now keep in mind, Jesus brought this Scripture to mind using the same mental faculties God has given to each of us
 - Jesus didn't have His iPad nearby with a convenient search box so He could locate that perfect passage on the fly
 - Jesus would have had the entire Old Testament memorized
 - He had to know it well enough to recall it even at the conclusion of a 40-day fast
 - On the other hand, we know Jesus was uniquely prepared by the Father
 - The Gospels tell us that Jesus was profoundly blessed with spiritual wisdom and insight, even as a young man
 - So clearly, we are not Jesus' equal and that's not my point
 - But what I am saying is, Jesus still had to learn the things He knew as He grew up
 - They weren't downloaded into His head like a software program
 - And He wasn't born knowing them
 - He still had to put in the necessary time and make the required effort to absorb these truths
 - For example, Luke ends his account of Jesus' upbringing with these words

Luke 2:52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

- Notice Jesus increased in wisdom and in favor with God
- And therefore, we must see His brilliant response in this moment not as some superhuman magic trick beyond our grasp
- Rather, we need to appreciate what a godly, dedicated and faithful man can accomplish when He is thoroughly nourished on the Word of God
- We will never be Jesus, but we can be like Jesus in many things
 - Satan preyed upon the weakness of Jesus' flesh and tried to use it to lead Jesus against the will of the Father
 - And instead, Jesus allowed His physical body to continue suffering, not willing to satisfy it
 - And instead, He made his priority pleasing God by obedience to His Word
 - That's not something beyond our reach
 - We need to understand this account as it was intended to be understood
 - It's an account of a man resisting the enemy by maintaining self-control, while making obeying the Father His highest priority
 - This is about a Man Who knew that in time, the Father would satisfy His body's need for food when the time was right
 - Later in this Gospel, we will hear Jesus teaching these words

Matt. 6:25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Matt. 6:26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”

Matt. 6:27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?”

Matt. 6:28 “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,

Matt. 6:29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

Matt. 6:30 “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

Matt. 6:31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’

Matt. 6:32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

- When we study this passage in a few weeks, remember what Jesus experiences in His

first temptation

- And don't think He couldn't identify with His own teaching
- Jesus knew exactly what it's like to be in desperate need of a meal
- He understood the temptation to suppose that God wasn't going to provide
- That He had to do something for Himself, something that would have been contrary to the will of the Father
- Something that was contrary to righteousness
- But Jesus lived according to the same Word He preached to His followers
 - Jesus sought first the Kingdom, that is to obtain His rightful place over that Kingdom
 - And He sought for the Father's righteousness, to obey the Father's commands even above His own needs
 - Because Jesus knew the other things He needed, like food, would come in time... God would provide them when the test was over
- Last week, as we ended, I mentioned that Jesus' death on the cross was the moment God made a provision, a payment, for our sins
 - And by placing our trust in that payment, by accepting that payment on our behalf, putting our faith in Jesus, God says He will forgive us our sins
 - And by that forgiveness, we will be welcomed into God's presence when we die
 - Only our faith in Jesus is required, nothing more
 - But I also said that in a sense, Jesus' dying on the cross for us was the "easier" part for Him
 - As horrible as Jesus' death was – and it was truly unbearable – it was an easier task than living 30+ years without committing a single sin
 - But Jesus had to succeed as our New Adam
 - Because if Jesus' death on that cross were to mean anything, to be worth anything, Jesus had to be our spotless, sinless sacrifice
 - He had to resist temptation everyday, not just on this day
 - That's what makes Christianity unique and every other religion counterfeit
 - No one else had a solution for the problem of sin, for it is our sin that stands in the way of reaching Heaven
 - Unless God does something to erase your sin, you have no hope to be counted worthy for Heaven because the standard to get into Heaven is sinlessness
 - Muhammad offers no solution to the problem of man's sin
 - Buddha offers no solution, Confucius offers no solution, Mormons, JW's, Scientology, none of them offer a solution
 - But Jesus does...He says, let Me take your sin on Me
 - Jesus lived the perfect sinless life you couldn't, as a man who knew temptation, yet never gave in to it
 - And then, Jesus died an underserved death to pay the penalty for your sin

- And all He asks, is for you to accept the salvation He has prepared for you by placing your faith in Him

Matt. 10:32 “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 10:33 “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

- Tonight, we return to Satan's temptations of Christ

A couple built their dream home, but they overspent and found themselves "house poor" struggling to make ends meet. They were so cash strapped, that the only entertainment they could afford was to go window-shopping at the mall.

So they entered the department store, and the husband quickly disappeared into the men's clothing section, while the wife made a beeline for the women's section. A short time later, the wife came out carrying a shopping bag with a brand new \$1,000 dress inside.

Her husband was shocked, and asked, "How could you do this?! You know we have no money!"

Sheepishly, the wife replied, "I saw this dress on the rack and found myself imagining how I would look in it. I tried it on in the dressing room, and the next thing I knew I had bought it. It was like Satan was whispering in my ear, 'You look fabulous in that dress. Buy it!'"

"Well," the husband replied, "You know how I deal with that kind of temptation. I say, 'Get behind me, Satan!'"

"I did," replied his wife," but then he said, 'It looks fabulous from back here, too!'"

- Have you ever felt like that...like you couldn't help yourself from taking Satan's bait?
 - Well, you're certainly not alone
 - Satan is the wisest creature God has ever made
 - So it's no surprise he has great skill to lead us astray
 - We studied the first of Satan's temptations last week
 - The enemy asked Jesus to prove the Word of God concerning His identity asking, if you're the Son of God, make stones into bread
 - In dissecting the enemy's methods, we noted how Satan begins by untethering us from the Word of God
 - Satan indicts the Word of God, subtly, seeking to place a seed of doubt in our minds
 - Satan leads us to rethink what we already know, to doubt God's instructions, to justify our desires as consistent with God's word
 - Once Satan has untethered us from the anchor of God's Word, we're floating free
 - Now all Satan requires is a temptation to incentivize us to consummate our lust, leading to sin
- Last week, we learned the three ways we can be tempted to sin
 - 1 John 2:16 taught that everything of the world can be classified as the lust of the flesh, the lust or attraction of the eyes, or the pride of life

- Jesus' first temptation was directed at the lust of His body, His flesh
- Satan suggested Jesus make bread from stones to prove the Word of God concerning Jesus' identity
- Satan wanted Jesus to give up His fast because he knew that if bread appeared before Jesus, Jesus would be strongly tempted to eat it
 - So Satan drew from the Exodus to suggest Jesus repeat the miracle of manna to prove His identity
 - Of course, Jesus wisely resisted Satan's temptation
 - Beginning with re-affirming His anchor in the Word of God
- God's Word tells us that obeying God is more important than satisfying our body's desires
 - Had Jesus made bread from stones, He would have proven Himself to be the Son of God
 - Yet simultaneously, He would have acted against the instructions of the Father, thereby contradicting the Word of the Father
 - The lesson being, if we trade our obedience for fleshly desires, we forfeit eternal things to gain temporal things...and that's a bad deal
- So let's look at the second temptation...

Matt. 4:5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,
Matt. 4:6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,
'He will command His angels concerning You';
and
'On their hands they will bear You up,
So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'"
Matt. 4:7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

- If you were to compare Luke's account with this account, you'll notice that the events are recorded in a different order
 - The difference is due to the authors' different purposes in writing
 - Luke opens his Gospel saying he was writing to explain events in chronological order
 - While Matthew's purpose was to show Jesus as the King promised to Israel
 - So Luke's account has the actual order of temptations, while Matthew's account has them building to the most important
 - Since we're in Matthew, we'll follow his order

- Satan's first temptation was directed at the lust of the flesh
- The next temptation in Matthew's Gospel is directed at the pride of life
- Satan takes Jesus from the wilderness to the "holy city", which is Jerusalem
 - It's unclear to us whether Satan transported Jesus in some way or accomplished his temptation through a vision
 - In the end, it doesn't much matter which way Satan worked
 - The point is, that Jesus is now confronting a different set of circumstances
- Specifically, Jesus is standing on the pinnacle of the temple
 - The word "pinnacle" refers to the highest point of the structure
 - And the highest point of the temple is the southeast corner of the city walls
 - The SE corner of the city wall is also the SE corner of the temple compound, and it's the highest place of the temple
- From that place, you look down on the rocks of the Kidron Valley, about 170 ft below
 - A fall from that place would certainly be fatal
 - And from this vantage point, Satan tempts Jesus using the same basic method we've outlined already
- First, Satan questions Jesus' identity again, asking "If You are the Son of God..."
 - Notice, the question itself presumes that Jesus is the Son of God
 - Satan never asks this question of anyone else, because he knows Jesus is the Son of God
 - Remember, the goal isn't to verify Jesus' identity...it's to get Jesus to disobey the Father
 - So, because Satan knows Jesus is the Son of God, he's intent on tempting Jesus to sin
 - Likewise, it's because you are a child of God that Satan wants to tempt you, for this is how he steals God's glory
 - So Satan questions the trustworthiness of God's Word and then proposes another test to verify Jesus' identity
 - In the first temptation, Satan challenged Jesus to perform a miracle that would demonstrate Jesus was divine
 - So Satan was testing Jesus
 - But now, Satan challenges the Father Himself to prove Jesus is His Son
 - Satan quotes from Psalm 91, but as he always does, Satan misquoted and misapplied the Word to suit his own desires
 - Let's read the passage from where Satan takes this quote

**Psa. 91:11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you,
To guard you in all your ways.**

Psa. 91:12 They will bear you up in their hands,
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

Psa. 91:13 You will tread upon the lion and cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.

Psa. 91:14 “Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him;
I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name.

- This psalm makes general promises to God’s people, but it makes specific promises to the Messiah, so we understand it to be a Messianic prophecy
- The Father promises to give His angels charge over the Messiah when He comes, protecting Him as He goes about His mission
- To put it simply, Jesus came to earth to die a sacrificial death on a cross during Passover, which meant
 - He couldn’t die in an ox cart accident
 - Or by drowning as a child or from a disease
- So in Psalm 91, the Father promised that no harm would prevent Jesus from fulfilling His mission
 - Specifically, in v.11, the Father promises that the angels would guard Jesus in all His ways
 - And in v.12, that they would not even allow Jesus to fall from stumbling on a stone
- Of course, Satan twisted this promise in a subtle way
 - Satan suggests that the Father is promising Jesus that He can’t be hurt under any circumstances
 - So Satan proposes that we test the Father’s promise
 - If you throw yourself off this wall and the angels catch you, then it’s proof that you are the One the Father was speaking about in Psalm 91
 - Satan’s deception is taking God’s Word out of context so that it lacks important details
 - Notice in v.14, the psalm says Jesus will be delivered from harm *because* Jesus has loved the Father
 - And loving the Father is defined in Scripture as obedience to God’s Word

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

- And that’s the key...Jesus was to be protected because He honors the Father in faithfulness to the mission
 - Because Jesus obeys the Father, the Father responds by protecting Jesus
 - Not only from the dangers of everyday life, but ultimately, from rescuing Jesus from

the grave

- Conversely, had Jesus not been faithful to obey the Father, the Father would not have been obligated to protect Jesus
- The Word Satan quoted was true, but the way Satan attempted to apply it was false, because it called upon Jesus to challenge God's authority
 - By jumping off the wall, Jesus would be dictating the timing and circumstances under which the Father must fulfill His Own Word
 - The Father had a specific fulfillment in mind for the words of Psalm 91
 - And we can be sure the Father *didn't* have this situation in mind
- He was speaking about protecting Christ from His enemies and from the by-and-by dangers of life on earth
 - He wasn't giving Jesus carte blanche to throw Himself in harm's way to force God to respond
 - That's turning God into a genie, forcing Him to do our bidding
- So, had Jesus agreed to Satan's demands, Jesus would have been testing God, as Jesus says in v.7
 - Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy again, where Moses told the people that they should not try to force God to prove Himself
 - Israel tested God in the desert by claiming God wasn't prepared to care for their needs in the desert
 - They made these claims, hoping to provoke God's pride, so that God would then respond by providing them what they wanted
 - The Israelites tried to demand the terms by which God would serve them, rather than their serving God
 - That's testing God, and we do it all the time
 - We make bargains with God
 - We promise things to Him, if He would only do things we want
 - We treat Him as an equal, or worse, as someone we can manipulate
 - That's what Satan wants Jesus to do here
 - To dictate to the Father how Psalm 91 would be fulfilled
 - And ironically, had Jesus chosen to do so, the Father would have been under no obligation whatsoever to save Jesus
 - Had Jesus jumped, He would have been acting outside the will of the Father, so Jesus would have been disobeying the Father
 - And had Jesus sinned in this way, then the promise of Psalm 91 would have been invalidated
- Now why would Jesus be tempted to do such a thing in the first place?
 - In a word, pride – and that's the temptation Satan is offering here: the temptation of the pride of life

- Pride is judging ourselves more worthy of honor than we truly are, while seeking others to affirm our self view
- It's an insidious and deceptively powerful evil working in our hearts
- It's so dangerous because we usually can't recognize it in ourselves
- Because we dress up our pride to look virtuous, telling ourselves our motives are selfless
- For example, we fish for compliments, but then pretend to be embarrassed when we receive them
 - We maneuver to be the center of attention at the party...then act surprised when everyone stops to listen to us
 - We conspire to receive credit for that team project at work...then look magnanimous as we give token acknowledgement to our co-workers
 - We drive slowly through the parking lot, hoping friends will admire us in our new car...but then pretend not to notice them staring
 - And in the end, we're proud of our humility
- It's all vanity, as Solomon said, and when pride rules our heart, we join Satan's team, we follow in his footsteps trying to take over from God
 - Instead of serving God, we want God to be our servant
 - We work for our desires and priorities, not God's
 - Pride makes us steal God's honor and glory, to take credit for His provision and grace by calling it hard work and talent
- That's what Satan was banking on in Jesus' case
 - Satan was hoping that by questioning if Jesus was the Son of God, Satan might give Jesus a desire to defend His reputation
 - Then, Satan quotes the word of God out of context, suggesting the Father was obligated to protect Jesus, which enflames Jesus' pride
 - All that remained was for Jesus to jump, expecting the Father to do Jesus' bidding instead of Jesus obeying the Father
 - And if that had happened, Jesus sins and all is lost
- Pride may be Satan's most powerful deception
 - Satan has used this temptation to convince millions of believers that God wants to make us rich or free us from all disease
 - That we have a RIGHT to these things, because God has PROMISED us these things in His Word
 - That's the primary error of the prosperity heresy: implying that God serves us, instead of us serving God
 - You may have thought the prosperity heresy depended on greed to gain its following, and it does to an extent
 - But its principle target is our pride, the urge to make God suit our desires

- The prosperity heresy asserts that God has promised wealth to us and it will come our way if we just claim it
 - It's the same manipulation Satan tried with Psalm 91
 - Suggesting that God will show up when WE want Him to
 - That we can force God to fulfill His Word to us according to our desires and on our terms
- Scripture teaches a very different perspective on our relationship to God
 - The most common word the Scriptures use for believers is servant, or in Greek *duolos*, which literally means slave
 - Believers in Jesus Christ have been bought, redeemed, with a heavy price: Jesus' blood

1Cor. 6:20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

- So having been purchased, we have an obligation to glorify God with our body, with our lives
- That means we must silence that part of our sin nature that keeps telling us that we have equal standing with God
 - We have no right to anything apart from what the Lord has determined we should have, whether possessions, honor, power, or whatever
 - Listen to Jesus' instructions to His disciples

Luke 17:7 "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'?"

Luke 17:8 "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'?"

Luke 17:9 "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?"

Luke 17:10 "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

- That's the godly perspective, a humble perspective that sees ourselves in a realistic light
 - It's the heart that knows God alone is worthy of glory and honor
 - He alone deserves praise, and whatever we have to offer the world, if it's worth anything, comes from God Himself
 - And so our spiritual service of worship is to make ourselves a living sacrifice of praise

- So Satan has attempted to tempt Jesus using the lust of His flesh and the pride of life
 - He's attempted to challenge Jesus' power and to challenge the Father's promises
 - In both cases, Satan twisted a truth found in God's Word to make a claim that Scripture itself does not make
 - And in both cases, Jesus answered Satan's lie with the true view of Scripture
 - Before we look at Satan's third temptation, take note of something important in these exchanges
 - Satan has been making claims from Scripture, either implicitly or explicitly
 - And then Jesus has been answering these claims also using Scripture
 - Now if we didn't know better, we might think that Scripture contradicts itself
 - That whoever has the best verse or the last word "wins" the debate
 - But that's never true, because Scripture never contradicts itself
 - So if we think two verses are arguing opposite conclusions, it means we don't understand one or the other
 - In this case, Satan misused Scripture making it appear to say something it didn't
 - And many times, the so-called "contradictions" or "tensions" in Scripture are actually self-imposed
 - We've caused it because we aren't interpreting Scripture properly somewhere
- So let's move to the final temptation

Matt. 4:8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;

Matt. 4:9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

Matt. 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

Matt. 4:11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

- For his final temptation, Satan again moves Jesus (or gives Him a vision) from a very high mountain
 - Traditionally, people say this mountain is the one next to Jericho, probably because it's the highest mountain in the wilderness of Judea
 - From this high point, Satan gives Jesus a vision of all the kingdoms of the world
 - And he tells Jesus it's within Satan's power to give these to Jesus if Jesus would worship Satan as god
 - Satan's mention of kingdoms referred to all the physical earth

- Satan is, for a while, the prince of the fallen world, as Paul says in Ephesians 2
- And Satan is the ruler of the world's forces of darkness, as Paul says in Ephesians 6
- Notice what Satan says to God in Job

Job 1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

Job 1:7 The Lord said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.”

- Satan was roaming about on the earth, because this is his home for a time
- And therefore, he can give portions of this world to those as he desires
- He rules the hearts of unbelievers, and he has authority and dominion to hand out to those whom he pleases
 - It's no surprise that many of the world's most evil people are those with great power, wealth and success
 - Satan is the god of this world, as Paul calls him, and he empowers those who worship him
- So now, Satan is pressing Jesus to do the same, to acknowledge Satan as God, rather than His Father in Heaven
 - In a sense, Satan was offering Jesus the opportunity to reach His mission the easy way
 - Jesus came to earth as a man to redeem the fallen world from Satan
 - God gave dominion of the earth to Adam and Woman
 - But when they fell to Satan's temptations, they gave Satan glory as their god, making themselves slaves to sin
 - So now, Jesus as our New Adam has come to redeem the world from this curse by His blood shed on the cross
 - That plan requires Jesus to die a painful death on a cross
 - Enduring the shame to pay for Adam's mistake and the sin of all who have followed Adam
 - When Jesus completes this plan He will receive an inheritance, the Bible says
 - The Father has promised Jesus an inheritance of the entire earth
 - But like any inheritance, it can only be received upon a death
 - We can't receive our rich uncle's inheritance until after he dies
 - Jesus' death was required before His inheritance was available
 - Jesus redeemed the Creation from Satan by His death

- And Jesus was resurrected to receive back His Own inheritance, which he gladly shares with the children of God
- All believers share in Christ's inheritance, which we receive when we too are resurrected
- Our share of Christ's inheritance is a portion of the world, a portion of the Kingdom Jesus sets up on earth upon His return
- But here's Satan offering Jesus a shortcut to getting His inheritance
 - Jesus could have all the kingdoms of the world if he would just worship Satan instead of the Father
 - Had Jesus done so, He could have avoided the cross, or at least that's what Satan is proposing
 - Jesus could have received His inheritance without the need to die a painful death
 - Of course, like everything Satan says, it's a lie
 - Yes, Satan could have given Jesus the world of kingdoms to rule for a time
 - But it would not have been an eternal Kingdom
 - Jesus could have ruled over the world Satan gave Jesus only for as long as Satan Himself had authority over the world
 - But one day, Satan will lose his authority over the world
 - The Bible promises that Satan will be cut down in a day to come

Ezek. 28:19 “All who know you among the peoples
 Are appalled at you;
 You have become terrified
 And you will cease to be forever.”””

- So Satan couldn't offer Jesus what the Father was willing to give His Son if He obeyed
- The Father offered His Son an eternal Kingdom

Psa. 45:6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
 A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
Psa. 45:7 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
 Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
 With the oil of joy above Your fellows.

Psa. 145:13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
 And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

- Satan simply can't give Jesus an everlasting Kingdom because Satan himself isn't

everlasting

- But by taking Jesus to the top of a mountain, Satan hoped to provoke a lust of the eyes in Jesus
- And by that lust, Jesus might try to gain that Kingdom in a way that brought glory to Satan, instead of the Father
- If the pride of life is the most powerful temptation we face, I think the lust of the eyes is the most common
 - The lust of the eyes is that sinful desire to have things that we aren't supposed to have
 - Or to obtain legitimate things by illegitimate means
 - Don't we all know that feeling too well?
 - We want that shiny object, but we don't want to ask the Lord to grant it to us, or even ask if we should have it
 - We don't ask, probably because we're afraid His answer will be "No"
 - And we're so captivated by the desire, we can't walk away
 - Or we aren't willing to wait for it to come in God's timing, so we try to gain it our own way
 - The lust of the eyes leads to things like materialism, debt, fraud, deceit, bankruptcy
 - In short, it leads us to sin
 - And in this case, Satan was hoping that Jesus' desire for instant gratification and avoiding the cross might lead Him to sin
 - Satan twisted the Father's promise to give Jesus a Kingdom by implying Satan could offer the same thing
 - And then, he tempted Jesus into obtaining that promise in an easier way
 - Jesus responded once more from Deuteronomy, declaring that we worship and serve the Lord alone
 - Jesus' answer is self-explanatory
 - But it reinforces something we've said multiple times during this study: worshiping God means obeying God
 - There is no way around it...we can't claim to love and worship our Lord, while simultaneously giving Satan glory by following his temptations
 - The one you obey is the one you glorify
- But there are no shortcuts in our obedience to God
 - Either we do what the Lord asks, according to His timing and in keeping with His instructions, or else we sin
 - Satan will often tell us that obeying God will mean giving up something fun, something we'll miss
 - And it does mean forgoing a lustful desire that's pulling us in the opposite

direction

- But it's just another lie...because in eternity, we're going to realize that obedience was our path to better things
 - But when we allow the desires of this world to distract us from obeying God, it produces less joy, less peace, less satisfaction
 - We don't have to wait until we reach Heaven to understand these things
- Notice how Jesus brought this encounter to an end
 - In v.10, Jesus told Satan to go away
 - And as Jesus did, Satan fled and angels came to comfort Jesus
- Remember, Jesus fought Satan the same way we can fight Him, in the strength of our convictions, while resting on the truth of God's word
 - And despite Satan's wisdom and authority, His power over us is limited
 - Scripture says Satan can subject us to trials and he can bring temptations
 - But if we resist his schemes, he flees from us

James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

- The promise of Scripture is that if we resist him and his efforts to tempt us, he has no option but to look elsewhere for his victims
- Just as he fled Jesus
- Isn't that remarkable? As powerful as Satan is and as crafty as he is, nevertheless, he depends on us cooperating with him if he's going to succeed
 - He can only accomplish what we allow him to accomplish in our lives
 - We'll certainly feel the effect of his efforts, both trials and temptations
 - But in the end, if we resist the temptations and endure in the trials, he will give up and leave us – at least for a time
- Consider what Peter says

1 Pet. 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Pet. 5:9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

1 Pet. 5:10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

- Peter says appreciate and respect the power of the enemy as our adversary...don't underestimate him

- But resistance is all that's required to defeat his schemes
- We don't need witch doctors, incantations, we don't have to wear garlic around our necks or any such thing
- Just don't buy his lies, and don't give in to the temptations he brings
- Which means that temptations are resistible
 - Don't ever say the devil made me do it, because he doesn't have the power to do that!
 - You can say no to your desires, and the Spirit living in you is more than capable of giving you the strength
 - Just resist the enemy's efforts by remaining firm in your faith, and he can't get his way
- Then Peter adds, keep an eternal perspective on all this...live with eyes for eternity, understand what's really going on here
 - Our battle with the enemy is one that started long before we came along
 - As Peter says, we're experiencing the same suffering the brethren have always known in the world
 - It's part of following the Lord, of being His ambassadors to the fallen world
 - But after we have suffered for a little while, we'll be called into Christ's glory and all this will be behind us
 - So resist, be on alert, remain patient, and look forward to your eternal reward
 - In all these things, we are being like Christ, for He too experienced the temptations of Satan
 - And Christ certainly knew suffering
 - Only Christ suffered without cause, for our sake, so that in the end we would have this victory over the enemy
 - Satan flees when we resist because he can't win, because he's already defeated
 - Let's give Christ the glory of our obedience by learning to follow Jesus' example

- We've completed our study of the temptations of Christ, which qualified Jesus to be our New Adam
 - Jesus demonstrated He is truly the sinless Man Who will restore what Adam forfeited
 - And as fascinating as this section of the Gospel may be, I resisted the temptation to spend more time in this area
 - Instead, we move on in Chapter 4 to the next phase of Jesus' earthly ministry
 - Jesus is now ready to begin collecting disciples who will learn from Him and follow Him
 - But Matthew's accounts of how Jesus gained His disciples can be a bit confusing
 - Jesus' recruitment effort didn't happen in a single moment...it happened over a period of days and weeks
 - And the four Gospel writers each record different moments in that process
 - We're studying Matthew, of course, so that's where we will focus our attention
 - But, to make sure you follow Matthew's narrative, I'll summarize details from the other Gospels to be sure we get the full picture
 - But before we get into that topic, Matthew first covers some of Jesus' early moments in the Galilee

Matt. 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee;

Matt. 4:13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Matt. 4:14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

Matt. 4:15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles —

Matt. 4:16 "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light,
And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,
Upon them a light dawned."

Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- At the end of the temptations, Matthew had Jesus standing atop a mountain near Jericho in the wilderness of Judea
 - But in reality, Satan's final temptation of Jesus was the temptation to fall from the pinnacle of the temple
 - You'll remember, I said that Matthew re-ordered the temptations to place the Kingdom temptation at the end
 - Matthew's point was to emphasize that Jesus is the Promised King Who came to gain a Kingdom

- But Jesus would only gain it in the way the Father required, not in an illegitimate fashion
- So, following that final temptation, Matthew says Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been imprisoned by Herod Antipas
 - Herod Antipas inherited rule over Galilee after his father, Herod the Great, died in 4 BC
 - Herod Antipas married the wife of his brother, Philip, committing adultery in the process
 - John the Baptist spoke out against Herod Antipas' adultery and as a result, John was arrested and later beheaded
- Upon learning John was arrested, Jesus withdrew to the Galilee
 - The Galilee is the name for the region in Israel immediately surrounding the Sea of Galilee in the north
 - The Sea of Galilee is a fresh water lake, not a salt sea, and it's the main source of fresh water for all Israel
 - It's shaped like a harp, so it's also called Lake Gennesaret, from the Hebrew word for "harp"
- More importantly, the Galilee was the place a person went to disappear
 - Jerusalem was Israel's cultural, religious, and political center
 - While the Galilee was the backwater, unsophisticated, blue collar farming region of Israel
 - You'll remember there was a saying In Israel that nothing good came from Nazareth
 - Unsurprisingly, Nazareth is located in the heart of the Galilee
- So Jesus has chosen to retreat into the Galilee to put some distance between Himself and those who might oppose Him
 - John's arrest was an indication to Jesus that Satan was turning up the heat on His ministry
 - Remember, Jesus had just frustrated the enemy's attempts to tempt Jesus into sin
 - But don't think the enemy was done trying to stop God's plan at that point
 - On the contrary, Satan simply shifted his focus elsewhere, to stirring up opposition to Jesus and His message, beginning with attacking John
 - Satan brought evil men against the prophet to silence his message that the Messiah had arrived
 - At the same time, the enemy worked equally hard to stir up those same evil men to oppose Jesus' ministry
 - John's Gospel tells us the Pharisees were concerned when they heard Jesus was attracting even more followers than John
 - So for the next three years, Jesus will spend most of His time ministering in the

region of the Galilee, out of the way of those who oppose Him

- Eventually, Jesus must die, of course
 - So when the time is right, the Lord will harness Satan's opposition to deliver His Son to the cross
 - But as we learned last week, from Psalm 91, nothing bad could happen to the Messiah until that appointed time
 - So for now, Jesus will stay out of harm's way in the Galilee
- So in v.12, Matthew briefly mentions Jesus' departure for the Galilee, but as he does, he skips a significant interval of time and a series of important events
 - Based on the other Gospels, we know that after the temptations ended, Jesus went back to Nazareth
 - Immediately, Jesus began to meet His first disciples, including Peter, Andrew and Nathaniel, all from that area of the Galilee
 - Soon after that Jesus, his mother and these first disciples attended a wedding together in the nearby town of Cana
 - At this wedding, Jesus performed His first miracle of turning water into wine
 - After the wedding, Jesus traveled to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and disciples
 - After a few days, Jesus departs for Jerusalem to attend the first of four Passovers during His three year ministry (Jesus' final Passover puts Jesus on the cross)
 - During this visit to the temple, Jesus chases money changers out of the temple for the first time (He does it on His fourth visit also)
 - He also begins to perform public miracles and teach
 - As a result of Jesus' appearances in Jerusalem, Nicodemus comes to ask his questions of Jesus, recorded in John 3
 - Around that time, John the Baptist is arrested, so following the Passover, Jesus returns to the Galilee to escape His enemies
 - On the way to the Galilee, Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at the well, in John 4
 - Jesus eventually returns to His home in Nazareth, where He began to preach and travel around the Galilee
 - That's where we pick up in Matthew 4:13, with Jesus leaving Nazareth for Capernaum once again
 - But this time, Jesus is moving permanently to settle in Capernaum
 - Capernaum is to become Jesus' headquarters for ministry in the Galilee
 - So why did Jesus make this move?
 - In a word, because of unbelief
 - We learn from Luke and John that after He returned to Nazareth, following the

Passover, Jesus' fame quickly spread

- He was performing miracles and declaring the Kingdom was at hand
- On one occasion, Jesus preached at a synagogue in Nazareth, declaring that He was the promised Messiah
- According to Luke, the town of Nazareth rejected Jesus' claims, largely because they thought of Him as just a local boy
- They were so angered by Jesus' claims, they tried to throw Jesus off a nearby cliff
 - Ironically, Satan had just tried to get Jesus to throw Himself off a high point to prove He was the Son of God
 - And now in Nazareth, people were trying to throw Jesus off a cliff because He was the Son of God
- Meanwhile, as Nazareth was rejecting the Messiah, Capernaum was embracing Jesus
 - Capernaum is a small fishing village located on the northern point of the Sea of Galilee
 - And the Gospels report that in contrast to Nazareth, Capernaum readily embraced Jesus' message and miracles
 - So Jesus moves with His family from Nazareth to Capernaum
 - But Jesus didn't make the move because Capernaum was more receptive
 - Matthew says Jesus' decision to settle in Capernaum was intended to fulfill Isaiah 9:1-2
 - Capernaum lies on the road, Via Maris, which means, the Way of the Sea
 - The Via Maris was an important Roman trading route running from Egypt to Babylon
 - Thousands of traders passed through Capernaum on this route
 - Which made Capernaum a strategic location from which to share the message of the Gospel
 - From that one place, news of what Jesus was saying and doing could easily spread to many places in the world
- Isaiah said that would be God's plan

Is. 9:1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

**Is. 9:2 The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.**

- Isaiah says that the tribal territories of Zebulun and Naphtali would be especially blessed when the Lord brought light into darkness
 - Nazareth lies in the region of Zebulun, while Capernaum lies in the region of Naphtali
 - The majority of Jesus' ministry took place in these regions along the northern end of the Galilee
 - Notice also, that Isaiah says the Messiah's light would come "by the way of the sea," the name of that Roman road running through Capernaum
- So the prophet explicitly named the location that the Messiah would perform miracles and bring light to darkness
 - And more than Israel, Isaiah says the Messiah will also be sent to the Galilee of the Gentiles
 - As Gentile traders passed through the Galilee on the Via Maris, some encountered Jesus and His teachings, leading to early converts among the nations
 - Clearly, the Messiah isn't trying to hide in this place
 - Jesus is working in a very public fashion to announce His arrival
- In v.17, Matthew summarizes the message that Jesus was delivering to Israel in those early days of His ministry
 - Much like John the Baptist, Jesus was saying, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"
 - Mark adds that Jesus said "the time is fulfilled" and "believe in the Gospel"
 - So the full message Jesus preached was "*Repent and believe in the Gospel, for the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.*"
 - We know what Jesus meant by repent, because it's the same message John the Baptist was preaching, which we studied back in Chapter 3
 - And believing in the Gospel sounds easy enough to understand too
 - But what exactly was *the Gospel* at this point?
- Today, we define the Gospel as Paul taught it
 - The Gospel is the testimony that Jesus died on a cross for our sins, was buried and raised again after three days (1 Corinthians 15, Romans 10)
 - If you believe that testimony, if you trust in Jesus' death to reconcile you to God and bring you into Heaven, then you shall be saved
 - If you don't accept that message, you will pay the price for your sins, which is eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire
 - But in Jesus' day, Jesus hadn't died yet, so what was the Gospel message Jesus preached while He was alive?
 - The Gospel Jesus preached is captured in the second half of Matthew's statement in v.17
 - Jesus preached that the time is fulfilled, meaning that the promises of the Old Testament prophets were being fulfilled in their midst, in His life

- And specifically, the time had come for the promised Kingdom of the Messiah, for the King Who would rule His people in peace
- The time for God to fulfill all those promises had now arrived, and so the Kingdom of God was ready to appear, Jesus said
 - Jesus supported His claims by teaching from OT Scripture how He was fulfilling prophecy
 - And then Jesus performed supernatural miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit to validate His claims
 - So that by His teaching and His miracles, Jesus quickly attracted large crowds, and according to John, many believed in Jesus as Messiah
- So if someone believed in Jesus' Gospel, they were accepting Jesus as their Promised Messiah, which resulted in personal salvation
 - Moreover, that person was also believing in Jesus' promise to set up the Messianic Kingdom in that day
 - The Old Testament prophets taught extensively that the Messiah, when He came, would rule over a physical Kingdom on earth
 - The Messiah would sit on His throne in Jerusalem, presiding over many nations ruling in peace and justice
 - That's what Jesus meant when He said the Kingdom of God was at hand
 - So during the days Jesus walked the world, we could summarize the Gospel message this way
 - The message declared that salvation began with repenting from dead works of the Law and of disobedience to God
 - In place of these things, a person placed their trust in Jesus' claims to be the promised Messiah in fulfillment of Scripture
 - And they submitted to His authority as their King ruling over the promised Kingdom of God
 - Jesus' offering to set up that Kingdom had a condition...it would come to pass for Israel only if they first obeyed the first half of Jesus' Gospel
 - They had to repent and believe in Jesus as their King before they could receive the Gospel
 - If the nation of Israel embraced Jesus as their Messiah in faith, then Jesus would give them the promised Kingdom
 - Literally, the 1,000-year Kingdom we're still waiting for would have arrived during Jesus' first coming, had Israel repented and believed
 - Obviously, that Kingdom didn't come, because Israel didn't receive Him
 - Instead of setting up a Kingdom, Jesus went to the cross
 - Yet at this point, Jesus' message made no reference to Him dying on the cross for our sins
 - Later, when Jesus did begin to share with His disciples about His coming death, it

greatly confused them

- They wondered, how could Jesus be the Promised Messiah coming to rule all nations if He could be killed by Rome?
- And how could the King die before His Kingdom was in place?
- The answer for when and why Jesus' message changed from Kingdom to cross must await our study of Matthew 12
 - So for now, Matthew moves to Jesus recruiting His disciples

Matt. 4:18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

Matt. 4:19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matt. 4:20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Matt. 4:21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them.

Matt. 4:22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

- This is all Matthew gives us about how Jesus selected His disciples
 - Later in Chapter 10, Matthew records Jesus assigning twelve of His disciples to a special role called apostle
 - But for now, Matthew simply says Jesus found men along the way in the Galilee
 - In v.18, Jesus calls two brothers from their fishing business on the Galilee, Simon and Andrew
 - And lo and behold, they just leave their nets and follow Jesus
 - Now when you read that, doesn't it sound strange to you?
 - It doesn't read like real life
 - Doesn't it sound as if they were hypnotized?
 - Who drops everything in the middle of everyday life to begin a new life following someone around?
 - My wife would say that's how I ended up with her, but for the rest of us, it doesn't sound like real life
 - And nor should it, because that's not how this happened
 - Once again, Matthew is leaving out some important details we find in the other Gospels
 - Beginning with the important point that this isn't the first time Peter and Andrew met Jesus
 - In John's Gospel, we get the account of their first meeting
- Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, following John's ministry by the river Jordan

along with John, who wrote the Gospel of John

- After John baptized Jesus, he told Andrew and John to stop following him and to start following Jesus
 - So Andrew and John left John the Baptist and started to follow Jesus
 - Soon after, Andrew introduces Jesus to his brother, Simon
 - Jesus immediately changed Simon's name to Peter, which means, "Rock" (today we would say Rocky)
 - Later, Jesus called Philip, who lived near Andrew and Peter in the Galilee, and then later Philip introduced Jesus to Nathaniel
- So one at a time, Jesus collected disciples around the Galilee
 - But it's important to remember that Jesus collected these men before Jesus had performed even a single miracle
 - John says these encounters happened shortly after Jesus was baptized, prior to the wedding in Cana
 - So these men were believing in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, and following Him based solely on Jesus' testimony
 - They were clearly operating in faith
- Later, these disciples joined Jesus as guests at the wedding in Cana, probably because they had been invited too
 - While at the wedding, John, Andrew and Peter witness Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine
 - As they see this miracle, John reports their faith was confirmed and strengthened

John 2:11 This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

- After this, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Passover, and these same disciples join Him in Jerusalem
 - They followed Jesus, probably because as Jewish men, they were also required to attend the feast
 - So they traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem and on His return to the Galilee
 - They are also with Jesus when He has His encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria
- During all this time, John reports they called Jesus "rabbi", or "teacher"
 - But they also called Him "Christ", or "Messiah"
 - So they understood Jesus was the Messiah, but for them, the Messiah was principally a rabbi or teacher
- In other words, it's unclear at first what these guys understood of the concept of

Messiah, much less what it would require of them personally

- They were probably operating from what they knew of Israel's past
 - For example, when Moses came to Israel, the people accepted him as their leader and prophet and mediator of the Law
 - They revered him and respected him
 - Likewise, when Joshua was raised up, or when David and Solomon ruled, the people recognized these leaders as being sent by God
- But in all these cases, the people of Israel still maintained their normal way of life
 - Just because Moses showed up, the people didn't cease in their trades
 - Joshua's conquest of Canaan didn't change their family allegiances
 - David's rise to the throne didn't require that people leave their homes and follow David around
 - People didn't abandon their way of life when God sent a prophet or king...they simply accepted and served these men as they went about their daily lives
- Therefore, when these disciples met Jesus, they were certainly excited to receive Him and to know His Kingdom was at hand
 - They believed in Him, they listened to His teaching
 - They accompanied Him from time to time and they shared the news of His arrival with others
- But in the meantime, they still needed to make a living
 - They had bills to pay and had to put food on the table
 - So after the disciples returned with Jesus to the Galilee after the Passover, they simply returned to their fishing nets and boats
 - Meanwhile, Jesus continued traveling around the Galilee teaching in synagogues and drawing large crowds
- Then on this day, Jesus makes His way back to these men on the shores of the Galilee
 - According to Luke, Jesus teaches the crowds on the shore for a while with Jesus' disciples listening on
 - And then, as we read in Matthew 4, Jesus suddenly turns to Andrew and Peter and James and John and says, follow Me
 - But at this point, these men have already spent considerable time with Jesus
 - They believed in Him as the Messiah
 - They have seen the miracles that confirmed Jesus' claims
 - Moreover, they've had time to consider what Jesus has been teaching and what it means for them personally
 - So perhaps, they were ready for this change
 - Perhaps, after being with Jesus, fishing just didn't seem as rewarding as it once did

- Perhaps, they were already considering whether to ask Jesus if they could become His full-time students
- So Jesus asks these men to embark on a career change to become students of a rabbi
 - To follow a rabbi, meant to enroll in the rabbi's personal academy, which meant pursuing a calling to be a rabbi yourself
 - Students of rabbis committed themselves to follow and obey the rabbi's teaching, after which, the students would become rabbis
 - That's what Jesus is asking, and that's what these men agree to do in an instant, leaving behind their livelihood and identity
- But despite all that, doesn't their decision to leave suddenly seem hard to believe?
 - Well, perhaps it would help you to know about one more detail Matthew left out
 - In Luke, we learn that right before Jesus issued this call, He put on a little demonstration of His fishing ability

Luke 5:4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Luke 5:5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets."

Luke 5:6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break;

Luke 5:7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.

Luke 5:8 But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Luke 5:9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken;

Luke 5:10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."

Luke 5:11 When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

- Now do you understand why these men were willing to drop everything to follow Jesus?
 - They knew Jesus was the Messiah, they had seen His miracles and heard the power of His teaching
 - But now, they witness a firsthand demonstration of His authority to rule over all things, including the Creation
 - They've witnessed His divinity in a powerful, new way

- And only then, does Jesus call them to make a new way of life, serving Him as fishers of men
 - Jesus is calling them to flip their way of life upside down
 - These men fished the sea, seeking earthly provision
 - They brought death to living things so they could enrich themselves
- Now Jesus wants them to fish the land seeking heavenly provision
 - They would sacrifice themselves to bring eternal life to dead hearts
 - And in the face of Jesus' display of divine power, they felt compelled to make the change
- From my own personal experience in following and serving Christ, I can tell you, I can identify with this pattern and I suspect it's the same for most people
 - At some point, we encounter Jesus...someone says come and see, and we meet our Messiah
 - We believe in His Word, even before we see evidence of His power and the depths of his wisdom
 - And then, as we accompany Him in our daily life, we see our faith confirmed and strengthened by what we experience and what we learn
 - Then, on Monday morning, we go back to our nets, so to speak, and for most of us, this is where the path becomes a circle
 - We repeat this pattern regularly, and for most of us, it's enough
 - But for some of us, there's a growing sensation that following Jesus in this way isn't enough
 - It's like the disciples sitting on that boat watching Jesus teaching crowds on the shore...it doesn't feel like we're close enough
 - Our daily pursuits are no longer enough for us, and more importantly, they're no longer enough for Jesus
 - So we start to wonder if there's something more to our faith than Sunday mornings (Thursday nights)
 - And then, at the right moment, the Lord brings us an example of His divine power, perhaps in a word, or some amazing work of grace in our life
 - The Lord fills our nets, as He did for Peter, and we come face-to-face with the power of God in our lives
 - And at that moment, the Lord gives us a decision to make
 - Are we going to continue chasing the bounty of the world
 - Or are we going to serve the One who already owns everything?
 - Are we going to follow the Lord who can fill our nets anytime He desires?
 - Are we going to leave the world to serve Christ?
 - That's a call of ministry and when we hear it, our only response is turning away from whatever is holding us back to follow Jesus

- But notice, when Jesus revealed His divine power to Peter, it provoked fear in the man
 - Peter instantly sensed his own sinfulness and unworthiness, as did his friends
 - Their sin weighed on their hearts
 - And they suddenly doubt they could even be in the presence of God, much less serve Him
 - So in Luke's account, Peter tells Jesus to go away
 - Have you ever felt that way?
 - Have you ever felt unworthy of God's call? *Too sinful to be useful?*
 - That God couldn't possibly have time for you, much less any need for you
 - And so like Peter, in self-pity, you tell the Lord to go away
 - Let me share a secret...Peter was right...he wasn't worthy to serve God...none of us are
 - There's nothing in us that God needs, and we're certainly not equal to the work
 - But that's where grace comes in...God's unmerited favor
 - The love of God is so great that He doesn't just forgive us by calling us into a saving faith
 - He also overlooks our weaknesses and disqualifications to allow us to serve Him
- Think about who these men were...Peter, John, Andrew, James
 - They were fishermen by trade
 - They likely had no formal education, much less religious training
 - They were engaged in a profession that generally attracted rougher types
 - They probably shared in the various vices that accompanied men of this sort
 - So exactly what qualified them to serve the Messiah? The King of earth and Heaven? God incarnate?
 - Absolutely nothing
 - In fact, they were likely the last men on earth someone might have assumed could be disciples of the Messiah
 - Yet the Lord selected these men from among all those He encountered from Jerusalem to the Galilee
 - Which simply demonstrates that the Lord calls unqualified men and women to serve Him, men and women who know they have nothing to offer
 - The disciples were just the latest example of this principle, but God always works this way
 - God commonly selects the one you don't expect, the one who can't meet the standards, the one without the qualifications
 - Men like Joseph, Gideon, David, Amos...people like us
 - Why? Because then we're not confused about who's really doing the work

- Because we won't try to compete with the Lord for His glory
- Because in our weaknesses, the Lord is seen to be strong as Paul says
- And think about how strong the Lord showed Himself through these men
 - Peter becomes the leader of the Church in its first days
 - He preaches sermons at Pentecost and before the leaders of Israel
 - He converted thousands in the city of Jerusalem and beyond
 - He bravely resisted the persecution of the Jewish leaders and he became the first to convert Gentiles
 - Eventually, he accepted a martyr's death
 - The other men had similarly impressive records
 - James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem, ministering in the face of severe persecution and poverty, until his early death as a martyr
 - Early Church writings report that Andrew was the first to evangelize the Black Sea region of Georgia, Ukraine and Southern Russia and was also martyred on a cross
 - John was instrumental in ministering to the early Church throughout the first century
 - Eventually, he received the greatest revelation of the New Testament and recorded it in the book of that name
 - Can we imagine the Church beginning without the work of these men?
 - How did they accomplish these things?
 - They didn't...Jesus did it through them
 - What mattered wasn't their ability...it was their availability
 - The Lord calls unqualified people, but He doesn't leave us untrained
 - The Lord spent three years with these men training them by His Word and example
 - And then, He gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them each day after Jesus departed
- He's given every believer the same things today
 - You who have been given saving faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through that faith, you also have the Word of God
 - You have the record of what these men learned so you can learn it too
 - And you have also been given the deposit of the Holy Spirit
 - And so, if you fear you have the same paltry qualifications these men had, have no fear
 - You have the same equipping they had too
 - Now the only question you have to answer is, if you're going to drop your net?

- Is God calling you to serve Him in some new and different way?
- Perhaps, to make more time to study His Word, to spend time in the company of your fellow believers
- Perhaps, to devote more time, talent and treasure to the work of the Church
- Perhaps, He's calling you to abandon your career, to turn your entire life upside down by leaving your nets in an instant
- I can't tell you what He's calling you to do, but I can assure you of one thing
 - He's asking you to do something to follow Him
 - As you consider this word tonight, I hope you're humble and courageous enough to answer His question honestly

- Last week, we studied Jesus beginning His public ministry in the Galilee
 - Jesus came back from the desert and began to move from place to place, teaching and performing miraculous signs
 - He traveled to Jerusalem for the first of four Passovers during His years of ministry
 - And as He returned to the Galilee, His fame immediately began to spread and crowds began to gather
 - Moving forward today, Matthew begins to describe the impact of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee
 - In particular, Matthew focuses on five areas of impact
 - First, Matthew relates Jesus' authority as a teacher and preacher of God's word
 - Secondly, Matthew describes Jesus' power to heal the human condition
 - Thirdly, Matthew shows Jesus' authority to defeat the enemy and his demons
 - Fourthly, Matthew shows Jesus held authority over the Sabbath, and therefore over all Jewish Law and tradition
 - And finally, Matthew relates examples of Jesus' power over Creation itself
 - By describing Jesus' power in these areas, Matthew supports his main claim that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the King and ruler of Israel and of the world
 - Matthew begins this narrative focused on the most important of these areas of authority
 - Jesus' authority in teaching the Word of God
 - Because as impressive as Jesus' miracles are, they always served a greater purpose, which was to bring attention to Jesus' Words
 - That's why the next chapters of this Gospel focus on the Sermon on the Mount
- But for now, let's wrap up Matthew's narrative at the end of Chapter 4

Matt. 4:23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

Matt. 4:24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.

Matt. 4:25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

- This short passage is really an overview of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee
 - From here, Matthew will give us the details on these experiences in the chapters ahead
 - For now, let's focus on three observations

- First, Matthew says Jesus was traveling throughout the Galilee, teaching in synagogues with His first few key disciples in tow
 - The Galilee covers about 2,800 sq. miles and in Jesus' day, it was home to about 3 million people
 - So that's a lot of territory to cover and a lot of people to reach
 - Jesus spent the better part of three years moving about this area, but He probably could have ministered for many more years
- Matthew says Jesus taught specifically in Galilean synagogues, which were the local Jewish houses of worship
 - The only official Jewish house of worship that God established for Israel was the tabernacle, later to become the temple
 - But while Israel was in exile in Babylon without a temple, the rabbis instituted the practice of Jews assembling for worship away from the temple
 - The Hebrew word for an "assembly" is *synagogue*, so the place of assembly became known as the *synagogue*
- This detail tells us that as Jesus preached the Gospel in the Galilee, He was searching out gatherings of religious Jews
 - In other words, Jesus wasn't going to Gentiles during this early phase of His ministry
 - And there were significant populations of Gentiles in and around the Galilee
 - Nevertheless, Jesus was focused on converting God-fearing Jews
- The reason He focused on Jews goes back to something I taught last week
 - Jesus' Gospel proclamation was that He was the promised Messiah and He was prepared to give Israel their promised Kingdom
 - It was a good-faith offer that Israel ultimately rejected, because they rejected Jesus as their King
 - But still, Jesus' offer was sincere and legitimate, which is why Jesus sought specifically for Jews to hear it
- The second thing Matthew notes in his summary, is that Jesus did more than just preach in the Galilee
 - He also performed supernatural acts of compassionate healing for people
 - He healed people of every disease and affliction, Matthew says, demonstrating His power over the human condition
 - And these supernatural healings had a predictable effect
 - We're told in v.24, that the news of His healing power spread like a wildfire roaring through dry Galilean grasslands
 - Not only was all Galilee streaming to Jesus, but the news traveled as far north as Syria (ancient Aram) and beyond the Jordan to Gilead and Ammon
 - Which means thousands of people who suffered an illness or knew someone who did, sought out Jesus from both regions

- And the indication here, and elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel, is Jesus was healing everyone who came to Him without discrimination and without prerequisites
- Which is why the crowds were so huge
- Matthew gives us a brief list of the ailments Jesus healed
 - First, He healed various diseases, which refers to general physical ailments
 - Secondly, He healed pains, which literally translates as "torments" or "torture"
 - Anyone who has suffered under chronic pain understands why the Greek language refers to such pains as "torture"
- Next, Matthew mentions the healing of demoniacs
 - A demoniac was someone indwelt by a demon
 - In Jesus' day, people understood that some maladies were not the result of natural causes, but rather of demonic activity
 - In other words, demoniacs manifested either physical or mental illness, resulting from the damage inflicted on their mind and body by demons
 - So as Jesus removed the demons, the people were made instantly well
 - We're going to have a lot of opportunity in the future to talk more about demons and demon possession in this Gospel
- Finally, Jesus healed epileptics and paralytics
 - These are essentially opposite conditions
 - "Epileptic" was the ancient term for someone who had seizures, which are uncontrolled body movements
 - While paralytics were those who lost use of limbs
 - Jesus healed both conditions
- In Jesus' day, there were no medical cures for these conditions
 - Even today, we still don't have solutions to many of these diseases
 - And even in cases where we do have treatments, many of our treatments do little more than mask the symptoms
 - For example, we can't cure seizures or paralysis in most cases
 - This is especially true for demoniacs, especially since modern society doesn't even recognize this condition as real
 - But Jesus' healing was a full and complete restoration of the body in all cases
 - His was a healing that distinguished Jesus as someone greater than a mere medicine man
 - Even today, in the age of science and modern medicine, miracle healings like these would be mind-blowing
 - Therefore, as Jesus performed these miracles, He was making an undeniable statement of His divinity

- Jesus was demonstrating that He possesses the power to address the human condition
- With merely a word or touch, Jesus can bring the human body back to its ideal state, to full health
- That ability to restore the human body to its ideal state is the unique calling card of the Creator Himself
- Only the One Who has created the human body, possesses the power to restore us in perfection
- And this power isn't limited to our physical condition
 - Anyone who witnessed Jesus healing in this way, would have instinctively appreciated Jesus' power over the human body
 - And from that conclusion, it's just a small step to conclude logically that Jesus must also possess power to heal the soul
 - Because as sick as our bodies may be, the condition of the human soul is even sicker and even more desperately in need of healing
 - And that was the focus of Jesus' ministry and preaching: healing souls
- Remember, Jesus' healing ministry was not about making people feel better or live longer...it was about bringing people to an awareness of the Gospel
 - The Christian hope is not in physical healing...it's in knowing that by the blood of Christ shed for us, we one day escape this sinful dying body and receive eternal life in glory
 - That's what we're all waiting for, to leave this corrupt body behind and enter into a new body that never dies, never sins
 - In fact, one could argue that a supernatural healing could be a disappointment for the believer who knows what awaits in eternity
 - Because it delays our escape from this body and prolongs our suffering in this world
 - By the same token, the Lord doesn't profit from healing this sinful body so we have a more comfortable existence for a time
 - Generally speaking, the more comfortable we become in this body, the less we desire the new body
 - And the less priority we place on seeking eternal gain
 - So, Jesus' compassionate healing ministry served more important, spiritual purposes
 - First, Jesus healed to establish His claims to divinity
 - His miracles validated He was *Jehovah Rapha*, the God Who heals, and therefore the Creator of the human body
 - Secondly, these miracles drew an audience to Jesus' teaching
 - For obvious reasons, a ministry of free and total healing drew huge crowds
 - And then, once these crowds were gathered around Him, Jesus could teach and

preach

- So to put it simply, Jesus healed the body so He would have opportunity to heal the spirit
- This is still God's priority today in cases where the Lord may perform a miraculous healing
 - It's always for the purpose of glorifying the Healer, not pleasing the one healed
 - It draws people to the Lord as their Creator and gives opportunity for them to hear the Word of God
 - If you doubt this purpose, ask why the Lord would heal someone He allowed to experience disease in the first place
 - If God's first concern was keeping our bodies disease free, then why do Christians contract illness in the first place?
 - Likewise, any teaching that suggests if you seek healing and don't get it, it must mean you didn't have enough faith – that's ridiculous, because we all die sooner or later – by that definition, we all run out of faith, or we'd never die
 - Jesus gives us the answer in John 9

John 9:1 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.

John 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?"

John 9:3 Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

- That's how we need to understand Jesus' healing ministry in the Galilee
 - Jesus healed sick people to bring glory to God
- First, to show Himself as the One possessing power over, and compassion for, the human condition
- And secondly, to ensure that crowds would gather to listen to His teaching
 - Because long after our bodies have become dust, the Word of God will endure forever
- Finally, the third thing Matthew's summary shows us is how effective this strategy was
 - In v.25, Matthew says that large crowds followed Jesus
 - First, they came from around the Galilee, which generally describes the area west of the Sea of Galilee
 - And they also came from the Decapolis, which is the area east of the Jordan from Damascus to the Dead Sea
 - And they also came from Judea and Jerusalem
 - We're talking about people coming from hundreds of miles away by foot, through the desert, and during an age when there was no instant communication

- Imagine how powerful Jesus' draw must have been in that day, to bring people from so far merely by word of mouth?
- This is also why we can assume that Jesus was healing virtually everyone who came to Him
- The word was out that if you wanted restored health, it was happening in the Galilee
- Matthew's description of these huge crowds demonstrates the importance of Jesus' healing ministry in establishing His reputation quickly and powerfully
 - Jesus only has three years to accomplish all that the Father has planned for His earthly ministry
 - And in that short time, Jesus needed to move quickly from being in one moment, a nobody from a backwater town of Nazareth
 - To the next moment, being a rockstar with a very large following
 - And His healing ministry served that purpose
- Speaking of followers, we saw last week, how Jesus invited certain men to follow Him... men like Andrew, Peter, John and Philip and eventually others
 - These men believed in Jesus' claim to be Messiah, so they submitted themselves to His authority as their Rabbi
 - They left their former way of life to join Jesus in a vocational pursuit
 - But now, we hear that in the weeks and months that followed, Jesus collected hundreds or even thousands of followers
 - So we might ask, are these new followers considered Jesus' disciples also?
 - Before we answer that question, we need to understand the meaning of "disciple" in Jesus' day
 - The word itself simply means, "pupil" or "student", but today we've attached a greater meaning to the word
 - Today, when we say "disciple" of Jesus, we usually mean a believer, a person who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ
 - But in Jesus' day, a disciple simply meant a student in a rabbinical school
 - A disciple was a person who committed to study under a rabbi
 - It would be similar to the position of a postgraduate student learning under a professor at a university today
 - So disciples were vocational students, studying under a rabbi and committed to becoming like him
 - One day, when they finished their course of study, a disciple hoped to become a rabbi and lead others in a similar fashion
 - Just as university students might aspire to become a tenured professor themselves
 - And like postgraduate programs today, prospective disciples had to compete to be accepted by the better rabbis

- The more renowned a rabbi was, the more selective he could be in choosing his disciples
- And the more competitive it was to become his disciple
- One of the more famous rabbi-student relationships of the first century was that of Rabbi Gamaliel and his student, Saul of Tarsus
 - Gamaliel was the “Harvard” or “Yale” of his day
 - And Saul (or the Apostle Paul) was a talented and ambitious disciple
 - Paul spoke in Acts of their association to give evidence of his significant academic achievements

Acts 22:3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

- Jesus was already a renowned rabbi, and He was quickly gaining prominence for His teaching and power
 - So when Jesus called men to be His disciples, it was a high honor for them
 - Remarkably, these first men Jesus called weren’t even looking to be His disciples or to be disciples of any rabbi
 - I imagine that becoming a rabbi’s disciple was the last thing they ever imagined doing
 - So when Jesus called them to be His disciples, it was probably a shock
 - It would have been as surprising as a high school dropout suddenly receiving a full scholarship to Harvard today
 - They were receiving a great honor, one they didn’t request, and one that didn’t depend on their scholastic achievement
 - But now, many people are following Jesus without waiting for Jesus to call them as disciples
 - Later, Matthew will report that Jesus has thousands of these self-appointed followers
 - These people attached themselves to Jesus without receiving an invitation to be His disciples
 - It’s like someone sitting in on a college course without bothering to enroll in the university first
 - They came for personal reasons, like healing or food or out of curiosity or other reasons
- So what we’re learning is, that following after Jesus didn’t require a belief in Jesus’ claims as Messiah
 - The early disciples called to be His disciples did have faith in Him as Messiah, and their faith grew as they learned more

- But Jesus didn't make that faith a prerequisite for the crowds to come to Him for healing or to hear His teaching
- And as the crowds grew some decided to follow Him from place to place, even after they were healed
- And some within the group even began to commit themselves to Jesus as His disciples
 - They identified themselves as Jesus' formal students, and they gave up their normal way of life to accompany Him everywhere
 - And Jesus permitted them to join Him in this way, and Jesus even refers to them as His disciples
 - This group of disciples will number upward of several hundred, or more, at times along the way
 - Later, Jesus will make an additional distinction among His disciples, by naming twelve of them to be His apostles
- So those who surrounded Jesus in these crowds can be classified in this way
 - Following Jesus, is a large group of thousands seeking for Jesus' help or just curious to hear His teaching
 - Within this larger group, there is a smaller group of dozens or perhaps hundreds who have committed to being Jesus' disciples
 - And inside the group of disciples, there is an even smaller group of handpicked disciples who Jesus called His apostles
- But now, here's the main point to remember...in *each* of these three groups you can find both believers and unbelievers
 - As you would naturally expect, Jesus' larger group of followers included both believers and unbelievers
 - Some accepted Jesus' claims to be Messiah and were saved by that faith
 - While many others who followed Jesus had only a passing interest in His claims and teaching
 - They followed *after* Jesus, but they never placed their faith *in* Jesus Christ as their Messiah, as their Savior
 - This group eventually grows to tens of thousands of followers who celebrated Him, for a time
 - But then a short time later, these followers abandoned Jesus, particularly when the free food or healings stopped
 - They were much like people who sit in churches today
 - They come in the doors for any number of reasons, but they have never come to Jesus
 - They are unbelievers, sitting in the house of God, but they are not resting in Jesus for their salvation
 - Sometimes, you'll find someone who has been in church for years, yet hasn't come

to faith in Jesus Christ

- Somehow, they hung around believers, yet never encountered Jesus in a true way
- These are the saddest examples of following without knowing
- But most of the time, pretend Christians only show up in church when times are tough, like after a disaster or in a personal crisis (or at Christmas & Easter)
 - And certainly, those are really good times to draw closer to God
 - In fact, God uses trials and crises in our lives to wake us up and to cause us to seek Him earnestly
- But, if a person's interest in God never goes further...
 - If their pursuit of God during trial never goes deeper than seeking a security blanket or looking for a foxhole to dive into when the bullets start to fly, then they never learn the lesson of the trial
 - They've wasted an opportunity to know the truth
- That's why I believe teaching the Word of God is so important in this moment, as we gather week to week
 - And it's why we do it so consistently and with such emphasis
 - The only way an unbeliever can hide out in church week after week, year after year, is if that room is devoid of the Word of God
 - Because if the Word is preached properly and consistently, then one of two things will happen
 - Either the Word of God will make an impression on the heart, such that the person recognizes the truth
 - They see themselves as sinners and in danger of receiving God's wrath
 - And so as a result, they repent, falling on their knees and accepting the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ
 - Or else, the constant presentation of the Word of God will weigh so heavily on their hard heart, that they cannot sit under its weight
 - So that eventually, they become restless and uncomfortable in the reminders that Jesus is Lord
 - And that a judgment is coming upon all who suppress the truth in unrighteousness
 - And therefore, they will jump to their feet and escape out of the building, never to return
 - The one thing an unbeliever can't do under the steady and bold preaching of God's Word, is sit still and feel comfortable
 - And we don't want that either, because that's the worst possible outcome
 - To be allowed to think you have something you don't have
 - And the only way that happens, is if you remove the power of God's Word from

the meeting of God's people

- Now having said that, studying the Word of God won't magically erase the evil lurking in our hearts
 - But it does equip us to deal with it, in our walk with Christ
 - First, hearing the Word of God brings a person to a saving faith, which changes the course of their eternal future
 - It awakens a dead heart to know and follow Jesus as His disciple, rather than being content to be Jesus' admirer
 - But more than that, the Word of God is also the source of our sanctification
 - The Spirit, living in us, takes the Word of God and impresses it on our hearts so that He may expose the ugliness that's inside all of us
 - So that as we enter into a study of God's Word, we come face to face with our sin nature
 - The Spirit convicts us, raising our awareness of our shortcomings so the Spirit can then work in us to scrape that sin away
 - We will be washed by the water of the Word so that, in time, we are more and more like the One we follow
- So it's not surprising that many within that larger crowd were not believing
 - But you're probably surprised to know that some of Jesus' formal students, His disciples, were also not believing in Him, at least not at first
 - Remember, believing in Jesus as Messiah was not a prerequisite for becoming His disciple
 - Some of Jesus' disciples believed in Him *before* Jesus called them...men like Andrew
 - And others probably did not come to faith in Jesus as Messiah until after they were already disciples...men like Matthew himself
 - And for the same reason, there were those who Jesus called as His disciples who *never* came to faith
 - We see evidence of this in John's Gospel
 - After Jesus taught that His followers must eat His flesh and drink His blood (speaking spiritually, not literally) the crowd objected
 - They thought He was calling for cannibalism, and some began to grumble and reconsider whether to follow Jesus
 - So Jesus says this to them

John 6:64 “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

John 6:65 And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

John 6:66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

- As soon as following Jesus became too challenging or inconvenient, these fell away
- That's the expected result...that if we don't have our faith rooted in Jesus Christ as our Savior, then sooner or later, we lose interest in what He's offering
- I'm sure you remember the parable Jesus taught in Luke 8 of the four soils
 - In the parable, Jesus taught that the Word of God falls on the human heart like a seed falling on the ground
 - And the result depends on the nature of the person's heart, or their response to that Word
 - Some hearts are soft and prepared to receive that Word truly, to believe it sincerely
 - These embrace the truth and receive Jesus in faith, becoming a lifelong disciple
 - And as they do, new life springs forth and comes to maturity, such that the person bears spiritual fruit
 - Other hearts are so hard, that the Word of God can't penetrate
 - They hear, but they don't listen
 - And as a result, they reject the message and remain spiritually dead and lifeless
 - And in the future, they will experience the consequences of unbelief, which is eternal judgment under the wrath of God
- But in that parable, Jesus also teaches about two additional outcomes that sit in-between these two extremes
 - These middle conditions are murky and harder to decipher and so, they can be easily misunderstood
 - In particular, the second of these conditions describes a heart's response to the Word that looks promising at first
 - They hear the Word of God and respond, showing interest and even commitment
 - But in time, difficulties cause them to withdraw their support for Jesus
 - This person is like one of those disciples of Jesus who began following with enthusiasm but left Jesus when His Words were too difficult to accept
 - As a result, they reveal themselves to be among the unbelieving disciples
 - They pursued Jesus for earthly reasons, not spiritual reasons
 - And when Jesus ceased meeting their earthly desires, they lost interest in Him
 - Increasingly, I think this is the state of church gatherings today
 - In churches all over the world, we are amassing buildings full of disciples for Jesus

- But many of these so-called disciples are coming entirely for earthly reasons
- And in times of testing, or when their earthly dreams aren't fulfilled as they expected, they move on
- How is this possible?
 - Because the Word of God is not faithfully preached on Sundays in many churches today
 - And as a result, rooms fill with hearts who have imagined a Jesus according to their own desires
 - These people are disciples of Jesus only in the simple sense that they are students of a false Jesus, one that isn't grounded in Scripture
- So that when the miracles they were promised fail to materialize, or when the price of following Jesus becomes too great, they too fall away
 - They are part of the apostasy that Paul said would accompany the last days of the Church
 - These are unbelieving "disciples" who leave the Church, because they never truly came to Jesus
- And finally, this pattern of unbelievers hiding among believers also held true for the twelve disciples named as apostles
 - One of these twelve was not believing in Jesus, either: Judas Iscariot
 - John tells us this in John 6

John 6:67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

John 6:69 "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

John 6:70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"

John 6:71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

- Jesus handpicked these twelve men to become part of His inner circle of disciples
- And yet, as Jesus says plainly, He selected one of these men knowing He was a "devil", meaning an unbeliever
- Much later in our study of Matthew, we'll come back to the question of why Jesus selected an unbeliever to be among the first apostles
 - So the point to understand tonight, is simply that those who followed Jesus have always included those who were not what they seemed
 - They were disciples in appearance only

- Yet Jesus allowed them to accompany Him, just as He allows unbelievers to associate within the Church body today
- As Jesus teaches in the parable of the wheat and the tares, for a time, the Lord allows the two types of followers to mix
 - For the time has not yet come for Him to sift out the unbeliever
 - For now is the time of salvation, and the Lord won't cut the time short
 - But in time, the window for salvation will close, and that separation will happen
 - As the writer of Hebrews reminds us

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

- Why are you following Jesus? What did you come for?
 - Did someone promise you some wealth or health or trick?
 - Smells and bells in some high church cathedral?
 - Mysticism? Romanticism?
 - Entertainment? (I know you're not here for that)
- If those things are your principal causes for your relationship with Jesus, you do not have a relationship with Jesus
 - On the other hand, if you know yourself, as the Scriptures describe it
 - A person who has nothing good in the heart
 - Eternally evil, as all human beings are
- And you know that's not God-pleasing
 - You know one day, someone is going to hold you accountable to the Law
 - And that someone is going to be Jesus Christ
 - If you know that's true, then you have every reason to repent and accept His mercy – because He hasn't come in judgment yet
 - And you're not dead yet...so there's still time
 - That's coming to know Christ as a disciple, and as a believer

- Tonight, in Chapter 5, we begin one of Jesus' best-known sermons, the Sermon on the Mount
 - When I last taught at the end of Chapter 4, I explained that Matthew's account focuses on five areas of Jesus' ministry
 - Jesus' authority as a teacher
 - His authority over the human body
 - His authority over the demonic realm
 - His authority over the Sabbath and all the Law
 - And His authority over the Creation itself
 - Collectively, these demonstrations of power and authority proved Jesus' claim to be divine, to be the promised Messianic King
 - But one area was more important than the rest
 - Matthew's account places special emphasis on Jesus' teaching authority
 - Matthew records, in detail, five major sermons or discourses Jesus delivered to His disciples
 - And these sermons reveal Jesus' unparalleled understanding of spiritual truth
 - And each one corrects false understandings of God and His plan for His people
- Perhaps the most famous of these five discourses is the one we start tonight, the Sermon on the Mount
 - We call this the Sermon on the Mount because of where Jesus stood when He delivered the teaching
 - More than likely, Jesus was somewhere near the Sea of Galilee, perhaps on one of the higher plains near Bethsaida or The Arbel
 - As we said earlier, Jesus is moving around the Galilee healing anyone who comes to Him
 - Naturally, He's attracted a sizable following in the process
 - And as He goes, He declares to those who follow that the Kingdom of God is at hand
 - Jesus takes time to explain in detail what He means by the term, "Kingdom of God"
 - The sermon on the mount is Jesus' first such extended teaching
 - The sermon runs three chapters in Matthew's Gospel, until the end of Chapter 7
 - And it's best-known for how it begins, with a section commonly called, "the Beatitudes"
 - Let's read the Beatitudes to open this chapter, and then we'll take a moment to consider some important background

Matt. 5:1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He

sat down, His disciples came to Him.

Matt. 5:2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

Matt. 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matt. 5:5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matt. 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Matt. 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Matt. 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matt. 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matt. 5:10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

Matt. 5:12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Before we consider what Jesus is saying to this crowd, there are two major points of background we must appreciate
 - First, we need to understand the religious culture in the Israel of Jesus’ day
 - By the time Jesus appeared in the Galilee, Israel’s religious life had been warped by centuries of bad teaching
 - For at least four centuries, the nation had been led and taught by men who traced their origins to the scribes of Ezra
 - Yet, these men distorted and corrupted the high standard of teaching Ezra established
 - When the people of Israel returned from exile in Babylon, they were determined never to repeat the mistakes that led to their captivity
 - Among their leaders was a teacher named Ezra, who began to instruct the people in following the Law of God
 - Ezra was a man who knew and loved God’s Word and he taught it truly
 - He desired to instill a heart of obedience in Israel so they might never be removed from the land again
 - As a result of Ezra’s leadership, the people of Israel recommitted themselves to knowing and following God’s commandments
 - Ezra also began a school to train religious leaders called, “scribes”, in the proper understanding of the Law
 - For a time, things went well for Israel
 - But after Ezra died, a new generation of scribes rose up, men who took Ezra’s program in a new and dangerous direction

- Not content to teach only God's Word, they began to expand the set of rules that the people should follow
- For every "thou shalt not..." in God's Law, this new generation of scribes added 10 more restrictions
- They claimed these additional rules ("fences") would ensure Israel's obedience by preventing any violation of God's law
- This new rabbinical movement resulted in two very serious problems for the people of Israel
 - First, the scribes' manual of manmade rules, which eventually became known as the *Mishnah*, grew in size and importance over the centuries
 - Each new generation of scribes and religious leaders sought to invent new rules and reinterpreted old rules
 - Eventually, the rabbinical rules became so all-encompassing that they rivaled Scripture itself
 - In fact, the scribes and rabbis ultimately declared that their rules *were* Scripture
 - They claimed the Mishnah was an "oral law" that God originally gave to Moses, yet Moses never wrote it down
 - This additional law was preserved over time, being handed down orally to these scribes, who now put it in writing
 - Once this myth took hold among the people, the Mishnah became indistinguishable from Scripture in the minds of Jews
 - Naturally, as keepers of the Mishnah, the Pharisees were the self-appointed models of piety in Israel
 - They portrayed themselves as the gold standard for righteousness among the people
 - So that when a Jewish man or woman wondered what pleased God, they only needed to look at the Pharisees to find their answer
 - Of course, this game was rigged, because the Pharisees set the rules and also decided how they were to be interpreted
 - It was like the fox guarding the hen house
- So after centuries of living under Pharisaical Judaism, Israel lost a true appreciation for what God's Word taught on these matters
 - By the time of Jesus, Israeli society was regulated almost exclusively by the Mishnah's precepts
 - Sabbath keeping, feast rituals, temple service, virtually all religious life and practice was conducted according to these manmade rules
 - These customs bear only a passing resemblance to the requirements of Scripture
 - And in some cases, the rabbi's teaching directly contradicted the Word of God, yet still they prevailed

- This is still the case among orthodox Judaism today
- The Mishnah and later works, like the Talmud, drive Jewish religious life and custom today, not Scripture
- **Addendum:** *The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish oral traditions, and forms the first part of the Talmud. The second part of the Talmud is the Gemara, rabbinical commentary of the Mishnah.*
- So ironically, the system Ezra hoped would preserve God's Word in Israel had become a means of obscuring it
 - With the result being that today (as in Jesus' day), a typical Jew is largely ignorant of Scripture
 - In place of the truth, they bear the burden of literally thousands of meaningless manmade rules
 - The consequence being, that the Jewish people have largely forgotten God's promise of forgiveness and mercy in the Messiah
- Which leads us to the second major point of background: the crowd listening to Jesus' words
 - Remember, I said these men and women came to Jesus because they heard Jesus was healing every kind of illness
 - Jesus has attracted literally thousands of sick, paralyzed, demon-possessed outcasts
 - That's not exactly an "A" list of the religious elite
 - On the contrary, from the perspective of the religious elites in Israel, these people were at the bottom of the pecking order
 - The Pharisees commonly held that those who suffered from incurable diseases and disabilities were experiencing God's judgment for their sins
 - That false charge gave Jewish society license to ignore their plight, because they were just suffering what they deserved
 - So as a result, these people were marginalized and forgotten within Israel
 - Anytime their thoughts turned to God and heaven, or of their prospects of entering the kingdom, they would have found little reason for hope
 - They were being judged by God, or so the rabbis told them
 - So how could they ever rise above their poverty and shame to equal the piety of the scrupulous Pharisees?
 - If the Pharisees were God's gold standard for righteousness, then they obviously had no chance to merit the Kingdom
 - So Pharisaical Judaism yielded two seriously negative consequences for Israel
 - First, it replaced God's Word with onerous manmade rules that left Israel ignorant of God's true desires for His people
 - And secondly, it perpetrated a false standard for righteousness by elevating corrupt hypocritical religious leaders as God's representatives

- This combination of false teaching and false teachers resulted in an upside down view of God and righteousness among God's people
- And it robbed many of the hope of salvation, since they couldn't measure up to the Pharisees' hypocritical standard
- Anyone who has ever been trapped in a works-based false religion, that replaces grace with works, can certainly identify with the situation I just outlined
- So, in Matthew 5, Jesus sits down near the Galilee and delivers this sermon to overturn that upside down understanding and replace it with long-lost Biblical truth
 - That's why so much of what Jesus says in this sermon may sound backwards at first
 - It's Jesus repeatedly denying the authority of the Pharisees and their oral law so He can reassert the authority of God's Word
 - He exposes the Pharisees' wrong view of righteousness, so He can exhort the people to look elsewhere for the truth on these matters
 - And in the process, Jesus establishes Himself as the One true authority on righteousness and the Kingdom
 - And as He begins His sermon, Jesus issues a series of statements, often called "the Beatitudes"
 - Each of the nine statements begins with the word, *makarios*, usually translated as "blessed" or "happy"
 - We get the term "beatitude" from the Latin translation of this Greek word
 - So instead of blessed, you could say, "spiritually happy" or "spiritually rewarded"
 - But notice first, the blessing or reward Jesus is talking about here is not something vague...it's something very specific
 - Notice, Jesus defines "blessed" at the beginning and again near the end of the nine statements
 - In v.3, and again in v.10, Jesus defines being blessed as entering into the Kingdom of God
 - Or today, we would say, "being saved" or "going to Heaven"
 - So Jesus isn't talking about trivial, everyday blessings of happiness on earth
 - Jesus is talking about the ultimate, eternal blessing of entering the Kingdom with Jesus
 - Each of these nine qualities or conditions is linked in some sense to entering the Kingdom
 - Secondly, notice that each of these qualities or conditions is spiritual in nature, not physical
 - It's easy to see how qualities like purity or gentleness refer to the spiritual condition of a person's heart
 - But even in cases of being poor or hungering, Jesus qualifies what He means, to ensure we understand that He's talking spiritually

- In v.3, He says poor *in spirit* and, in v.6, He describes hungering *for righteousness*
- So in all cases, Jesus was not talking about physical conditions...He was describing spiritual conditions
- Thirdly, notice that the reward for each condition does not come now, but will come in the future Kingdom
 - Beginning in v.3 again, Jesus says the poor in spirit will receive the Kingdom
 - Likewise, those who mourn today will rejoice in the Kingdom
 - And those who are meek today will be rewarded in the Kingdom
 - And those who desire to see righteousness and justice reigning will be satisfied in the Kingdom
 - And those who pursue purity will know the purity of God Himself in the Kingdom
 - We clearly see how Jesus is contradicting the false religious leaders of His day, as well as those of our day
 - The Pharisees set their minds on receiving the praises of men and obtaining the riches of the earth
 - Then, they pointed to their wealth and prestige as proof they were pleasing to God
 - The false prosperity teachers of our day are repeating these very same lies
 - But Jesus taught that God's children await to receive their reward in the Kingdom
 - God's priority isn't giving us our best life now, but rather granting us the joy of the Kingdom in the age to come
- Finally, notice in these nine statements, that Jesus was describing the heart of the one who *has received* the Kingdom, not giving us a recipe for *how to receive* the Kingdom
 - If Jesus had intended the Beatitudes to be a roadmap for how to obtain the Kingdom, then He would have been teaching a Gospel of works
 - In fact, many false teachers and false churches teach that this the way we are to earn entrance to Heaven
 - But that view simply repeats the error of the Pharisees
 - It's substituting new rules for the ones found in the Mishnah
 - When in reality, rule-keeping never brought anyone into Heaven, no matter which rules you follow
 - On the contrary, the Bible teaches plainly that salvation cannot be obtained by good works, but only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - And even common sense says that the Beatitudes can't be a recipe for gaining Heaven
 - Because we know that not everyone who is gentle goes to Heaven

- Not everyone who mourns over the death of a relative will be in the Kingdom, *etc.*
- So what was Jesus trying to say here? Simply put, this is a character sketch of the Kingdom citizen
 - He or she will look very different than a Pharisee
 - Those you will find in the Kingdom will look very different than a Pharisee
 - They will not be pious, hypocritical, self-righteous, proud religious leaders
 - Instead, the Kingdom will be populated by men and women who look a lot like Jesus' crowd
 - They will be poor in spirit, hungering to see righteousness prevail, merciful, gentle, and pure in heart, *etc.*
- So let's get to know this character Christ is sketching for us, so we can see how we compare
 - We can divide the list into two groups: a group of four and a group of five
 - The first four conditions describe the person's relationship with God, beginning with poor in spirit in v.3
 - To be poor in spirit is the opposite of being spiritually proud
 - To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge our inability to meet the lofty standard of Heaven
 - It's recognizing that if we have to qualify for Heaven on our own merits, we have no chance...we are spiritually impoverished
 - Therefore, the one who is poor in spirit comes to understand that he is utterly dependent on God's mercy and grace to enter into Heaven
 - It's literally the opposite perspective of that of a Pharisee
 - Pharisees were proud in spirit, proud of their piety, proud of their reputation and completely in denial of their sinfulness
 - They weren't just qualified for Heaven, they expected to be welcomed into Heaven with great fanfare and high praise
 - But Jesus says that's not who we will find in the Kingdom
 - So how does someone become poor in spirit?
 - The Bible says that obtaining such a perspective is a work done by God's Spirit in our heart as part of our salvation experience

2Cor. 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- As the Spirit convicts us, bringing us to repentance, He replaces our spiritual pride and self-righteousness with a humility that understands our true sinful condition

- And in that moment, we come to recognize that we need Jesus, for there is no other way to enter the Kingdom
- And even after receiving God's grace, we are to continue to depend upon it
 - I once saw a sign that said, "Jesus loves you, but I'm His favorite"
 - Have you ever met a Christian who seemed to think like that?
 - They understand that their salvation comes by God's grace, not by good works
 - Nevertheless, they act as though they were deserving of God's grace
 - They wear their self-righteousness on their sleeve and look down on all those who can't measure up to their lofty standard of piety
 - That's a type of Pharisaical thinking, of spiritual pride, rather than being poor in spirit
 - If we slip into that state of mind, we're taking the grace of God for granted
 - We're forgetting how we gained the Kingdom in the first place
 - And we're becoming a stumbling block for others who perceive our self-righteousness as cause to lose hope for their own prospects of Heaven
 - Don't become so proud of your salvation that you become a stumbling block preventing others from sharing in it
- Next, Jesus connects being poor in spirit with mourning in v.4
 - By the context, we know mourning refers to feeling sorrow for the devastating effects of sin, both of our sin and that of others'
 - Those who are destined for the Kingdom know true sorrow for having offended God by their sins
 - Christians mourn over our mistakes and especially for how our mistakes have hurt others
 - This is the natural consequence of having a soft heart, made so by the conviction of the Holy Spirit
 - And in many cases, we will know literal sorrow – shedding tears – over these things
 - Once again, Jesus is flipping the tables on conventional thought
 - The world doesn't mourn its sin, it celebrates it
 - Sure, the world sheds tears when the consequences of their sin catch up to them
 - But that's not the kind of mourning Jesus is talking about
 - If you want a good example of how the godly mourn over their sins, consider David's own words in Psalm 51

**Psa. 51:1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.**

Psa. 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity

And cleanse me from my sin.

Psa. 51:3 For I know my transgressions,

And my sin is ever before me.

Psa. 51:4 Against You, You only, I have sinned

And done what is evil in Your sight,

So that You are justified when You speak

And blameless when You judge.

Psa. 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,

And in sin my mother conceived me.

Psa. 51:6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,

And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

Psa. 51:7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psa. 51:8 Make me to hear joy and gladness,

Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

Psa. 51:9 Hide Your face from my sins

And blot out all my iniquities.

Psa. 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

- Can't you hear David mourning over his sins before God?
 - And yet David also appreciated that, in a time to come, when he received his glorified body in the Kingdom, he would be comforted
 - He would no longer mourn his sin, because his sin would be no more
 - That's what Jesus promises those who mourn over sin: that one day, we will be comforted
- Moving to v.5, we see this pattern continuing
 - Jesus says gentleness will make citizens of the Kingdom, and they will inherit the earth
 - You've probably heard this verse translated as, "the meek"
 - That's probably a better word choice, because Jesus is talking about an attitude of submission to God's authority
 - Being gentle or meek means accepting our station in life as God has assigned it, and seeking to please Him from that place
 - It's the opposite of earthly ambition, of seeking the power and riches of this world
 - The Kingdom citizen will exhibit this attitude, and to the extent he or she lives according to this conviction, they will receive reward in the Kingdom
 - And that reward takes the form of a share in Christ's inheritance

- At His resurrection, Christ received back the earth and all it contains as His inheritance
- One day, He will return to rule over His inheritance
- And when He does, He will share His inheritance with the children of God according to our faithfulness in serving Him
- That's meekness...seeking to please Christ with our service, not to please the world
- Once more, this is an opposite state of heart compared to the one commonly held by Pharisees
 - They were men motivated by riches and willing to use their position of authority to gain wealth
 - They sought the approval of men and loved to receive greetings in the streets
 - They were anything but meek
 - And now, Jesus tells the stunned crowd that such naked ambition would have no part in the Kingdom
- Next, in v.6, Jesus says the Kingdom citizen will hunger and thirst for righteousness
 - When someone hungers or thirsts, it means they don't have the thing they desire
 - You say you're hungry because you want food, but don't have it
 - Or you're thirsty because you want water, but none can be found
 - Similarly, those destined for the Kingdom long to see righteous reigning on earth, yet we realize this is an unreachable goal apart from Christ's ruling
 - We hunger and thirst for righteousness, but we don't think we can achieve it by calls for social justice or at the voting booth
 - We recognize righteousness can only be found in a kingdom ruled perfect by the King of Kings
 - For now, God's righteousness reigns in our hearts by His Spirit, but we await the day it reigns from sea to sea on earth
 - Jesus promises that those who look forward to such things will be satisfied in a day to come, in the Kingdom
 - As the prophet Micah proclaims

**Mic. 4:1 And it will come about in the last days
That the mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
And the peoples will stream to it.**

**Mic. 4:2 Many nations will come and say,
"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,**

That He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”

For from Zion will go forth the law,
Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Mic. 4:3 And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.
Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war.

Mic. 4:4 Each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Mic. 4:5 Though all the peoples walk
Each in the name of his god,
As for us, we will walk
In the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

Mic. 4:6 “In that day,” declares the LORD,
“I will assemble the lame
And gather the outcasts,
Even those whom I have afflicted.

Mic. 4:7 “I will make the lame a remnant
And the outcasts a strong nation,
And the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion
From now on and forever.

- But once again, Israel’s leaders didn’t hunger or thirst for righteousness
 - They believed they had already found it in their law and customs
 - They were already satisfied by the system they established
 - Especially since it rewarded them and kept them protected and in power
 - Such men will not be found in the Kingdom
- The second set of five beatitudes relate our relationship with people in the world, beginning with being merciful in v.7
 - Jesus says those destined for the Kingdom are those who show mercy in their dealings with others
 - Believers appreciate the mercy we received from God when He extended salvation to us by His grace
 - And so, we are inclined by our new nature to show mercy to others
 - This trait is very unlike the unsaved, especially among the religious in Israel, who have never known God’s mercy and have been taught an eye for an eye,

etc.

- Similarly, in v.8, Jesus says the Kingdom citizen is one who possesses a pure heart
 - He's referring to being upright and honest in the way we conduct ourselves in all matters of life and especially in our dealings with others
 - Kingdom citizens do not seek to profit from another's loss or gain at another's expense
 - Once again, this is not a recipe for gaining Heaven, but rather the mark of those who have gained Heaven by faith in Jesus Christ
 - And in the Kingdom, these citizens will enjoy the unrivaled purity of seeing God face to face
- In v.9, Jesus says the Kingdom will be occupied by those who make peace in the world
 - Jesus says God's children will exhibit a sincere desire to mediate conflict, to reduce strife and encourage peace in their relationships
 - We may not always find the peace we want, but our new spirit is programmed to seek for it rather than to provoke, much less celebrate, conflict
- Jesus says Kingdom citizens live this way because we will one day be called the sons of God in the Kingdom
 - Jesus is alluding to the role believers will play in the Kingdom ruling with Christ and establishing peace among the nations
 - As Paul taught

1Cor. 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

1Cor. 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

- Finally, Kingdom citizens will know persecution and slander because our relationship with Christ will invite it
 - Yet, we rejoice in such things because it's a mark common to all God's children
 - Just as the prophets who came before us, if we share in their persecution, then we can know we will share in their reward in the Kingdom
- Now let's take a step back and consider this character sketch of the Kingdom citizen
 - The person entering the Kingdom is a humble person aware of their own unrighteousness and resting in God's mercy and grace
 - They are saddened by their own mistakes and long to see God's righteousness prevail
 - They submit to God's authority, seeking to please Him rather than placing their trust in the world's rewards
 - They seek to show mercy to others, to deal honestly with others, seek peace

with others

- And yet, they will be persecuted by that world because they love Jesus
- This is the person God has prepared to enter the Kingdom
- Now if you're a believer and you're thinking, "I don't do some of those things very well," what does that tell you?
 - First, it tells you that this list sets the ideal standard, the new gold standard to replace the one offered by Pharisees
 - And as such, it's an ideal, not something any of us can meet with perfection
- Nevertheless, by the Spirit, we ought to be moving in this direction
 - So, if your behavior doesn't measure up in any of these areas, then it tells you that despite the Spirit of God dwelling in your heart, you're still living in the flesh
 - You have been saved by your faith and your future in the Kingdom is secure – but you still have some work left to do in sanctification, in representing Christ to this world as Jesus expects
- On the other hand, if you're not sure your future includes the Kingdom...
 - If you're thinking to yourself, "I want to enter the Kingdom (go to Heaven) so I guess I need to begin doing these things", then you missed the point
 - As I said, this isn't a recipe for Heaven...you can't mimic these behaviors, expecting it to result in your salvation
 - That's like trying to push on a rope...you're not doing it right
 - Before you can act like a Kingdom citizen, you need to be a Kingdom citizen
 - And the only way you can become a child of God is by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, knowing He died on the cross to pay the price for your sin
 - As you accept Jesus as Lord, you are born again by the Spirit, Scripture says
 - Your old spiritual nature is put to death in Christ and you receive a new spiritual nature
 - And that new nature is formed in the image of Jesus, so that you may share in His nature and character
 - And it's only by obtaining that new spiritual nature that you will begin to exhibit these characteristics
 - By your new nature in Christ, you will be spiritually humble, you will mourn over your sin, you will submit to Christ in gentleness, you will show mercy, you will seek for peace
 - Confess Christ and He brings you these qualities
 - And with them, you receive eternal life – God's promise that you will enter the Kingdom in the day it appears, along with all God's children
 - And in that day, you will be truly blessed and your greatest spiritual desires will be fulfilled beyond your imagination

- You won't gain these things by mimicking the piety of the hypocritically self-righteous, whether priests, popes, imams, yogis, or gurus
 - Their hearts betray their ignorance, yet God's children display His heart

- We're studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
 - Last week, we began with Jesus' remarkable opening, called the Beatitudes, or the blessings
 - Jesus makes nine statements that collectively typify the person who will inherit the Kingdom
 - It's a character sketch of those being saved by God, both from out of Israel and from among the Gentiles
 - Jesus' character sketch of the Kingdom-bound person was very different than the character of the religious leaders of Jesus' day
 - In fact, it was a 180° opposite view from the Pharisees
 - Pharisees weren't poor in spirit...they were proud of their spiritual accomplishments
 - They weren't mourning over their sin...they celebrated their piety
 - They weren't gentle or merciful or peacemakers...
 - The Pharisees were arrogant power brokers who schemed and conspired to maintain their hold on authority and privilege within the culture
 - They decided for the average Jew what they must believe and how they were to live
 - They set themselves apart from everyone else, claiming to be a perfect example of what pleases God
 - And they burdened the people with manmade rules, which they themselves would not always follow, that distracted them from knowing the love and mercy of God
- So to the ear of a first century Jew, who knew only the Pharisees' view of the Kingdom, Jesus' declarations were stunning and revolutionary
 - Jesus wasn't just contradicting the Pharisees' teaching...he was invalidating their authority
 - He was declaring that the Pharisees' approach to God and to establishing godliness was as corrupt as Satan himself
 - Jesus declared their teaching to be false
 - But more than that, He declared these men to be false teachers who lacked the very thing they claimed to offer others
 - Jesus' teaching exposed Israel's religious leaders to be counterfeits who said and did literally the opposite of what God desired
 - Luke, in his Gospel, records a few additional statements Jesus made at the end of the Beatitudes, which were directed at the Pharisees

Luke 6:24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.

Luke 6:25 "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Luke 6:26 “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

- It's clear Jesus was thinking of Israel's religious leaders as He spoke these words of condemnation
 - Pharisees were rich men living in comfort and splendor, enjoying the life they created for themselves at the expense of the people
 - They sought the approval of men by pandering to the peoples' interests
 - Yet Jesus said these traits have always been characteristics of false prophets, not true men of God
- So it's no surprise that the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees becomes a major storyline in the Gospels
 - Jesus is rocking their boat
 - He came to reveal spiritual truth that was so different, so opposite of what the Pharisees taught
 - Therefore, conflict with these men was inevitable
 - So, early in His ministry, Jesus fires the first shot with the Beatitudes
 - Jesus says the Kingdom could not be obtained by following the Pharisees' example
 - Instead, God will call to Himself a very different kind of soul, one reborn in God's image
 - One that yearns for the Kingdom to come, rather than desiring the world as it is
- So now, having thrown down the gauntlet, Jesus moves to explaining how God's true disciples shall live during the time they await the Kingdom

Matt. 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

Matt. 5:15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Jesus turns to address those who are Kingdom-bound, those who share in the nine traits He just listed
 - And He commands His disciples to live according to two metaphors
 - Jesus says those who await the Kingdom, those who have been saved by their faith in Messiah, shall be like salt and light
 - We've all heard Jesus' comparison before

- It's so well known, it's become axiomatic
- And you've also probably heard teaching on what these metaphors mean in the context of Christian witnessing
 - You've heard how salt enhances the taste of food, making the taste stand out
 - And therefore, so should the Christian live in such a way that we stand apart from the world
 - Likewise, as light illuminates and exposes things hidden in darkness, so are we called to bring truth to the world, *etc.*
- These explanations are largely accurate and somewhat helpful, but they don't tell the whole story, because Jesus' analogy goes a step deeper
 - The added details come from a better understanding of how salt was used in Jesus' day
 - Though today, we use salt principally to enhance the flavor of food, in Jesus' day, the most common use of salt was as a preservative
 - In an age before refrigeration, salt was essential as a preservative, to prevent food from spoiling
 - So, for a Jew of Jesus' day, this would have been the first and most obvious way to understand the comparison
- Jesus says that those who are the blessed, those who are Kingdom-bound, we are to serve a spiritual purpose as they await the Kingdom
 - While we live on earth, we live like salt, meaning we are a preservative
 - Now for those of Israel, Jesus was speaking about the believing remnant
 - The Old Testament declares repeatedly, that God will always preserve a small number of believers within Israel by grace
 - This remnant will be the means by which God preserves His promises to Israel
 - In that sense, those believers within Israel were salt to the rest of Israel, preserving God's people from complete destruction
 - As Isaiah says

Is. 1:9 Unless the LORD of hosts

**Had left us a few survivors,
We would be like Sodom,
We would be like Gomorrah.**

- And for Gentile believers, we too have a mission to live as a preservative
 - As the temple of God, we are the means by which God tabernacles among men during this age
 - So God sprinkles Gentile believers among the nations of the world to preserve the world against self-destruction and runaway evil

- And in that sense, we are salt, bringing a Godly perspective into an utterly sinful world
 - We exhibit the character of God, to the extent we live out the Beatitudes
 - By the Spirit working in us, we may demonstrate some degree of mercy, humility, purity, peacemaking, *etc.*
 - By standing for righteousness, we militate against runaway sin and depravity
 - We won't put an end to sin, of course, and the world is destined to become increasingly sinful
 - But nevertheless, we're called to live as salt, preserving the world by slowing the decay
- Most importantly, we give opportunity for the Lord to rescue some people out of this world, through our witness
 - The Church is the ultimate preservative
 - We preserve men and women from the fires of Hell, as we witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - In that way, more than any other, Kingdom-bound people are to be salt to this world
 - And once again, our target is the Beatitudes...they are the gold standard in place of the Pharisees
- But in the second half of v.13, Jesus challenges His disciples to consider whether we are truly living up to that expectation
 - Jesus asks, what good is salt when it is no longer salty?
 - Here again, Jesus isn't speaking simply about salt's dietary benefits
 - He's referring to its work as a preservative in retarding the growth of harmful bacteria
 - But first, we need to ask how does salt cease to be salty, how does it become ineffective as a preservative?
 - Sodium chloride doesn't change...it's a stable compound
 - The key to interpreting Jesus' words is understanding how salt was obtained in His day
 - Pure salt was hard to obtain, so it was not generally used as a preservative...it was reserved for table use
 - The salt used for preserving food was usually mined from sediment in salt marshes or in other similar deposits
 - The salt from these deposits included other minerals or impurities, which degraded the quality of the salt
 - This rendered the salt too poor for use in cooking, but it was still acceptable for preserving food
 - So the type of salt Jesus was speaking about was a preserving salt, this lower quality salt, contaminated with impurities
 - We know this, because of what Jesus says next

- Jesus refers to the salt losing its saltiness
- Pure salt cannot lose its saltiness, because sodium chloride doesn't change... it's a stable compound
- But the impure salt used for preservation can lose its saltiness
 - If these salt deposits became wet, the water-soluble salt crystals dissolve and wash away, leaving behind only the impurities
 - The impurities left behind were useless, so they would be thrown out on the ground
 - In that sense, what was once called "salt" loses its saltiness
 - The salt itself hasn't changed...it's simply washed away
- That's Jesus' concern for His disciples...that we would lose our saltiness
 - But Jesus is not talking about our being table salt, of standing out from the world, being distinctive
 - Isn't that the interpretation we've all heard?
 - That Jesus is saying be table salt! Maintain your "Christian" distinction
 - That may be a valuable lesson as well, but at best, I think it's a narrow view of Jesus' teaching
 - And at worst, it can lead to Pharisaical thinking
 - I've seen that interpretation used to defend Christians living in strange ways, isolating themselves in compounds
 - Or acting holier than thou and calling it, "being salt"
 - But that's not what Jesus wanted of His disciples
 - He didn't ask us to segregate ourselves or wear our faith on our sleeves in such a way that no one can relate to us
 - To say it another way, if your efforts at being "salt" lead the world to thinking you're a religious weirdo, then you're doing it wrong
 - The goal isn't merely to stand out *from* the world, in the sense of table salt
 - Jesus is asking us to be a blessing *to* the world, in the sense of preserving them from evil
 - When we let the Spirit live through us, we will bless the world by demonstrating humility and mercy and gentleness and purity
 - We will be peacemakers, while everyone else is at war; we will mourn over our mistakes while the world celebrates its depravity
 - By pursuing righteousness, we may become a preservative God will use to counteract the world's descent into corruption
- But if we refuse to live out these traits, if we cease being useful to God for that purpose... we fail to serve Him now, even as we await the Kingdom
 - It's like the preservative salt that's mixed with impurities

- As long as that deposit has salt in it, the lump is useful to preserve food
- The impurities add no benefit, but since they are combined with salt, the whole thing works to produce something good
- But take the salt out, and the impurities are worthless and will be thrown out
- If we fail to exhibit those nine characteristics of the Beatitudes, we forfeit the potential we had to be an influence in this world, to be a blessing to those with whom we interact
- Likewise, as a Christian, if you live out your blessedness, seeking to exhibit the nine characteristics Jesus gave us, then you have a powerful potential
 - God can use you to bring a blessing to those you “combine” with
 - Your unsaved friends, neighbors, workmates, schoolmates are struggling in a world that is rushing headlong over the cliff
 - We live in a world that is tearing itself apart with violence, hatred, crudeness, depravity, drug addiction, all manner of evil
 - And into that world, we go as salt bringing humility, gentleness, mercy, peace
- Think about the many opportunities you have in the course of your day to bring a blessing to those you meet, simply by living out one or more of the Beatitudes
 - As the Church body collectively demonstrates our Kingdom traits in society, we militate against the consequences of the world’s sin
 - And on a personal level, God may use our humility or gentleness or purity to bring individual souls into the Kingdom through faith in Jesus
 - So we can be a preservative on a worldwide basis and we can make an impact in the life of a single individual
 - That’s being salt in the world
- But if you, as a Christian, fail to be salt when you combine with the world, what good are you then?
 - If you combine with the impurities of the world, yet do not live out your Kingdom traits in the Spirit, then it’s like you’ve melted away
 - All that remains are impurities...the world’s impurities and your own
 - And what good is that to God?
 - Jesus’ warning acknowledges that a believer can fail to live out the Beatitudes
 - The fact is, that while every Kingdom-bound individual possesses these qualities in their spirit...
 - Not every believer exhibits them consistently...and some don’t exhibit them at all
 - Don’t take Jesus’ concern lightly, because these qualities don’t materialize without focus
 - Your flesh is a powerful force in your life
 - And if you are not focused on disciplining your flesh and yielding to the Spirit so

He may produce better things in your character, then don't expect to see much spiritual fruit in your life

- That's our choice...we have a choice between two paths in our life as a disciple
 - Either we're obedient to Jesus' call to living as salt, as a preservative in the world, which leads to a blessing for the world and for us
 - Or we are disobedient to His call, in which case, we are indistinguishable from the impurities of the world
 - Leaving us no better than pavement to be trampled under foot
 - Jesus' point is, that we will be put to use one way or another, either as a blessing to the world or a warning to other believers
- And Jesus is not ambivalent about our choice
 - He wants us to serve diligently, which is why He adds the second metaphor in v.14
 - Jesus says we are to be light in the world
 - Here again, Jesus' analogy is simple, yet profound, and many have taken it out of context to tell us what it means
 - They say that as light chases away darkness, so should a believer be light to the world as a witness to the truth of Jesus
 - Once again, while this interpretation is true, it ignores the context and as a result, it misses the full sense of Jesus' meaning
 - Look at the progression of the context
 - First, Jesus defined the behaviors that mark a Kingdom-bound person
 - Then, Jesus said that living according to these standards is like being salt in the world
 - Which means we must discipline our flesh so that Christ living in us may bring a blessing to the world through us
 - Now it's in that context that Jesus adds His second analogy of light
 - To understand what He's saying here, we need to appreciate that lighting a lamp in Jesus' day was no casual endeavor
 - First, light was created by burning oil in a lamp, and oil was an expensive commodity
 - So people generally didn't pay to light up their entire house at night
 - You only turned on a lamp when it was important and necessary
 - Secondly, even when a person did need to light a lamp, it required effort to get it started
 - You didn't just flip a switch and forget about it
 - Or if you're under 30, ask Alexa to turn on the light
 - Or if you're over 65, clap your hands
 - The person had to find a source for the fire or create a new fire

- In other words, lighting a lamp required effort and money
- So the point Jesus is making is, that when someone goes to the time and effort and expense to light a lamp, they won't then hide it under a blanket
 - We expect that light to give us something we need in return
 - So since the Lord has placed a light inside each of us, His Holy Spirit, He expects it to pay off, so to speak
 - We're not supposed to hide that light, to blend in, to lose our saltiness
- But being salt in the world, living out the Beatitudes, will require effort and cost on our part
 - We must discipline the flesh and yield to the Spirit so that we can reflect Christ to the world
 - It's like the effort required to light a lamp...God didn't just flip a switch in our hearts and instantly we think and act like Jesus
 - We all have the potential to think and act like Him, but we have to make an effort to discipline the sin nature of our flesh
- And that effort Jesus described as, "good works"
 - Notice in v.16, Jesus says that letting our light shine is doing good works before men
 - The light inside us, the Spirit living in us, is invisible unless it comes out of us in some tangible way
 - That "light" can only be seen through a demonstration of spiritual fruit or good works
 - Which leads us to the key conclusion...the good works Jesus expects are a living-out of the Kingdom traits Jesus defined for us in the Beatitudes
 - Good works aren't simply doing nice things for other people
 - Good works is being more godly
 - And that's a tough standard
- You know, you may have been challenged when you learned that believers are called to do good works
 - You thought about serving in soup kitchens or building houses for the poor
 - Or maybe you thought of offering up prayers for the sick
 - Or maybe volunteering in the children's area
 - Or helping little old ladies across the street, *etc.*
 - And you thought that's pretty demanding...Jesus is asking a lot
 - But then you thought, I can do that and you signed up
 - But if that's how you thought you let your light shine, how you become salt, then you're actually thinking a little bit like a Pharisee
 - You're rigging the game
 - You're setting the bar low enough that you can feel good about yourself without

actually making the difficult sacrifices that are truly required

- Later in this Gospel, Jesus says this to the Pharisees

Matt. 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Matt. 23:14 [“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

- Here’s the point: if doing good works were merely about doing acts of kindness, then any hypocrite could do good works
 - The Pharisees did many so-called good things, but in their hearts, they were as evil as ever
 - So Jesus says, such people are not those destined for the Kingdom
- Kingdom-bound people will demonstrate an inward spiritual change
 - And that inward change is our salt, our light to the world
 - These character traits are the good works we must do
 - Those nine qualities in the Beatitudes are supposed to shine forth in the new, Godly character Christ is making inside us
- And as we adopt these spiritual qualities, they will inform our words and actions
 - For example, as we discipline our fleshly pride, we allow our Spirit-produced humility to shine forth
 - And as we discipline our flesh’s self-righteousness, we will mourn our sin and repent of it
 - And as we discipline our flesh’s desire for conflict and revenge and lust, Christ shines forth in us producing gentleness, mercy and purity
- These are the good works that Christ is calling us to display before men, like a lamp or a city set on a hill, drawing attention to God’s grace
 - In this case, that attention brings glory to our Heavenly Father, because He rightly receives credit for that spiritual work
 - Because let’s face it, we’re not humble or merciful and pure by nature
 - Every good thing comes from above, as James says
 - If we miss this point, we’re likely to think that doing good things for other people is enough to bring Christ to the world
 - But if that were the case, then Christ wouldn’t need the Church
 - He could use the Salvation Army or the United Way or the Federal Government
 - They all do good works for people

- No, that's not the work Jesus wants...it's a work in your heart
 - And that's a much harder work, isn't it?
 - The prospect of serving in soup kitchens seems pretty easy compared to demonstrating mercy and gentleness on a consistent basis, doesn't it?
 - How many Christians do you suppose have driven downtown to serve in a soup kitchen and cursed at other drivers along the way? Or cut them off in traffic? Or driven faster than the speed limit?
 - How many people do that on their way to church?
 - That's being a Pharisee...someone who looks the part in public yet in their heart, they are someone very different
- Jesus' point is, being salt is a process of inward change, one that requires forethought and effort and it comes at a cost, like lighting a lamp
 - Glorify the Father by your good works, which means contending with those parts of your character that don't look like Kingdom qualities
 - You have to battle against yourself in a sense, and it's the opposite of how a Pharisee thinks
- So let's stand back and review Jesus' teaching in vs.1-16
 - He starts with a character-sketch of the Kingdom-bound individual, the person saved by faith and sanctified by the Spirit
 - That person thinks and acts in ways very differently than the world
 - They maintain eyes for eternity, keeping a perspective that reward will be found in the Kingdom
 - They know they're only passing through this world, yet God has placed them here for a time to be a blessing
 - So they long to show God's heart before a world that doesn't know Him
 - They act as a preservative, demonstrating their Kingdom-qualities to hold back the destructive power of sin, both in themselves and in the world
 - They do these good works to bring attention to the power of Christ living in them, and in that way, they bring glory to the Father in Heaven as a witness
 - That's who Jesus calls His disciples to be...we're to be living billboards for the Kingdom
 - And not just in our words of proclamation
 - But in our attitudes and character
 - We cannot mimic these things in the strength of our flesh
 - You cannot fake mercy or gentleness...either you are these things by the grace of God or you are not
 - But a Christian can hide these qualities...
 - You came here tonight, to this church, because you knew you would hear the Word of God preached

- And since you did, then you are obligated by what you've heard to set your mind on obeying what it commands
- Take an inventory of these nine qualities...give some thought on where you fall short
- And in your prayer time, ask the Lord to help you exhibit them
- He won't ignore you – that's what He wants
- But it won't happen, unless you pursue it

- We're studying through Jesus' first sermon delivered during His earthly ministry, which we call "the Sermon on the Mount"
 - We've already studied the first sixteen verses of the sermon, including the well-known section called, "the Beatitudes"
 - In that section, Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) was reserved for people who have a certain spiritual nature
 - Jesus gave nine traits of the Kingdom-bound person in His beatitudes
 - They included humility, repentance, gentleness, purity, mercy and a general longing for righteousness coupled with a recognition that we won't find satisfaction this side of Heaven
 - As we learned, these traits are the spiritual fruit of a changed heart
 - By placing our faith in Jesus Christ, God changes our spirit so He may begin to develop these qualities in our nature
 - As we live-out these Kingdom traits outwardly and consistently, we become salt and light for the world
 - This process marks the believer as different than the world, because it's not the way the world thinks and acts
 - But as I read from Luke's Gospel last week, Jesus also taught that the Pharisees, Israel's religious leaders, weren't authentic representatives of God
 - They may have possessed authority over the nation's spiritual life, and they were certainly experts in the customs and traditions of Israel
 - Nevertheless, Jesus exposed them as ignorant and blind when it came to knowing how to please God
- Now imagine if you were a member of the crowd gathered listening to Jesus
 - You are a Jew who has grown up under Pharisaical Judaism
 - Since your youth, men like the Pharisees have been your teachers, your spiritual authorities, and your examples of godliness
 - Moreover, these men are the most scrupulous observers of the Law you've ever seen
 - Time and time again, you've been amazed at their self-discipline as they practiced the rules of the faith
 - They fasted several times every week
 - They washed themselves before every meal
 - They prayed long, intense public prayers several times daily
 - They tithed on everything they received, even on the herbs growing in their garden
 - Simply put, you could not imagine someone more pleasing to God
- But now Jesus, a man clearly empowered to speak for God, has declared that the Pharisees' demonstrations of piety counted for nothing with God

- The Pharisees lacked humility and mercy and love
 - They were depending on their self-righteousness rather than relying on God's mercy
 - They loved the money and power of this world, rather than seeking for the riches of the Kingdom to come
 - In short, Jesus has labeled the Pharisees as fakes, counterfeits, and frauds
- Now as you take this in, you start wondering what, if anything, you've been taught is correct and true?
 - Jesus has rocked your world, calling into question everything Jewish culture held dear
 - Because if the Pharisees *weren't* God's spokesmen, then what about the Law & traditions they commanded everyone to follow?
 - Was Moses wrong also? Are the feasts irrelevant? Was the temple service invalid?
 - Was Jesus advocating that it all be thrown out?
- I think Jesus knew His listeners would have these concerns, so in the next section of His sermon, Jesus reassures the crowd

Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Matt. 5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Matt. 5:19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:20 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

- In v.17, Jesus addresses the crowd's concerns, saying He didn't come (meaning His mission wasn't) to put an end to the Law and Prophets
 - You may know that this statement has been a source of considerable controversy in the Church
 - There are those who point to Jesus' words here, to claim that some or all of the Law God gave to Israel remains in effect for the Christian
 - They maintain this despite the consistent and unequivocal teaching of Scripture that Christians are NOT under law
 - Instead, we have been freed from the Law by grace
 - Nevertheless, some use Jesus' words here to defend their assertion
 - But as is usually the case, these claims rely on a misinterpretation of the text made

possible only by taking Jesus' words out of context

- First, let's understand what Jesus actually said
- He said that He did not come to abolish "the Law or the Prophets"
- For a Jew, the phrase "the Law or the Prophets" was their way of saying "the whole Bible"
- Since the New Testament didn't exist in Jesus' day, the Jewish Bible wasn't called the Old Testament
- Instead, they called the Bible "the Law and the Prophets" or sometimes "Moses and the Prophets"
- So in effect, Jesus said, "I didn't come to abolish the Bible"
 - And of course, Jesus never advocated for doing away with the Word of God, for after all, Jesus IS the Word
 - Jesus was not a revolutionary...He didn't advocate anarchy or lawlessness
- But it's also clear that Jesus wasn't talking about just the Mosaic Law, much less the issue of whether a Christian must follow the Law of Moses
 - Jesus was answering critics who claimed He was encouraging Jews to ignore all of God's Word
 - Knowing the context then, we can't use Jesus' words here to support or defend a particular view of the question of Christians keeping the Law
 - On the contrary, on the question of whether a Christian must live under the Law, we have to turn elsewhere in the Bible to find our answer
 - And when we do, we find Scripture telling us consistently that the answer is, "No" (*see Romans study*)
- Returning to our passage, we could translate Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 this way:
 - Don't think I came to abolish the written Word of God...on the contrary, I came to fulfill all that God's Word requires
 - Jesus came as a man to live in perfect compliance with God's Word, never committing even a single act of sin
 - Since Jesus was born a Jew under the Law, He also lived in perfect compliance with all the requirements of Israel's Law
 - And more than that, Jesus also fulfilled all the prophecies spoken by the prophets concerning the Messiah
 - Some of these prophecies Jesus has yet to fulfill, but He will do so at His Second Coming and in the Kingdom
 - Jesus was perfectly righteous in all that He thought and said and did
 - Therefore, by His earthly life, He brought to pass all that Scripture requires and promises
 - In that sense, Jesus fulfills the Word of God, and He is the only human being who has ever done so or ever will do so

- His perfect life sets the standard for our entry into Heaven, the Bible says
- The Bible describes Christ's perfect life as equaling the glory of God
- Only those who equal the glory of God are eligible to enter into His presence
 - Jesus meets that standard because He is God
 - But the Bible also says that everyone else ever born has fallen short of that standard
 - Romans 3:23 says that all humanity has sinned and therefore all have fallen short of the glory of God
- We are born sinners and so by our nature, we stand no chance of meeting the standard Christ set
 - We start sinning before we even know what sin is
 - That's why Jesus came, He says, to accomplish all that the Word of God required because we couldn't do it
 - And then, when we place our faith in Jesus as our substitute, the Father is willing to credit us with Jesus' perfection
 - But then Jesus went a step further, dying an undeserved death on the cross in our place so that He could pay the price for our failure to meet Heaven's standard
- And if you're thinking that perhaps you can find some way around this standard, that maybe this rule won't apply to you, take note of what Jesus says in v.18
 - Jesus testifies that the Word of God is going to stand the test of time and be proven right in the end
 - When all is said and done, the Word of God will still be there, setting the standard for entering Heaven and convicting us of sin
 - In fact, Jesus says the physical universe itself is less enduring than the Word of God
 - When you consider the vastness of space and the enormity of planets and stars and galaxies, remember it will all pass away one day
 - And after it's gone, and we're experiencing what God has prepared for us afterward, this same Word will be with us
 - So if you think the Universe is unshakable, what does that say about the Word of God?
 - Jesus says everything in this Word will come to pass exactly as God has spoken...and Jesus fulfills it all for us
 - In that verse, Jesus uses a uniquely Jewish idiom to emphasize His point
 - He says that not the smallest letter or stroke of the Word would go unaccomplished
 - Jesus is referring to characteristics of the written Hebrew language
 - The smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet is called a "jot" in English, and it's barely the size of an apostrophe

- Secondly, in the Hebrew alphabet, some characters are distinguished from one another merely by slight protrusions, called “strokes”
- So Jesus says that even the smallest letter and the most subtle stroke of the Hebrew alphabet has purpose and meaning to God’s purposes
 - And therefore, every detail in Scripture, no matter how minor, will come to pass and cannot be set aside
 - Today, we have a doctrine built on Jesus’ statement...the inerrancy of Scripture
 - Every word in the original written manuscripts is exactly as God intended, with no mistake or error
 - Not even a single letter is out of place
 - If we don’t believe that, where do we go from there? It becomes a slippery slope – there are people today who don’t even believe that David existed
 - We believe it, because Jesus said it
- Jesus’ idiom emphasizes that He’s committed to fulfilling the written Word of God in its entirety, because it’s a perfect reflection of God’s will
 - Those who accuse Jesus of trying to tear down God’s Word are dead wrong
 - He is so committed to it, that He will comply with everything it says, down to the least detail
 - Which was more than His critics could claim for themselves
- But Jesus referenced these features of written Hebrew in His idiom to make another point concerning the Pharisees
 - Jesus was implying that He was NOT interested in complying with the Pharisees’ oral law
 - Remember a couple of weeks ago, I explained how the scribes had created a vast set of rules and traditions for Jewish life
 - These rules were first developed following the Jewish return from captivity in Babylon
 - They were intended as a form of protection to ensure Israel never violated Scripture again and thus, never be sent into captivity again
 - The scribes called their new rules “fences” because they were barriers to violating Scripture
 - If you kept the scribes’ rules, then you would have no possibility of violating Scripture, or so they assumed
 - A classic example of a “fence” is the kosher requirement to never combine meat and dairy
 - In kosher kitchens, meat products and dairy products are never combined or served together
 - To make sure meat and dairy never mix by accident, kosher kitchens maintain separate dishes, pots and even refrigerators for serving and storing meat and dairy

- Obviously, this restriction isn't spelled out in the Law given to Moses, so why did the scribes propose it?
 - In Exodus, and again Deuteronomy, the Lord instructs Israel not to boil a young goat in its mother's milk
 - This practice was uniquely associated with Baal worship among the Canaanites
 - In Canaanite pagan rituals, worshippers would take a baby goat or calf from its mother soon after birth and boil it in the mother's milk
 - So God gave this law to Israel to keep them from participating in Canaanite idolatry
- But when the rabbis and scribes sought to create a "fence" to protect Israel from violating this law, they missed the whole point of the law
 - They focused entirely on the logistics involved and overlooked the spiritual purpose of the law
 - The rabbis wondered what would happen if a Jew bought a young goat from a certain butcher
 - And then that same Jew also bought milk from a farmer in the market
 - But unbeknownst to that Jew, the milk he purchased just happened to come from the mother of that young goat
 - If that Jew then cooked the goat in the milk, he would have broken the law, the scribes concluded
 - So to preclude any possibility of such an accidental violation, they established rules barring the mixing of meat with dairy
 - Over the centuries, later rabbis came along and expanded on the rules of the prior rabbis
 - So the fences continued to grow ever more encompassing
 - Until eventually, the rabbis reached the point of requiring separate dishes and pots and pans
 - And that, my friends, is why even today in Israel you cannot order a cheeseburger at a kosher McDonald's
 - Once these rabbinical rules became firmly entrenched in Jewish culture, the original intent of God's Law had long been lost
 - What started as a prohibition of engaging in Canaanite pagan worship had become a silly concern about cheese sitting on a burger
 - In fact, by the time the rabbis had decided to outlaw the mixing of meat and dairy, the Canaanites were extinct!
 - Nevertheless, their rules live on without purpose or reason, and with little or no relationship to the Word of God
- Over the centuries, the Pharisees' rules were assembled into a book called the *Mishnah*
 - *Mishnah* means "repetition", because it was taught through repetition, and it records centuries of rabbinical "scope creep"

- By Jesus' day, the Mishnah's reach extended far beyond simply prohibiting the mixing of meat and dairy
 - It has six divisions covering tithing, feasts, sabbaths, temple service, ritual cleansing, women, and various crimes
 - And in its printed form, the Mishnah can reach to over 1,000 pages in length!
- Obviously, that's a lot of additional burden, so to ensure the Jewish people respected the Mishnah, the Pharisees eventually claimed it was equal to Scripture
 - Despite the fact that the Mishnah wasn't written by Moses, the Pharisees claimed Moses received it from God
 - They claimed God communicated the Mishnah orally to Moses, not in writing
 - Over the centuries, it was passed down orally through the elders and priests of Israel
 - Only after the Jews' return from exile in Babylon did the scribes write it down, supposedly under the inspiration of the Spirit
 - So the Pharisees began calling the Mishnah an "oral" Law, which complimented God's written Word
- So the Jews of Jesus' day had two forms of "Scripture"
 - They had true Scripture, called the Law and the Prophets
 - And they had an additional work of so-called Scripture called the Mishnah
 - It's similar to the way Mormons claim that both the Bible and the Book of Mormon are Scripture
 - But also like the Mormons, in practice, the only book the Jews *actually* studied and followed was the oral Law, the Mishnah
- So, when Jesus' accusers lined up to say he was abolishing the Law or the Prophets, what they actually meant was He was disobeying the oral law
 - His accusers made no distinction between these two works
 - In fact, the Pharisees were more disturbed by a violation of the Mishnah than they were of a violation of God's Word
 - Today in Israel, it's a far greater scandal to set butter on your dinner plate in a kosher home than it is to commit fornication
 - So when we read about Jesus being accused of violating the Law, we need to understand they mean the oral law
 - But Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that these two works, Scripture vs. the Mishnah, were not equivalent
 - One came from God, but the other was given by men
 - One was the way to life and godliness, but the other was merely a means of self-righteousness
 - One must be accomplished, but the other must be abolished
 - And I think Jesus chose the idiom He used in v.18 to clarify where His allegiances

were

- Jesus was committed to every letter and stroke of the written Word, the true Word of God
 - But He cared nothing for the Pharisees' so-called oral law
- This one issue explains everything you need to know about why the Pharisees hated Jesus
 - If Jesus invalidated their treasured Mishnah, then what would happen to the Pharisees' power over the people?
 - If the people realized that the Mishnah's requirements were not sent from God, then the Pharisees instantly became irrelevant
 - Because their power and wealth was based in their expertise of the Mishnah, not in the Word of God
 - So at the core of their conflict, was the fight over the authority of Scripture vs. the teaching of men
 - The Pharisees claimed their teaching was equal to the Word of God, and therefore they substituted it for the Bible
 - Jesus disputed the Pharisees' claims and even blatantly ignored the Mishnah at times, especially when it conflicted with righteousness
 - For example, in every case where Jesus is accused of violating the Sabbath, he is actually violating the Mishnah's rules concerning Sabbath observance
 - And those rules were not God's definition of how to keep the Sabbath
- This same conflict continues today, because the enemy knows how important discrediting the Word of God is in his war with God
 - And the enemy works to discredit the Word of God with two versions of the same lie
 - To the irreligious of the world, Satan lies by telling them the Word of God is nonsense, full of myth and error
 - And therefore they can ignore it, and they gladly do
 - But to the zealous of the world, Satan's lie goes in the opposite direction
 - To that group, he says that Scripture is so holy and special we can't begin to understand it without expert assistance
 - It's like your mom's special china...so precious, you never actually use it to eat
 - Or like someone who buys a really nice couch, but then covers it with plastic
 - The Word of God is so special, we don't actually read it or learn what it says
 - Instead, we need priests or popes or sages or imams...or Pharisees to interpret it for us
 - And for the same reason, they study their books, books like the Mishnah or the Catholic Catechism or the Book of Mormon, rather than the actual Word
 - Both lies have the same effect...Satan takes our eyes off of the truth and replaces it with nonsense dressed up to look like it's from God

- For those who care nothing for religion, their eyes go to the Creation or to themselves, instead of to the Word
- And for those who are zealous, he directs their eyes to false teaching that obscures the Word
- We need to guard against falling into this same trap today
 - There are many Christians studying in Bible studies or small groups and when they gather, the book they open isn't the Bible
 - They open books written about the Bible
 - Men study pamphlets about how to live a manly life, women watch emotional videos of how to live a victorious life
 - Teens read books about how to avoid sex and drugs, *etc.*
 - We think we've learned something about the Bible, but we probably didn't – we were probably just entertained
 - That stuff is fine, but only if it's a supplement to – not a substitute for – the Bible
 - By knowing the Bible, you'll be able to filter that stuff; you'll know what was good and what was not
- If we're not careful, we risk focusing on our own "mishnahs" rather than turning to the one Book actually offering truth on all these matters
 - That's the key issue behind His conflict with the Pharisees
 - Jesus said He came to uphold and fulfill the irreplaceable, irrefutable, unequalled Word of God
 - But just as assuredly, He came to tear down the worthless manmade rule books that distract people from that truth
 - That's why Verse By Verse Fellowship exists...to reassert the importance of Christians knowing and obeying the Word of God
 - Even as we know and follow the One Who fulfilled it all
- If you want to know how serious Jesus is about elevating the Word of God over the opinions of men, hear what He says in v.19
 - Jesus says that anyone who advocates for the annulling or ignoring of even the least requirement of Scripture will be held accountable by God
 - Such a person, Jesus says, will be least in the Kingdom
 - Obviously, Jesus is speaking about those who would enter the Kingdom in the first place, that is, believers
 - And Jesus says for believers who use their time on earth to weaken obedience to the Word of God, they forfeit their honor in the Kingdom
 - In other words, there is no greater way for a believer to offend Christ than undermining the Word of God
 - On the other hand, those who set their minds on obeying the Word of God, and teaching others to do the same, will be worthy of the greatest honor

- Because no one else will have done what He did...no one else can say that
- Jesus is making a veiled reference to Himself in that statement
- Because of course, Jesus will possess the greatest honor in the Kingdom, having obeyed all that the Word requires
- And having taught us all how to obey it by His Spirit
- So where does that leave the Pharisees?
 - Remember, if you lived in that day, you saw these men as the most religious, most dedicated and fervent followers of God imaginable
 - Won't they receive honor for their respect of God's Word?
 - Well, notice Jesus adds in v.20, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom
 - That's like telling a Catholic that unless your righteousness exceeds the Pope, you can't enter Heaven
 - Or telling a Mormon that unless your righteousness exceeds Joseph Smith, you can't enter
 - Or telling a Muslim that you have to exceed the righteousness of Muhammed
 - It's shocking and unbelievable
 - But it's true...as scrupulous as the Pharisees were, they were still a long way from equaling the glory of God
 - They may have tried their best, but in reality, they simply became practiced at following their own rules, rather than obeying God's Word
 - And as much as we may look down our noses at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, we're no better
 - We do the same thing...we carefully define the rules we think make us holy so we can sleep at night
 - For example, if we like to lie, but we never cheat on our spouse, then we tell ourselves that lying is no big deal to God
 - But we're going to Heaven, because He approves of our faithfulness in marriage
 - Or we judge homosexuals or murderers or pagans by saying, "There's no way that person is going to heaven"
 - Conveniently forgetting our own lusts or hatred of others or devotion to materialism
 - That's being a Pharisee, and Jesus says it's not good enough to get into Heaven
 - So how do you get into Heaven? You have to be perfect like Jesus
 - Which means you need Jesus
 - You have to receive His perfection on your behalf
 - You have to put your faith in Him or you won't be in Heaven
 - That's why Jesus came...to bring you into the Kingdom with Him

- We're going through Matthew's Gospel verse-by-verse
 - And over the past few weeks, we've been studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount
 - It probably took Jesus about 20 minutes in total to deliver this sermon to the crowd
 - But as you can tell, it's taking me considerably longer to understand and explain it
 - I guess that's to be expected
 - Last week, we ended at v.20, as Jesus told the crowd that if they expected to enter Heaven by following the example of the Pharisees, they'd better understand and think again
 - Jesus says that they couldn't reach heaven by merely equaling the Pharisees' righteousness
 - Because as scrupulous as the Pharisees were in keeping the law, they weren't good enough
 - No, a person must *exceed* the righteousness of the Pharisees to enter the Kingdom
 - As we learned last week, this is true for two reasons
 - First, the Pharisees weren't as righteous as they appeared
 - In reality, the Pharisees were a study in style over substance
 - They were hypocrites who portrayed themselves to be perfectly righteous, yet were far from it
 - So a Pharisee wasn't the right example to follow...you would have to do better
 - And secondly, if you want to enter Heaven, you must exceed the piety of a Pharisee, because Pharisees judged using the wrong standard
 - The actual standard for entering heaven – the standard God uses – is His Son's example of perfection
 - We have to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees because we have to equal Jesus' righteousness
 - That's the real standard for entry into Heaven, and it's a standard that demands absolute perfection
 - That standard is much tougher than the Pharisees' example
- But of course, we can't equal Jesus' standard of perfection
 - If you've ever sinned, even once, then you're already below the standard God sets for Heaven
 - Now mature believers who know the Bible already know this
 - We know we can't enter Heaven by our own merit...we need Jesus to do it for us
 - But there are many well-intentioned, religious people who have never understood this truth...both today and certainly in Jesus' day
 - So let's go back in time once again...back to the day Jesus delivered this sermon,

and put yourself in the crowd

- You're a typical Jew in Jesus' day...committed to pleasing God, observing the Law according to the instructions of the Pharisees
- And you've been taught from your earliest days that the Jews are God's chosen people
- Therefore, the Kingdom has been promised to you and so you're probably feeling pretty good about yourself
 - The Pharisees tell you that if you follow their instructions and their example, you'll be well-received in the Kingdom
 - Your Jewishness ensures your entrance into the Kingdom
 - And following the Pharisees' rules assures you a good place in the Kingdom
- But now Jesus says that isn't good enough
 - In fact, not even the Pharisees themselves are going to enter the Kingdom
 - And of course, you think to yourself, that can't be right
 - I'm a good Jew...I haven't killed anyone, I haven't committed adultery, I give to the temple, I keep the dietary restrictions, *etc.*
 - Surely, God is pleased with me
 - Just like today, when people say I'm a good Catholic, or a good Mormon, or a good Baptist, or whatever
 - I haven't killed anyone
 - I go to church on Sundays, I give my "tithe"
 - I don't drink, smoke or chew or date girls who do
 - But in that kind of thinking, we find one of the dangerous consequences of Pharisaic Judaism or its modern equivalents: we grade ourselves on the curve
 - When a person practices a religion of rules, as the Jews did in following their Mishnah, we will always rig the game in our favor
 - It's human nature to emphasize rules that we *can* follow, while ignoring or eliminating the ones we can't or don't want to follow
 - In that way, we tell ourselves we are righteous, when in reality, we're simply doing what we prefer and calling it righteousness
 - We saw examples of this last week, when we studied the background of the Mishnah
 - We looked at that example of the Mishnah prohibiting the combining of meat and dairy
 - Those restrictions grew out of a single law God gave in Exodus, which prohibited a certain style of Canaanite idolatry, which involved boiling a goat kid in its mother's milk
 - But religious leaders perverted God's purposes by inventing new rules that had nothing to do with idolatry, and thus obscured God's intent for His people
 - Why did this happen? Because abstaining from idolatry is a tough task...it requires

disciplining the flesh and remaining faithful

- By comparison, it's much easier to simply outlaw mixing meat and dairy and declare that to be obedience to God's Law
- So while orthodox Jews today won't eat a cheeseburger, many still engage in idolatrous practices
- You see the problem...we move the goal posts so we can still declare victory without actually doing what God requires
- Religious thinking like that leads us to *feeling* righteous without actually making us righteous
 - And sadly, many a religious person has died in their sins and woken up the next instant surprised to find themselves in eternal punishment
 - They thought their system of rules would get them to Heaven
 - But Jesus says if you want to enter the Kingdom, you have to meet God's standard, not one you invented for yourself
 - And God's standard is the one Jesus established: perfection, equaling the glory of God
 - But as we learn today, God's standard is even tougher than living perfectly
 - God's Law requires that we obey perfectly in heart, mind, soul and strength
 - Our words, thoughts, motives and attitudes must also agree perfectly with God
 - That's what Jesus means when He says you have to exceed the example of the Pharisees
 - And to help us see this standard clearly, Jesus provides six examples that demonstrate how demanding God's standard of perfection truly is
 - In other words, when Jesus said your righteous must exceed that of the Pharisees, here's what He meant

Matt. 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

Matt. 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- Jesus opens each of his six examples with the phrase "you have heard it said..."
 - Notice this statement appears in vs.21, 27, 31, 33, 38 and 43
 - That phrase was a customary rabbinical saying that always preceded a reference to the oral law, the Mishnah's instructions
 - Saying "you have heard" distinguishes the quote from actual written Scripture, which rabbis quoted with the phrase "just as it is written..."

- So in this case, Jesus says “as you have heard” because He is quoting not from Scripture, but from the Mishnah, the oral law
- In these six examples, Jesus chooses some of the most challenging – and even offensive – rules in the Law of God
 - The first of Jesus’ six examples concerns the Mishnah’s teaching on the sixth commandment to not commit murder
 - And in the case of murder, the Pharisees taught that a person found guilty by a rabbinical court was liable for murder
 - The Mishnah said that you could not be considered to violate the sixth commandment unless and until you were duly convicted for the crime
- That’s the oral law Jesus quotes in v.21, and it certainly makes sense to us
 - A Jew who killed another person, but was declared not guilty by a rabbinical court, would not be considered a murderer
 - Our own law today works the same way
 - So naturally, we assume God follows the same standard...or does He?
- This example exposes how following manmade rules like the Mishnah leaves us with a false sense of security
 - When someone gives us a list of what we need to do to get to Heaven, we begin to think, “I got this.”
 - We take that checklist and start working the plan, confident we can earn our way to Heaven
 - Once again, the game is rigged, because we’re following rules men made, rather than following the standard God enforces
 - We could accomplish everything on our list, yet we’ll still be disqualified from Heaven in the end
 - Because when it comes to entering Heaven, the only standard that matters is the one God established
 - And if our list of rules isn’t EXACTLY the same list God uses, then our list is worthless, no matter how well we do in following it
- Guess what? The Mishnah isn’t God’s rule book
 - In v.22, Jesus explains God’s standard for keeping the sixth commandment
 - First, Jesus agrees that taking another person’s life unlawfully is a violation of the sixth commandment and therefore, is sin
 - But just because you haven’t (yet) killed someone, that isn’t enough to get you into Heaven
 - Jesus says you have to keep both the letter and the spirit of the Law
 - And the spirit of keeping the sixth commandment goes much deeper than simply not murdering
 - Jesus says meeting the requirements of “thou shall not murder” includes not expressing anger, unrighteously, against another person

- You cannot even speak a word against a person
- Even just calling a person a fool is enough to bring you under the condemnation of the sixth commandment
- That's God's standard for righteousness, and it's much higher than anything the Pharisees imagined in the Mishnah
 - We're learning that measuring righteousness goes much deeper than just actions
 - It includes considering our attitudes and thoughts
 - Said another way, the measure of our righteousness is found inside ourselves
- Long before you decide to raise your hand to take the life of another person, you've harbored animosity against that person in your heart
 - You have likely harbored sinful feelings, entertained sinful thoughts, and spoken hurtful words against that individual too
 - So that the act of taking the person's life was just the final link in a long chain of sin that lead up to that violent moment
- Obviously, few of us have taken another person's life in violation of the sixth commandment
 - So if I were to ask you, "Have you ever committed murder?" most of you could confidently answer, "No"
 - Nevertheless, according to Jesus, every single person in this room is guilty of violating that commandment
 - Not because you violated the letter of the law but because you violated the spirit of that law
 - Even though you've never taken someone's life, you are equally guilty for having hated another person or said a word against them
 - Notice at the end of v.22, Jesus says violating the spirit of a law is enough by itself to cast you into fiery hell
 - The standard for entering Heaven is perfection, and insulting a person is a sin
 - One sin is enough to bar you from Heaven, therefore hating is enough to get you thrown into Hell
 - So if you've assumed you're going to Heaven because you've never killed someone, think again
 - When you get to Hell and meet true murderers like Hitler and Stalin, you might say "Well, at least I never committed mass murder."
 - But you're still going to be just as hot
 - Jesus' point is, that manmade rules like the Pharisees' oral law won't guide you to Heaven...they're only fooling you
 - You have to do better, much better
 - You have to understand God's standard for Heaven

- And that standard is Jesus
- So if that's us, what do we do now? Jesus explains with two illustrations

Matt. 5:23 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

Matt. 5:24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Matt. 5:25 “Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Matt. 5:26 “Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

- In His first illustration, Jesus describes a worshipper at the temple preparing to make an offering to God
 - Suddenly, he remembers he has a fellow Jew (“brother”) who has something against him
 - At some point in the past, this worshipper offended his brother, yet has never repaired that relationship
 - In effect, he has broken the sixth commandment
 - He didn’t kill anyone, but his offense to his brother violated the spirit of that law
- Jesus’ point is that the worshipper’s heart knows that hatred for a brother was a sin
 - The Law didn’t say that this man’s offense was a sin, but his own conscience convicted him
 - And that was enough for that worshipper to realize he had to make amends
 - He recognized that his actions put him in violation of the spirit of the commandment
- So rather than coming before God bearing this guilt, the worshipper leaves to make things right
 - After all, this man would never walk into the temple expecting God’s approval if he had just killed his brother
 - So no more then, should he expect God’s approval if he has offended his brother
 - One offense may be more severe than the other, but both are equally disqualifying from Heaven
- So having set aside his sacrifice to reconcile with his brother, the worshipper can then return and approach God in the temple with a clear conscience
 - Jesus’ point is that we don’t need the Mishnah or any rule book to understand what righteousness requires
 - Our own conscience convicts us of our sin

- And so those who rest on a technicality, like not having killed someone, know full well there's more to pleasing God
- Your conscience testifies that you've sinned
- And therefore, if you are truly seeking to please God, you will acknowledge your sin and do what righteousness requires
- This leads us to Jesus' second illustration in v.25
 - Jesus describes two people involved in a legal dispute
 - One person is taking the other person to court to settle the matter
 - In the illustration, Jesus puts His audience in the place of the one being sued
 - And it's clear from His illustration, that you are guilty of the charge made against you
 - So Jesus says, knowing that you are guilty of the crime, you should act sensibly in resolving the situation before you get to the court
 - Don't persist in your denials and don't perpetuate the dispute
 - Because where will this lead? Ultimately, if you don't resolve the situation, you will end up in court
 - And in court, the judge will look at the facts and render a decision
 - If you are truly at fault, then you can safely assume the judgment will go against you
 - And when the court convicts you, there will be consequences that you can't escape from
 - In Jesus' illustration, the judge would throw you into prison as punishment for your offense against your neighbor
 - But if you had resolved the situation before you met the judge, you could have determined your own fate
 - Now you're at the mercy of a merciless judge
 - Only a proud and self-deceived person would persist in going to court knowing they were guilty
- Can you see Jesus' point in these illustrations?
 - First, true righteousness begins with understanding we are inherently unrighteous
 - Even when we're busy following our little rule books, thinking we're being righteous, our conscience tells on us
 - We know we're not perfect, that we're not righteous
 - But if we persist in our little game, we're only deceiving ourselves
 - Our righteousness needs to exceed that of the Pharisees
 - Secondly, given the fact that we know we're guilty of sin, and since we will face God for judgment in a day to come, what ought we to do now?
 - If we're sensible, we would act now to resolve our jeopardy

- In Jesus' illustration, there were two men involved in the dispute
- One man had offended another, so resolving the dispute involved reconciling with that other man
- But when we're talking about sin, the One we offend is God
 - So we need to reconcile with Him
 - So not only is God our Judge, He is also our adversary
 - So we need to make peace with Him, Jesus says, before we give an account to Him
 - If we don't, Jesus says, we will pay the full price for our sin
- And how do we reconcile with God? How do we make friends with God? The answer is simple...we can't on our own, but God has made a way available
 - First, the Bible says you must repent, which means to confess your sin, acknowledging you're guilty of offending God
 - And then secondly, seek God's mercy by accepting His provision of grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - When you place your faith in Jesus, you are accepting the free gift of Jesus' perfect life in place of your sinful life
 - By faith, you receive credit for Jesus' perfection, and God accepts Jesus' death on the cross as an acceptable payment for your sin
 - That's how you reconcile with God, as Paul says

Rom. 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- We aren't good enough to get into a Heaven that only accepts perfection...not even the Pharisees were good enough
 - That standard of perfection is so demanding, that it even requires perfect thoughts and attitudes...who can meet that standard?
 - Only Jesus...Jesus did what was required for us, because God knew we couldn't do it on our own
- With the time remaining, let's look briefly at the second example Jesus gives

Matt. 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';
Matt. 5:28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Again, Jesus quotes from the Mishnah, saying, "you have heard..."
 - This time, Jesus uses the Mishnah's teaching concerning the seventh

commandment not to commit adultery

- Once again, the Mishnah's definition of what constitutes a violation of this commandment falls short
- The Pharisees said that when a married person engaged in sexual relations with another, they committed adultery
- And certainly that was adultery
- But the Pharisees did not realize how lofty God's standard was for keeping the seventh commandment
 - Jesus says that this commandment also covers lustful glances
 - Simply looking upon someone with lust is a sin
 - Lust is not equal to adultery, but it violates the spirit of that law nonetheless
 - So once more, I could take a poll in here of how many people have committed adultery, and perhaps a few hands would go up
 - But if I asked how many people in here have violated the seventh commandment, every hand should go up
- Are you beginning to see the danger of following manmade rules – even rules that are supposedly based on the Bible?
 - Inevitably, we contrive them to give ourselves a false sense of security
 - It's easy to avoid the act of adultery, so we say that's enough and feel pretty good about ourselves
 - But God's standard is much higher, and we can't measure up
 - And then to add insult to injury, we usually don't even follow our own rules that well
- So once more, Jesus uses two illustrations to make His point

Matt. 5:29 “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matt. 5:30 “If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

- Jesus says it's better to pluck out our own eye, rather than allow it to lead you into lusting
 - And He says if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, rather than let it lead you into sin
 - Without being vulgar, I can tell you that in Jewish culture, the right hand was a euphemism
 - It stood, at times, for that unique male body part associated with adultery

- Since Jesus is teaching in the context of adultery here; He was probably referring to that male body part, not an actual hand
- So He mentions the eye, because it leads to lust, and He mentioned the other body part because it consummates the lust
- And in both cases, Jesus says you should be prepared to cut them off to avoid Hell
- To understand His illustrations, let's be clear in what Jesus is NOT saying
 - First, Jesus is not advocating for cutting off body parts, because it does nothing to address the problem Jesus is concerned with
 - That should be obvious to everyone here, but it's worth explaining
 - If you pluck out your own eye or cut off certain other body parts, you don't get an automatic pass into Heaven
 - Nowhere does the Bible teach that self-mutilation is a fast pass into Heaven
 - In fact, the Bible says exactly the opposite
 - Abraham was commanded by God to cut off a part of his body in obedience to God
 - Nevertheless, Paul tells us in Romans, that the Lord declared Abraham righteous by his faith *before* that moment
 - So that by Abraham's example, we would know that circumcision was not the means by which Abraham became righteous
 - Secondly, Jesus couldn't be advocating the removal of body parts as a solution to sin, because it obviously wouldn't work
 - Just because I remove my eyes, that won't prevent me from lusting in my heart
 - Sin is committed in the heart (in the spirit), not in the eyes
 - So even without eyes, I still have the capacity to sin, even if I lack the ability to act on that desire
- So clearly, Jesus' words were intended to be hyperbolic and ironic, not literal
 - Jesus was illustrating that we should be willing to make any sacrifice necessary now, if it can keep us out of an eternity in Hell
 - If you have not reconciled with God, then nothing else in your life should take priority over that goal
 - Nothing else is even close...because eternity is a long, long time
 - And if we do not reconcile with our Adversary before we come before Him at our judgment, then the consequences will be devastating, eternal and irreversible
 - In fact, if someone is unwilling to do what's necessary to reconcile, then clearly that person doesn't appreciate the jeopardy they are in
 - Of course, the Pharisees weren't willing to do what was required to reconcile with God
 - They weren't willing to cut off their hand, so to speak
 - Jesus didn't expect anyone to literally cut off a body part

- But He was emphasizing that reconciling with God starts with denying our flesh and humbling ourselves before God
- But most Pharisees weren't willing to sacrifice their earthly pleasures – their pride, their wealth, their status – to embrace God's provision, Jesus Christ
 - Which is why Jesus said we must do better than even a Pharisee if we want to reach Heaven
 - But some Pharisees saw the light, and when they did, they were willing to make these sacrifices, to become poor in spirit
 - Men like Paul, who wrote of his experience reconciling with God this way

Phil. 3:4 ...If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

Phil. 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

Phil. 3:6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Phil. 3:7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Phil. 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

Phil. 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

- So if you're planning to get to Heaven by following the Pharisees and their oral law, are you prepared to accept your fate?
 - God's standard for righteousness is so much more demanding than your rules, you can't afford any miscalculation
 - You can't make a single mistake...Are you sure you can succeed against that standard?
 - Are you prepared to remove cherished body parts if necessary to avoid that one disqualifying sin?
 - Search your conscience...doesn't it convict you right now? Don't you recognize that you're not perfect
 - And so, like the man at the altar, shouldn't you be running to the One you offended to seek reconciliation?
 - And shouldn't you be doing it now, while you have the chance, before your time in God's court comes?
 - And shouldn't you be willing to do whatever is required to avoid Hell? Isn't that the single most important thing you should consider in this life?
 - The answer is so simple, because God made it simple for us, because He knew we

couldn't obtain sufficient righteousness on our own

- Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, the sinless man Who died to pay for your sin
- And believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, proving He has the power to grant life over death
- And by your faith in Him, Jesus will raise you from the dead to live forever in the Kingdom...no rules, just grace
- That's what the Gospel offers

- Let's return to Jesus' examples illustrating what true righteousness requires
 - But first, let's not forget the big picture...
 - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is a gigantic resetting of Israel's understanding of what it takes to enter Heaven, or the Kingdom
 - Entering the Kingdom, Jesus said, requires living a life that was even more righteous than that of the Pharisees
 - It required living according to the spirit of God's Law, not merely following the Pharisees' manmade "oral law"
 - In the second half of this chapter, Jesus has been giving us examples of what this higher standard requires
 - Last week, we learned that the spirit behind "Thou shall not murder" goes a lot deeper than not taking another person's life
 - The true intent of that law was to be loving to people!
 - And when God said thou shall not commit adultery, He didn't just mean don't fool around on your spouse
 - He meant stay faithful to your wife with your heart, mind, soul and strength... don't even let your eyes stray!
 - We still have four more examples in this chapter to study, and as we examine them, we'll continue to see how they refuted the Pharisees' teaching
 - But we've already seen how the Pharisees were perverting the Law for personal gain
 - And we've covered the Mishnah's impact on leading people astray
 - So for the final four examples, I'm going to focus mostly on the heart of each issue, rather than on the Pharisaic concern
 - And I also want us to consider if we're thinking about these issues like Pharisees too?
 - That is, are we guilty of setting aside the Word of God and ignoring God's heart on these matters
 - While we pursue our own rules in place of His?
- So let's begin with the first of these four examples

Matt. 5:31 "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';

Matt. 5:32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

- So Jesus' third example compares the Pharisees' teaching on divorce with God's view of divorce from the Scriptures

- Let me begin by acknowledging divorce is a sensitive and emotionally charged issue
 - Many of our lives have been touched by divorce
 - And it's always a painful and often embarrassing experience
 - Nevertheless, it's important we understand the Bible's perspective on this topic...and we will in time
- But in this chapter, Jesus is using divorce as an example on a larger point...divorce is not His main point, no more than murder or lust was
 - Furthermore, Jesus returns to this topic again, later in this Gospel, in Chapter 19
 - And at that time, Jesus will go into much greater detail on the subject
 - So I will wait until then to address the subject of divorce in greater detail
- So for now, we'll focus on understanding Jesus' point in this example
 - Jesus quotes from the Mishnah ("it was said" not "as it is written") where it paraphrases Deuteronomy 24
 - In that law, Moses commanded that a man who divorces his wife must send her away with a certificate of divorce
 - But Jesus says, that whoever divorces his wife "makes" her commit adultery
 - To understand how these two statements relate, we need to appreciate the culture of Jesus' day
 - In the ancient east, women had no legal standing
 - Generally speaking, they couldn't own land or own a business
 - They couldn't testify in court or enter into contracts
 - So a woman had no way to support herself in the culture
 - Moreover, women generally didn't possess sufficient upper body strength to handle the strenuous effort required to work the land
 - So a woman in Jesus' day literally had no way to provide for herself through labor
 - Therefore, women relied on men to survive
 - During the first part of her life, a young girl lived under her father's roof, depending on his support
 - Later, when she married, she was supported by her husband for the rest of her life
 - If she was widowed, she would move in with a son or brother-in-law
- But if that woman's husband lost interest in her and kicked her out of the house, she faced a desperate situation
 - Not only was her marriage falling apart, but she was at risk of losing her only means of support
 - She would be set out of the house with the clothes on her back and little else
 - There would be no alimony or child support

- She wasn't going to get a divorce settlement
 - And generally speaking, she couldn't return to her father's house, since she was considered the property of her husband
- And to make matters worse, the woman was still considered married
 - Which meant that no other man would consider giving her shelter either
 - A respectable man would never spend private time in the company of a married woman, especially in his home
 - That man could be accused of adultery
- Therefore, a woman abandoned by her husband was literally without hope
 - Unfortunately, this happened commonly in ancient life
 - Hard-hearted and cruel men abandoned their wives routinely, simply because they tired of her or wanted someone else
 - They left these poor women destitute and helpless, without a means of support
 - Such a woman was in real danger of starvation or abuse or death by exposure
 - Her best chance for survival was to depend on the mercy of strangers or family members, eking out a meager life as a beggar
 - The story of Ruth and Naomi is an example of such a situation
 - So to correct this injustice, God said to Israel, in Deuteronomy 24:1, that if a man is determined to divorce his wife, he must give her a certificate of divorce
 - The husband couldn't kick his wife out of the house with nothing
 - He had to give her a certificate of divorce
 - With a certificate of divorce, the woman had a reasonable chance of finding another man to take pity on her and marry her
 - Another man could take her as a wife without fear of being charged with adultery
- But reading the Law carefully, it's clear that God was not approving of the man's decision to divorce his wife
 - The Lord was simply commanding the man to show some mercy to his victim
 - God did not intend Deuteronomy 24 to become a license to engage in divorce and remarriage
 - It's similar to the case of another law

Ex. 22:16 “If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife.

- That Law says, that a man who seduces a woman outside of marriage, must pay a dowry to the family and marry the girl he seduced
 - Scripture is clear that having sex with a woman before you marry her is always a

sin...100% of the time...we call it fornication

- But in Exodus 22, God addresses the aftermath of fornication, because He knew sinful men were going to sin in this way
- He obligated the man to make amends for his sin by marrying the girl
- Obviously, Exodus 22:16 doesn't mean God thinks it's ok to engage in fornication
- Likewise, just because God made accommodation for divorce, doesn't mean He approves of it
 - Nevertheless, the Pharisees had taken Deuteronomy 24 to be just that...a license to divorce
 - They assumed God wouldn't have made allowance for a certificate of divorce if He didn't see a need for it at times
- So they set about to define in the Mishnah the many reasons that justified a divorce
 - Over the years, the Pharisees invented a long list of such reasons
 - None of these reasons were found in Scripture itself, the rabbis simply imagined them
 - The most ridiculous of these rules stated that a husband was justified in divorcing his wife if she burned his soup
 - With rules like that, it's obvious that these men were simply looking for any reason they could to end marriage
- But as silly as these rules seem to us, the Pharisees said they were equal to Scripture because they were part of the "oral law"
 - Ironically, their rules were supposedly intended to limit divorce
 - Yet, because of those rules, it became easier and easier for men in Israel to do the very thing God said he hates
 - And all the while, they assumed God approved of their behavior because the Pharisees said it was OK
- So once again, Jesus sets the record straight
 - In v.32, Jesus says, that despite Deuteronomy 24, and despite the Mishnah, everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery
 - Given the background I gave you earlier, we can understand what Jesus means when He says, a man "makes" his wife commit adultery
 - By ending the marriage, the husband essentially forced his wife to seek shelter under another man's roof
 - So in that sense, the husband made her commit adultery because her only other option was starvation
 - But even more challenging, Jesus says that when that next man marries the divorced woman, he too commits adultery
 - That probably shocked the crowd listening to Jesus
 - Everyone in Jesus' day assumed this new husband was in the clear because that

woman came with that certificate of divorce

- But Jesus says that certificate didn't change the situation from God's point of view
- That certificate was simply intended to make the best of a bad situation by preserving the life of the woman
 - That certificate didn't actually end the first marriage vows...it just gave the woman a chance for survival
 - Because if the choice is between the woman's death and adultery, adultery is the better of the two
- That certificate doesn't mean that the marriage has ceased – adultery is still adultery
 - The husband's choice to divorce his wife was a sin, and it led to a chain of sin, by his wife and the next man
 - So we could summarize Jesus' teaching simply by saying, if you want to please God, honor your marriage as a lifelong bond
 - As I might say to my kids...one wife per life, one man is God's plan
- Now, you probably noticed Jesus mentions an exception in v.32
 - I want to wait until Chapter 19 to discuss this exception in detail
 - For now, simply note that grammatically speaking, Jesus' exception applies to the second half of that verse
 - We could reword the sentence this way... "everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery except in the case of unchastity"
 - Jesus was simply saying that a husband can't be guilty of making his wife commit adultery if she beat him to it...if she committed adultery first
 - One last thing, I will say on this topic today...while divorce is a sin, it's not an unforgivable sin, and it's not worse than other sins
 - Remember earlier, Jesus said that those who have called a person a fool have broken the sixth commandment against murder
 - And He said that those who have lusted have broken the commandment against adultery
 - So how many of you have hated a person? How many have lusted?
 - And some of us have divorced, but I ask everyone...is the sin of divorce worse than our violations of the sixth and seventh commandments?
 - And more importantly, did Jesus die to cover the sin of divorce, or only to cover your sin?
 - Obviously, He died for all of us because we all have sin, no matter what kind
 - And so, we have no basis for judging anyone in the body of Christ concerning their life circumstances or past
 - We all stand by the grace of God in the atoning work of Christ

- And so our only priority on this topic, or any other, is to encourage everyone to learn what the Word says so we can all do better in the future
- Let's move to the next example for today, beginning in v.33

Matt. 5:33 “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’

Matt. 5:34 “But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

Matt. 5:35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

Matt. 5:36 “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Matt. 5:37 “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

- The next example begins with our tell-tale phrase “you have heard”, indicating another quote from the Mishnah is coming
 - In this case, Jesus quotes the Mishnah’s command concerning the taking of oaths
 - In the written Word of God, the Lord said in Numbers 30, that we are obligated to keep our vows
 - In Leviticus 27, the Lord warns that failure to keep our vows, even unintentionally, will bring the consequences of the vow
 - In ancient times, written contracts weren’t common, so a verbal agreement was usually the only way business was done
 - Those verbal agreements were solemn, and if a man wasn’t trustworthy, no one would do business with him
 - We have contracts now, but this principle still applies in modern life
 - For example, we vow to pay back a loan
 - We vow to fulfill our enlistment obligation in the military honorably
 - We take an oath to tell the truth on a witness stand
 - And speaking of marriage, in the ceremony, we vow to remain married for life
 - The Word of God says keep your vows or suffer the consequences
- But of course, the Pharisees took the spirit of God’s Law regarding oaths and tossed it aside
 - In the oral law, they expanded greatly on what God said concerning oaths
 - They invented an array of ways men could take oaths
 - And they imagined an equal variety of ways that oaths could be broken or excused
 - For example, the Pharisees created an elaborate system for determining whether an

oath was truly binding

- The binding nature of an oath depended upon what the promisor swore by
- For example, a person swearing by God's name was always bound to keep his oath because the Pharisees said God was eternal
- But swearing by heavens and earth was not binding they said, since the heavens and earth were not eternal
- And if a man swore his oath while facing toward Jerusalem, then the Pharisees said it was binding
- But if he swore while facing *away* from Jerusalem, it wasn't
- The effect of these convoluted rules was encouraging deceit and fraud in business dealings
 - A man could construct his oath concerning some manner in such a way that he knew it wouldn't be binding
 - Only later, would the victim discover that his agreement wasn't enforceable in court
 - It's the equivalent of the small print in a contract
- In Acts 23:14, men take an oath not to eat or drink until they killed the Apostle Paul
 - In the end, Paul escaped, but we never hear what happened to these men
 - They almost certainly didn't keep their vow, because the Mishnah had an exception for something called, "restraint"
 - These men were restrained, or prevented, from fulfilling their vow, so they were released from it, the Pharisees would say
- Of course, Jesus denounces the Mishnah's stupid rules on oaths
 - In v.34, Jesus says swearing by Heaven is just as binding as swearing by God Himself, because Heaven is the throne of God
 - Likewise in v.35, Jesus says swearing by earth is equally binding as swearing by God because it's the footstool of God's feet
 - And regardless of which way you face, swearing by Jerusalem is always binding because it's God's city in the Kingdom
 - Jesus wasn't validating the Pharisee's silly categorization of oaths, He was simply exposing how ludicrous their logic was
 - Once again, God made something clear in His word
 - Then later, in their oral law, the Pharisees took the spirit of what God said and perverted it
 - They contrived a set of rules that turned God's Word on its head by making it easy to divorce or break a vow
 - They called their rules an "oral law" to fool people into thinking that God would be pleased when they did as they pleased
 - In reality, those rules led people away from obedience and righteousness, and

into sin

- So in the matter of making vows or oaths, what does righteousness require?
 - Jesus said it begins with understanding our place in God's economy
 - In v.36, Jesus says you shouldn't make guarantees about things you can't control...it's taking a needless gamble and it's evil
 - Someone might swear an oath upon their own head, meaning they put their own life as a ransom, should they fail to keep their oath
 - But Jesus says you can't even change the color of your own hair, so how can you assure anyone of what you can do in the future?
 - This example doesn't seem to work as well today, in our age of hair coloring
 - But the example still applies, because coloring your hair doesn't change its actual color
 - You're just covering it up
 - So if you can't control even the least thing on your own body, why place so much at risk over things you have no hope to control?
 - Jesus' point is, that God's Word on oaths wasn't intended to encourage people to enter into them
 - And He certainly didn't want us to set rules for how to make oaths non-binding
 - On the contrary, the Lord was trying to steer us away from oaths altogether
 - So Jesus says, the spirit of God's Law was to encourage men to simply state their intentions honestly as "yes" or "no" without need for additional promises
 - If you operate this way, you will never have need to make oaths
 - Because your word will be respected and trusted, based on your history of doing what you say
 - Then, we never have need to put ourselves in jeopardy of violating an oath
 - To operate any other way is evil, Jesus says
- In v.38, Jesus moves to the Mishnah's laws on retribution

Matt. 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'

Matt. 5:39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Matt. 5:40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

Matt. 5:41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

Matt. 5:42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

- Jesus quotes from the Mishnah's take on Exodus 21:24, where the Lord told Israel that

justice should be measured out proportionally

- The Law uses euphemistic examples to say let the punishment fit the crime
- An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, so to speak
- We shouldn't demand something more valuable than was taken from us
- An eye is far more valuable than a single tooth, so don't demand an eye for a tooth
- But of course, you know what the Pharisees did here, right?
 - They took this law hyper-literally, so they could turn it into a license for personal vengeance
 - So according to their Mishnah, a Jew could take personal revenge against someone who harmed them, so long as they only took one tooth or one eye, *etc.*
- But the Lord wasn't advocating taking personal revenge, much less maiming people
 - God was placing a governor on our tendency to react in sinful ways against those who offend us, by requiring that we not go beyond what was done to us
 - He was limiting retribution to ensure that punishment didn't become excessive
 - The true spirit of that law was to encourage mercy
 - Said another way, if excessive punishment is sin, then showing undeserved favor (grace) is righteousness
 - God's heart is to encourage mercy for those who offend us
 - So Jesus says, if you want to follow the spirit of the Law, you'll show no interest in retribution whatsoever
 - Let them strike you without striking back
 - Respond to their unreasonable requests by surprising them with your generosity
 - When they borrow and don't return, let them borrow again anyway
 - And when they impose upon you by their unreasonable requests, respond as though you wanted to do it anyway
 - Now, if you're hearing Jesus' list and wondering if there are any exceptions to these rules, then you're still thinking like a Pharisee
 - Instead of looking for ways to limit our obedience to God's Word, we need to embrace the spirit of what God is saying
 - Righteousness means looking like God and not like ourselves
- So the right question to ask is, "How would God respond in these situations? What would Jesus do?"
 - For example, what did Jesus do when they slapped Him on the cheek?
 - Was that attack deserved? Did Jesus have a right to respond against His attackers?
 - Jesus had done nothing wrong
 - So couldn't He have retaliated and still been righteous?

- Actually, no...He couldn't, because it wouldn't have been in keeping with the Father's will
 - And that's the point...it's the Father's will, and our obedience to that will, that determines our righteousness
 - Jesus had a right to respond, but righteousness required He do something else
 - Jesus had to go to that cross as the Father determined, so that He could complete the plan of redemption that we all depend upon now
 - Can you live like that? With eyes for eternity...making decisions now that support God's eternal purposes?
- As you listen to these examples, I bet you've been hearing them from the perspective of the injured party...the one offended
 - But have you ever considered that you are the offender? Even more sobering, have you considered you were an offender to God Himself?
 - You were the sinner, the one who offended God
 - And then one day, you came to Christ seeking His mercy
 - In that moment, you were the one demanding things from God that you had no right to have
 - You were the evil person that Jesus didn't resist when you called upon Him for mercy
 - You were the one who asked Jesus to walk a mile with you, and He surprised you with His generosity
 - Because when you asked Jesus to forgive you for your sins, Jesus went a long way beyond just forgiving you
 - The Bible says that by your faith, He adopted you as a child of God, making you part of the family of God
 - He also has made you a fellow heir in His Kingdom
 - He has promised you a place in His government and a share of His inheritance
 - And He placed His Spirit in you, giving you access to the mind of God by His Word
 - Jesus went the extra mile for us and we certainly didn't deserve it
 - So how can we refuse our Lord, when He asked us to be His hands and feet to this lost and dying world?
 - How can we refuse to live according to the spirit of His Law when He has already accomplished all that it requires on our behalf?
- If you're searching for the big take-away from this chapter, let me say it plainly
 - Heaven is a tall order...taller than you can reach
 - You can't get there on your own, because you can't measure up
 - But Jesus could and did
 - So now we live as His disciples, seeking to please Him and represent Him

- But you can't do that effectively if you revert to following rules that were worthless in the first place
- Stop listening to others' "do's" and "don't's", or even the ones in your own head
- Get into the Word of God and stay there
 - And as you do, you'll be amazed by two things
 - First, you'll be continually humbled by how far you are from the standards of righteousness that God requires
 - You'll understand why Jesus had to live and die for you, because you'll see clearly that you had no chance to do it for yourself
 - And that recognition will serve to increase your appreciation for the grace you've received in Christ
- And then secondly, as you continue in your studies, you'll be amazed at how much your heart is changing by what you learn
 - You'll find yourself thinking and acting differently
 - Almost instinctively, you'll begin living by the spirit of the Word, where before, you couldn't even follow the letter of the Law
 - And that recognition will serve to increase your love for Christ and your devotion to Him
- If you want to receive Christ's righteousness, if you want assurance that you will be in the Kingdom, then place your faith in Jesus Christ

- Let's transition out of Part 1 of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and move into Part 2
 - Before we do, we have one more of Jesus' examples from the Mishnah to study
 - Remember, Jesus gave six examples from the Mishnah to expose the Pharisees' distorted teaching on the Kingdom and righteousness
 - The Pharisees made rules for Israel that supposedly helped Israel keep God's commandments
 - The Pharisees recorded their rules in a book called the Mishnah
 - Soon, that book had become more important than Scripture itself in regulating the daily life of Jews
 - But in reality, the rules of the Mishnah contradicted what Scripture said
 - So Jesus is working to set the record straight in His first sermon
 - He says the Kingdom saint doesn't look like a Pharisee
 - And that a saint won't follow the Pharisees' rules
 - Instead, that saint follows the spirit of God's Word
 - And each of Jesus' examples illustrates how demanding that standard is
 - Today, we reach Jesus' final example, which concerns the Mishnah's teaching on showing love to others
 - This final example will bridge us into the second part of Jesus' sermon in Chapter 6
 - And it also explains God's purpose in commanding His disciples to live righteously now, while we await the Kingdom

Matt. 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’

Matt. 5:44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matt. 5:45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matt. 5:46 “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Matt. 5:47 “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Matt. 5:48 “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- Jesus says you have *heard* it said, “you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy”
 - Once again, Jesus prefaces His quote with the phrase “you have heard it said”, indicating He's quoting from the Mishnah, the so-called “oral law”
 - In fact, this example shows clearly that Jesus is quoting from the Mishnah, not

directly from written Scripture

- Because the quote Jesus gives us in v.43 isn't found in Scripture
- The first part of the quote, to love your neighbor, is a restatement of Leviticus 19:18
- But the second half of the quote, to hate your enemy, is not found in Scripture at all
- This is confirmation for us that Jesus was quoting a rabbinical teaching found in the Mishnah, not Scripture
 - And in the Mishnah, the Pharisees modified the Bible's teaching to love your neighbor so that the spirit of God's Law was lost
 - Specifically, they created rules for how and when a Jew should love and when love wasn't required
- First, the Pharisees decided God's command to love your neighbor only applied to other Jews
 - Now, the context of Leviticus 19:18 *does* specify fellow Jews
 - But as Jesus explains, that wasn't the spirit of the Law
 - God expected Israel to show love to all humanity
- Secondly, the Pharisees concluded that since God only expected Jews to love fellow Jews, then it was permissible for Jews to hate Gentiles
 - So from that analysis, Pharisees taught love your neighbors and hate your enemy, which is the rule Jesus quoted
- Pharisees' supported this by other Scriptures, like Psalm 139:21

Psa. 139:21 Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

- The Pharisees said if David could rightly hate those whom God hated, then surely it was appropriate for Jews to hate their enemies too
 - David was referring to his shared hatred for unrighteousness
 - Just as God hates unrighteousness, so did David
 - But just as we say "hate the sin, but love the sinner", so God told Israel to love others so that they might bring them into the knowledge of righteousness – they were to be a light among the nations
- That was the spirit of God's Law, but the Pharisees were spiritually blind, so they never understood the meaning of these things
 - Instead, they were slaves to their own rules, and that slavery led them farther and farther from the truth
 - Instead of looking for greater ways to show love (which was the intent of the Law) later generations of Pharisees expanded the number of ways Jews could

legitimately hate others

- For example, by Jesus' day, the Pharisees had defined other Jewish political parties like Sadducees or publicans as "enemies" rather than "neighbors"
- So as a result of the Mishnah's teaching, it was considered godly to withhold love from a Sadducee, even though he was a fellow Jew
- We've see this pattern with Israel's religious leaders over and over
 - Rather than seek to understand the spirit of God's Word and conform to it, they preferred to dissect the Law with mindless rules
 - The Pharisees' rules had the effect of circumventing the intent of God's Law so that their evil hearts could do as they pleased
 - This should be no surprise, of course
 - Evil and hypocritical hearts are always seeking for ways to disobey God, while still maintaining the illusion of righteousness
- So now, how does true righteousness view the issue of loving others?
 - Jesus says it's simple...righteousness means showing love to everyone, especially those who oppose you
 - In contradiction to the Pharisees, Jesus gives us God's definition of a neighbor and a new definition of love
 - A neighbor, Jesus says, is your enemy
 - Your neighbor is the one who persecutes you
 - In other words, a neighbor refers to someone near you
 - It's the person living near you
 - It's the one you work with, the one you see in the market
 - It's anyone you have contact with in your life, whether someone you know or a stranger
 - In Leviticus 19:18, the Lord defined a neighbor as a fellow Jew because Israel principally lived, worked and interacted with other Jews
 - So obviously, every Jew is a neighbor to every other Jew
 - But as the nation had opportunity to interact with other nations, God expected Israel to show love to Gentile neighbors too
 - Which means, loving a neighbor means showing love to an enemy on occasion
 - Remember, the definition of neighbor is based on proximity, not on affinity
 - Therefore, those who come against you to persecute you, make themselves your neighbor
 - They make themselves targets of your love
 - That was spirit of the Law, Jesus says
- Then Jesus clarifies what God meant by showing love
 - Loving your neighbor isn't merely the absence of malice

- It means a proactive demonstration of concern and care for them, Jesus says
- Specifically, Jesus says loving an enemy means taking time to pray for their spiritual well-being
- Remember, praying for someone means lifting them up before God, seeking that God would bring His favor upon them in some way
- So imagine a person who you sincerely dislike, someone you know who has hurt you, or treats you unkindly
 - Now imagine spending time on your knees sincerely asking the Lord to bless them
 - To grant them peace, health, prosperity or some other blessing
 - Or most of all, to grant them salvation by faith in Jesus
- I'm sure we pray this way for those we love, like friends and family members
 - But Jesus says righteousness requires we place our enemies on the same level of importance as those we love
 - In fact, He's asking us to devote as much time to praying for them as for those we prefer
- I bet few of us have done this
 - And I say that simply because for most of us, it's challenging enough to find time to pray at all
 - So when we do, we naturally use that precious time to intercede for personal needs, our friends and family, our church, *etc.*
 - Knowing that, I suspect we give little or no time to praying for the spiritual good of those we dislike
- Yet Jesus says what God really meant by "love your neighbor", is showing regard for everyone God has placed around you
- If you understand God's sovereignty, you will understand that no one crosses your path without it being ordained by God – it's not a coincidence – there's a reason for it
 - For example, your neighbor is that coworker who contends with you at work, the next door neighbor who annoys you
 - That relative who never liked you, that classmate who mocks you
 - And God placed those "enemies" in your path for a good purpose, as a test
 - The test is whether you will be sons of your Father in Heaven, Jesus says
 - In Jewish thinking, to be a son of a father means to follow in the footsteps of that father
 - As Jesus says to the Pharisees in John's Gospel

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

- So our test in life is whether we will do as the Lord did
 - The Father brought Jesus to earth as a man, so that God could become our “neighbor” in that He associated with mankind
 - Hebrews says it this way

Heb. 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Heb. 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

- Jesus was made a little lower than angels, that is, He was made like man
 - Jesus became our neighbor, in that He became man, interacting with mankind
 - And as our neighbor, He showed us love, tasting death for us, to bring many sons to glory
 - Jesus loved His neighbors even as they hated Him and persecuted Him
- So now, Jesus asks if we will be sons of our Father in the sense that we will also show love to those God puts in our path, our neighbors
 - And not just to those who are being saved, but even those unbelievers who are determined to remain so
 - Because the Father also shows kindness to the likes of them
 - In v.45, Jesus says God’s goodness to everyone, both friend and foe, can be seen simply in the fact that the sun rises on both
 - That’s a way of saying that just allowing both to live to see another day is grace from the Father
 - Most people, especially unbelievers, take life for granted
 - But Scripture says the opportunity to live is grace from God
 - For example, consider how long you lived before you came to know Christ? How many years did you sin? How long did you offend God?
 - Yet He gave you food, clothing, shelter
 - Your life had a measure of joy, it had some satisfaction
 - You took all that for granted and probably assumed you had every right to expect it
 - But in reality, you were experiencing the kindness of God, even though you were unkind and ungrateful
- So that’s our test...to show love to our neighbors, whether friend or foe, simply because

that's how the Father operates

- And as sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven, we are expected to reflect the Father's character
 - Since this command is a test, the question becomes what's in it for us?
 - And the answer Jesus gives is, "reward"
 - There are eternal rewards on the line
- If we heed this command and show love to our neighbors, we will be rewarded by the Father in the Kingdom
 - But we must seek for that reward, understanding the Heavenly standard for righteousness
 - If we operate according to manmade rules, like those found in the Mishnah – or perhaps according to ones we make up for ourselves – then we are not going to see that reward
- For example, if you only show love to those who love you first, then you're not operating according to the right rules, Jesus says
 - In v.46, Jesus asks rhetorically, what reward will you have? The answer is none
 - Because showing love to those who love you first is not worthy of reward, because that's how the evil human heart thinks
 - Even the worst of Jewish society, a tax collector, will love his own kind
 - Tax collectors were despised, because they were considered traitors
 - Romans used local subjects to collect taxes in the provinces
 - So in Judea, Romans hired Jews to collect taxes from fellow Jews
 - So naturally, any Jew who would cooperate with Romans was considered a traitor
 - Even worse, the Romans assigned each tax collector a quota to collect, or suffer severe consequences
 - So tax collectors were extortionists, using ruthless methods to force fellow Jews to pay
 - Furthermore, a tax collector wasn't paid by Rome
 - So the collector made his own income by collecting above and beyond the quota set by Rome
 - So for Jews, the worst enemy imaginable was a fellow Jew who served Rome as a tax collector
 - Which meant tax collectors had few friends
 - Tax collectors were ostracized by their fellow Jews and despised by the Romans who employed them
 - So the only friends a tax collector was likely to have were fellow tax collectors
- Which is why Jesus says even tax collectors are willing to show love to those who love them first

- But this is hardly a standard of conduct worthy of reward
 - It's entirely self-serving and does nothing to glorify the Father
 - Yet, that's exactly the standard the Mishnah promoted
 - Love your neighbor, that is, love those who are kind to you first
 - And hate your enemy, that is, show no love to those who refuse to love you
- There is no eternal reward for acting that way
 - If you only show regard for your brothers, you're doing simply what everyone does naturally
 - Or as Jesus put it, what even the Gentiles do
- No, if you want to pass this test of righteousness and gain a reward in Heaven, you must do better
 - You must do as the Father in Heaven has done for you first
 - You must show love to even those who deserve it least
 - And do so before they give you regard
 - Be generous, be kind, be considerate, and even pray for them
 - And when you enter into the Kingdom, you will see your reward
- Now notice that Jesus began this sermon by defining the character qualities of a Kingdom-bound individual
 - Those qualities are made possible by spiritual rebirth
 - That is, we become citizens of the coming Kingdom when we place our faith in Jesus Christ and are born-again
 - As we come to faith in Jesus, God gives us a new spirit in the likeness of Christ, so that we may think and act like Christ
 - It's by that new spirit that we may begin to demonstrate the Kingdom qualities Jesus outlined in the Beatitudes
 - But we do not obtain the Kingdom by mimicking these behaviors, as we learned earlier
 - Nor do we receive the Kingdom itself as our reward for good behavior
 - The Kingdom is not a reward that we earn – it's a free gift
 - We obtain our citizenship in the Kingdom by faith alone
 - But Jesus says now that we do have opportunity for eternal reward in the Kingdom
 - And that reward is based, in part, on whether we show love to our neighbors, to those God places in our path, whether friend or foe
 - And in those moments, when you don't want to do that, ask yourself what you are sacrificing as your reward in Heaven
 - Let that be an encouragement to us to serve the Father in those moments
- Because let's be honest, it can be difficult to show love to someone who hates us or

mistreats us

- We want retribution
 - Or we feel like a hypocrite when we do nice things for someone we secretly detest
 - Well, remember the spirit of God's Law
 - He didn't say *act* like you love your neighbor...He said *love* your neighbor
- So God's intention is that we find love in our heart for them
 - And the best way to do that is to remember how Christ showed you love before you loved Him
 - Nothing softens your heart toward someone else faster than remembering what you've been forgiven of yourself
- Remember Jesus' words to Simon the Pharisee

Luke 7:47 “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

- Remembering how much Jesus has forgiven in your life, how many offenses, how many unkind actions and thoughts...
- That will instill in your heart a desire to show love to others
- So that the moment you begin to feel hesitation to show love to another, just remember how much you owe Jesus
- You cannot judge another without putting yourself in a place of superiority, so allow yourself to be brought down to their level
- Now, if that still doesn't seem possible, and you're still struggling to love your neighbor at times, then consider this...
 - If you can't find it in your heart to show love to your neighbor for their sake
 - Then do it for your own sake
 - Because reward is on the line
- Jesus summarizes this entire chapter with the final verse
 - Our goal in life should be to be as perfect as our Father is perfect
 - First, because that is the standard for entrance into Heaven, into the Kingdom
 - Perfection is the standard, and the only way to meet that standard is through faith in Jesus Christ
 - So entrance into the Kingdom is by obtaining Christ's perfection through our faith in Him
 - Secondly, we are called to live in righteousness by striving to equal the Father's standard
 - Which is why it's so important to understand the spirit of God's Word

- Obviously, we don't live in a Jewish, Pharisaic culture
- So we're not in danger of following the Mishnah rather than sticking to Scripture (though some unhealthy Christian movements are doing just that!)
- But that doesn't mean we aren't susceptible to missing the spirit of God's commandments in Scripture
 - We may know that we obtain Heaven by faith alone, so we're already resting in Christ's righteousness and not our own
 - But what about your walk of sanctification?
 - How are you endeavoring to live-out that righteousness?
 - Are you doing it according to the spirit of God's Word or merely according to the letter, which means following your own Mishnah?
- For example, when Jesus says love your neighbor, are you loving everyone or only the ones you like?
 - Or when Jesus says turn the other cheek, do you forgive those who harm you?
 - Or when He says don't commit adultery, do you actively fight the urge to indulge your lustful thoughts?
- You see, the issue of being perfect is two-fold – and as Christians, we typically only think of one side of this coin
 - We rest in Christ's righteousness to enter Heaven, but we forget that we have a work to do in the meantime
 - And that work is our sanctification
 - By our faith, we are made perfect before God in our Spirit
 - And by our willingness to obey God's Word, we can become more like God in our behavior
 - But only if we pay attention to the true intent of God's Word
 - Don't be like a Pharisee...don't seek for the minimum
 - Don't try to find excuses or exemptions or loopholes
 - Don't make your own rules for when God's rules apply to you and when they don't
 - Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect
 - And as you do this, you please Christ, and as you please Christ, you stand to gain reward
 - This is the walk we are called to live-out
 - And this walk of sanctification is the single most important challenge and duty of the Christian life...
 - Nothing else comes close
 - You can summarize what we're learning in this chapter this way
 - Know Christ to enter the Kingdom

- Know Christ's Word to represent the Kingdom
- Obey Christ's Word to obtain the Kingdom (to obtain the rewards in the Kingdom)
- Those are areas the Pharisees corrupted, and in the next chapter we will see Jesus set the record straight showing how godliness works in those areas of life when we live out our righteousness

- There's an old joke about a pastor whose sermon ran on too long one Sunday
 - Finally, a man got up and left before the sermon ended and outside the church, a bystander asked him if the preacher was finished
 - The man replied, "Oh yes, he's finished, but he won't stop talking."
 - I was guilty of making that mistake last week, so I owe you some time back this week
 - Therefore, as we return to Chapter 6 today, I'll cover just the opening verses
 - But let's start tonight remembering how Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of Jesus' sermon connect
 - In Chapter 5, Jesus exposed the Pharisee's wrong teaching about the Kingdom
 - Jesus explained how they taught wrongly about who would enter the Kingdom and what God's standard for righteousness was
 - Jesus said the Pharisees were not the standard for righteousness as they claimed
 - Instead, Jesus said God is our standard for righteousness
 - We are to be as perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect
 - That's the standard for entering the Kingdom, which we meet only through faith in Jesus Christ
 - But that's also the standard for our conduct while we await the Kingdom
- That last point leads us into to Jesus' topic for Chapter 6, which is the proper understanding of righteous conduct
 - Just as the Pharisees taught a false notion of the Kingdom, they also modeled a false way of living righteously now
 - So Jesus warns His followers not to follow the Pharisees' example in practicing righteousness

Matt. 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

- Jesus says beware of how you practice your righteousness before men
 - By necessity, we are always "practicing" our righteousness before both God and men
 - Because generally speaking, someone is always watching us and certainly God sees everything
 - But Jesus says there is a right way and a wrong way to practice righteousness before men
 - And the wrong way to live out your Christian witness is to do so in order to be noticed by men
 - Put simply, it's wrong to pursue the approval of people, rather than to pursue the approval of God

- Pharisees sought the approval of men, not God
- And therefore, the reward they received was an earthly, manmade reward...
- In the way they practiced their righteousness, the Pharisees received things like political power, earthly wealth, worldly praise, *etc.*
- But in this chapter, Jesus begins by warning us not to follow their example
 - Instead, we need to live with eyes for eternity
 - We are to seek to please God rather than seeking to please ourselves or others
 - And we do this, knowing God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - When we live seeking to please God, we have opportunity to receive eternal rewards from the God Who sees
 - Things like Heavenly authority, Heavenly wealth, Heavenly praise – things that will come to us in the Kingdom
- Now back in Chapter 5, Jesus gave us six examples of how the Pharisees taught wrongly about righteousness from their oral law, the Mishnah
 - In each example, Jesus first quoted the Pharisees' wrong teaching and then proceeded to give the proper view of each issue
 - Now, again in this chapter, Jesus will follow the same pattern
 - He cites four examples where the Pharisees commonly sought the approval of men instead of God
 - These four issues hit upon the worst practices of the Pharisees
 - Specifically, they deal with giving to the poor, praying, fasting and wealth
 - In each of these areas, the Pharisees had made a mockery of serving God
 - In each case, they had constructed their practices to maximize public exposure for the purpose of courting the praises of men
 - And as He did in Chapter 5, Jesus follows His critique by explaining the correct perspective on giving, praying, fasting and wealth
 - So in this chapter, we learn more about the problems in Israel in Jesus' day
 - But more importantly, we'll understand how not to make the same mistakes
 - We'll gain a better appreciation for God's standard of service, for righteousness lived-out
 - Because just as God's standard for obtaining righteousness was much higher than the Pharisees', so is God's standard for living it out
 - Finally, in each example, Jesus' chief concern is ensuring that we preserve our opportunity for eternal reward
 - I taught briefly on the concept of reward last week
 - But we'll develop the concept more deeply as we move through these examples
 - But the main point is easy to grasp...we can either seek our reward here on earth or in Heaven

- But you can't have your cake and eat it too

Matt. 6:2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matt. 6:3 “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Matt. 6:4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- Jesus' first example is on the topic of giving to the poor, also known as giving alms
 - And as will be the case for each of the four examples, Jesus begins by denying the Pharisaic way of giving alms
 - Pharisees had contrived an outlandish and completely self-serving method of giving and encouraging others to give
 - To understand their method, we need to first understand the Jewish practice of giving in general
 - The Law of Moses stipulated that the Jews should give tithes for a variety of reasons
 - Jews were called to tithe for the care of the priests and the upkeep of the temple and to fund the annual feasts
 - And they were also told to take care of the poor
 - In general, they were to maintain a charitable attitude toward anyone in need

Deut. 15:7 “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother;

Deut. 15:8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

- But the Lord also commanded Israel to tithe into a general fund for the needs of the most vulnerable in Jewish society

Deut. 26:12 “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

- Prior to entering the Babylonian captivity, around 600 BC, the Jewish people didn't have synagogues or local places of worship
 - All tithing was directed toward the tabernacle/temple

- Nothing precluded an individual Jew from providing charity to a neighbor, and the Law demanded as much
- But all institutional giving went to the temple
 - So Jews physically brought their tithes to the temple and deposited them there
 - Ancient writers report there were 13 large chests in the temple compound to gather the money as it was collected
 - Near the end of Jesus' ministry, while He's in the temple with His disciples, Jesus makes the following observation

Luke 21:1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury.

Luke 21:2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins.

Luke 21:3 And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them;

Luke 21:4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."

- The treasury Jesus mentions in that passage are the 13 chests in the temple compound
- During Israel's captivity outside the land and away from the temple, the nation began the practice of meeting in local synagogues
 - Naturally, they began to bring their tithes to the synagogue too
 - Seventy years later, when they returned to the land under Zerubbabel, the Jewish people rebuilt the temple
 - And they returned to bringing tithes to the temple, as the Law required
 - But the Jews also continued to establish local synagogues, in addition to the temple
 - And as they did, they also continued directing some of their giving to the synagogue, instead of directly to the temple
 - So each synagogue became a small, local treasury of its own, with local rabbis competing against the temple for donations
 - Naturally, competition breeds innovation
 - So, the local rabbinical authorities began looking for ways to encourage giving to the local treasury
 - At some point, the Pharisees came upon the idea of announcing large donations at the synagogues with trumpets in the streets
 - The trumpeting would begin in the streets to draw a crowd
 - The Pharisees escorted the giver with his alms in a procession to the synagogue where the donation was made
 - This scheme was mutually beneficial for both the Pharisees and the giver
 - For the giver, the trumpets garnered the attention of the community, stroking their egos and puffing up their pride

- Someone once wrote that these donors weren't giving their money to the poor; they were buying attention for themselves
- But the scheme also benefitted the synagogue's rabbi
 - By lavishing public praise on givers, the Pharisees created a powerful incentive for others to give, as well
 - And their goal went beyond merely improving the balance sheet of the synagogue
 - Pharisees were corrupt men, lovers of money Jesus said, who had their hands in the cookie jar
 - So anything that brought more money into the treasury, also benefitted them personally
- In v.2, Jesus tells us what God thinks of people who give to the poor in this way
 - He calls them hypocrites
 - The Greek word for "hypocrite" comes from a root word, meaning to act on a stage
 - And that's a good way to understand hypocrisy...it's pretending to be something you're not
 - The giver's hypocrisy was in pretending to be a humble benefactor, seeking to improve the plight of the poor
 - When in reality, the giver had only selfish interests
 - First, he sought to improve his standing within the community by receiving maximum attention and credit for his donation
 - Secondly, he courted the approval of powerful rabbis, knowing it would pay dividends in the future when they needed a favor
 - And the Pharisees' hypocrisy was in pretending to encourage everyone to obey God's commandment to give to the poor
 - While in reality, they were manipulating people for their own enrichment
 - The trumpets didn't increase public concern for the poor
 - It just pressured everyone else to give more money, or else be shamed by the absence of trumpets
 - It was extortion
- Because of their hypocrisy, Jesus says each group had already received their reward in full
 - The reward Jesus was speaking about were the earthly gains each group obtained through their unholy alliance
 - The Pharisees received the money they so dearly desired
 - And the giver received the public attention they bought with their donation
 - Jesus says both groups should consider themselves fully rewarded for their behavior

- Because there will be no additional reward in Heaven
- Now, if we wanted to play devil's advocate for a moment, we might point out that a donation *was* made and the poor *did* benefit
 - So then, what's the big deal? Who cares about the method?
 - Well, think back to Chapter 5 for a moment
 - We learned that we don't have to commit murder in order to violate the sixth commandment
 - And we don't have to cheat on our spouse to violate the seventh commandment
 - If we so much as hate or lust in our hearts, then when we face the Lord on judgment day, we will be found equally guilty
- In other words, God cares about how we obey *both* the letter of His Law *and* the spirit of His Law
 - As the Pharisees proved, it's possible to keep the *letter* of the Law, yet still violate the *spirit* of the Law
 - And if we violate the spirit of God's Word, then any technical compliance with the letter of the Law counts for nothing
 - In fact, God cares so much about the spirit of the Law, that He is even willing to overlook violations in the letter of the Law when that violation is necessary to keep the spirit of the Law (*see First Samuel 21*)
- So now we're learning that the same principle applies to how we will be rewarded for our service to God
 - Even if we do the "right" thing, if we do it for the wrong reasons, we get no credit with God
 - God cares as much, or more, about our motives as He does about our actions
 - So in the case of givers, who made large donations to the poor to receive public praise, Jesus says they gained nothing with God
 - Why not?
 - Because in their hearts, they were motivated by selfish desires, rather than by a sincere desire to obey God's commands or to help the poor
 - So take note, God will not be fooled by our hypocrisy
 - He does not reward selfish motives, even when our actions comply with His commands
 - We can give all our money away, but if we do so for hypocritical reasons, we would be better to keep it for ourselves
 - Because Jesus says you will have no reward with God
- As I mentioned before, the reward Jesus is talking about here is the eternal reward believers receive in the Kingdom
 - And Jesus is going to talk a lot about reward in this chapter
 - He mentions the word seven times

- More importantly, Jesus explores the principle of reward in-depth as He moves through each of His examples
- Beginning with what we've learned in this first example
- Point 1: Reward in the Kingdom is based on more than our actions alone
 - Our reward is conditional on maintaining the proper spirit or heart motive behind everything we do in service to God
 - The Lord is ready and willing to reward a servant seeking to please Him, to obey with sincere intent
 - We put our reward at risk if we neglect to obey His commands
 - But we also put that reward at risk if we pursue our obedience hypocritically, as man-pleasers rather than God-pleasers
- Knowing this, we must guard our hearts against the temptation to receive our reward early – that is, on earth
 - As we go about serving Christ, we must continually inspect our motives
 - We have to be honest with ourselves about what we're doing and why we're doing it
 - So that when we recognize we're doing the right things for the wrong reasons, we can address it
- Obviously, we don't have people offering to blow trumpets when we make large donations to the Church
 - Speaking for myself, that's a good thing, because I wouldn't want to be responsible for deafening so many people <a joke>
 - But we still have temptations to turn service to God into a "win-win" for God and for us
 - God gets what He wants and we get what we want
 - But Jesus says when we fall for that trap, we're actually getting less in the long run
 - Because we're trading imperishable, eternal rewards for temporary, earthly rewards
- In the case of giving to the poor, Jesus says the proper heart attitude is to give in such a way that our right hand doesn't know what our left hand is doing
 - This is a wonderful turn of phrase that's made its way into the culture
 - You'll hear people using Jesus' words across a variety of circumstances always to mean operating in total anonymity
 - What Jesus means is that our heart's desire should be to keep our giving completely concealed from public view
 - In fact, our giving should be so secretive that even our left hand is unaware of what our right hand is doing
 - Practically speaking, that means we should not seek public attention for our giving in any way

- We shouldn't talk about what we give, don't ask for recognition, and don't even expect someone to notice
- And just because we don't have trumpets by the offering box, that doesn't mean we don't have our own ways to accomplish the same effect
- The modern Church has found its own ways to repeat the Pharisees' hypocrisy
- For example, have you ever seen plaques hanging inside a church listing donors for a previous fund drive?
 - Or a brochure for the church-building campaign thanking "partners" for their contributions?
 - Or maybe someone's name on a small plaque on the back of a pew?
 - Or someone's name on the side of the building?
- More commonly, we risk spoiling our eternal reward with an idle brag in everyday conversation
 - Someone coined a modern term for the person who works a bragging comment into normal conversation
 - We call that person a "humblebrag"
 - For example, a humblebrag says things like:
 - "I need a vacation...I'm exhausted from my 2 weeks in Hawaii"
 - "Have you ever noticed how much longer it takes for large checks to clear your bank account? I'm still waiting for last month's tithe check to clear my account"
 - One prominent Christian pastor once tweeted to his followers:
 - "I'm truly humbled you follow my tweets...God bless all 200,000 of you!"
 - What do you think his real purpose was?
 - So be mindful of your pride and ego
 - They are always poised and ready to ruin opportunities for eternal reward
 - That's especially true when we're in the presence of a humblebrag who's going on and on about their accomplishments
 - As they toot their own horn, the temptation rises in each of us to compete with them on their terms
- But don't compete for their attention...be content with God's pleasure
 - And the key to pleasing God is to maintain pure motives
 - And Jesus says the best way to keep your motives pure is to give anonymously
 - The moment your check hits the bottom of the offering box, or your mouse clicks the donate button, forget it ever happened
 - Say nothing more about it, expect nothing in return
 - Because if you give in that way, then your flesh won't have interest in the

transaction because there's no reward to be found

- When you give secretly, the only reason for giving will be a sincere interest in blessing others from a heart desiring to please God
- And Jesus says the Father sees both our giving and motives, and when we give expecting nothing here, He delights to reward us later
- On the other hand, when we give in ways that bring attention to our gift, we forfeit eternal reward because we claimed our reward early
- Notice the contrast between the end of v.2 and Jesus' statement in v.4
 - To give in such a way that you receive honor from men means taking your reward now *instead* of receiving it in Heaven
 - And the point isn't whether you actually receive what you want...the point is whether you expected such things
 - If you give expecting an earthly return, Jesus says you have forfeited heavenly return regardless of whether you get what you wanted
 - On the other hand, giving in secret, understanding you are forgoing any recognition now, leaves opportunity for the Lord to reward you later
- Finally, I would be wrong if I didn't mention that this principle also guides how church leaders encourage giving within the body
 - We must police our own motives too, or else we may follow in the footsteps of the Pharisees blowing trumpets, so to speak
 - Leadership responsibilities will require that some elders or other church members are privy to the giving of other church members
 - Nevertheless, everyone must conduct himself or herself appropriately, despite having this information
 - Specifically, we can never share that information with others, for doing so is gossip and indiscretion
 - But equally important, we must guard our own conduct so that we never treat someone differently based on their giving
 - For example, church leaders can never show special attention to those in the body who they know give at higher levels
 - That means no offers to join the elder board, no reserved seats or parking places, no special invitations to dinner or the ballgame
 - No insider information on major church decisions
 - And certainly no plaques and no names on the side of buildings
 - If we do those things, we make it harder for those under our care to maintain a proper perspective on giving
 - We encourage the kind of hypocrisy Jesus taught against here
 - And we foster a culture of favoritism in the Church, which James specifically condemns in his letter
 - Our goal as leaders in this church must be to maximize your potential eternal

reward

- Specifically, to ensure that everyone under our care enters the Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ
- That as the writer of Hebrews says,

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

- We don't want anyone in our midst to come up short of receiving God's grace
- But equally important, we care about maximizing the believer's reward
 - We don't want anyone under our care to arrive in the Kingdom on that future day having forfeited their eternal reward because we didn't prepare them for that moment
 - And preparing you means helping you gain eyes for eternity
 - First, teaching you Christ's commands in His Word, so you will understand His expectations, so you don't fall from ignorance
 - And secondly, encouraging you to obey all that He commanded so that you won't fall from disobedience
 - Again, as the writer of Hebrews put it

Heb. 12:12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

Heb. 12:13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Heb. 12:14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

- Today, we reach a passage in Matthew's Gospel that must be one of the best-known Scriptures in all the New Testament
 - In fact, it's my belief that though most Christians memorize little or no Scripture, almost everyone has memorized this passage
 - It's a prayer we call the "Lord's Prayer"
 - And the fact that so many of us can recite this prayer by heart is particularly ironic, given what Jesus teaches about it
 - But before we get to the prayer, let's remember the context of Jesus' teaching
 - And you probably won't find a passage in the New Testament where context is more crucial to a proper interpretation of the text
 - Because we lack an appreciation for the context, many people are doing the very *opposite* of what Jesus commanded here
- So let's begin with the big picture...Jesus is teaching on the side of a mountain near the Galilee
 - He's in the middle of a sermon to set the record straight on the Kingdom and righteousness
 - Chapter 5 taught us the proper biblical view of obtaining the Kingdom, that is, being righteous enough to enter Heaven
 - And now in Chapter 6, Jesus is explaining the correct way to live as a Kingdom-bound citizen while we await the Kingdom
 - Jesus summarizes the theme of Chapter 6 neatly in v.1

Matt. 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

- So Jesus' concern is that we live-out the righteousness we received by faith in the proper way, so we may receive a full reward in the Kingdom
 - We live-out righteousness as a testimony to a lost and dying world
 - But we must be careful not to do so in the hope of receiving the praises of that lost and dying world
 - Instead, we should practice righteousness to please the Lord alone
 - And Jesus said He will take note of our good works done with the proper heart and reward us in the Kingdom
- In both chapters, Jesus gives examples of how the Pharisees corrupted the proper understanding of these things
 - Here, we're looking at four examples that touch on basic areas of spiritual life: giving, prayer, fasting and wealth
 - These four also happened to be practices that the Pharisees had especially perverted for selfish purposes

- Last week, we looked at Jesus' first example of giving to the poor, and the issue came down to the heart of the giver
- We learned that if we go about our giving, so as to receive earthly gain in one form or another, then Jesus says we are hypocrites
 - And God does not reward hypocrisy
 - Instead, Jesus said we should guard our hearts from pride and ego by keeping all our giving secretive
 - And if we give in that way, then we preserve our opportunity for the Lord to reward us in the Kingdom
- Once again, the issue for God was the state of our *heart* as we give, not merely *did* we give
 - That's the general context for this entire chapter
 - What is our heart's attitude as we conduct ourselves in these four areas of spiritual life?
 - We can go through the motions and for appearances' sake
 - And perhaps we'll receive praise from people who observe us and think we're so pious and holy
 - But God knows our heart and will not reward a false heart
- So now, understanding that context, let's look at Jesus' second example on prayer

Matt. 6:5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matt. 6:6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Matt. 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Matt. 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

- Jesus says when we pray, there is a right way and a wrong way to do it
 - But first, take a moment to notice the preposition Jesus uses in v.7
 - He doesn't say *if* you pray; He says *when* you pray
 - I could preach for a while on the necessity of regular prayer
 - In fact, I could preach for weeks on this topic
 - But, as I said last week on the topic of giving, I'm constrained by this text
 - Jesus raises these issues to address a very specific point

- And I'm here to teach you Jesus' point, not to substitute my own point
- So in the matter of prayer, I'm going to focus on what Jesus wants to say on the matter
 - And His point is on the heart of the one praying
 - Are we praying merely to impress other people, or are we praying to communicate with our Father in Heaven?
 - One way is wrong and gains nothing from God, while the other way is correct and gives opportunity to hear from God
- In v.7, Jesus says the wrong way to pray invariably involves using meaningless repetition of words
 - Jesus says do not engage in such ritualistic, meaningless repetition...
 - Do not recite the same words over and over again
 - Jesus says that is *not* prayer at all
 - It's mantra, a chant
 - The word in Greek translated as "meaningless repetition" in our Bibles is actually the word for "babbling" or "stammering"
 - It refers to the sound that an 18-month old baby makes as it babbles
 - So when we revert to mindless repetition of words, that's how God hears us: like a parent listening to a babbling infant
 - It's meaningless and it's useless...and it's not prayer
- Jesus dismisses such tactics as praying the way Gentiles pray, which was a derogatory statement
 - To understand what Jesus is saying, you have to remember that Jesus was a Jew speaking to a Jewish crowd
 - And at this point in history, only the Jewish people had received the revelation of the true God, Jehovah
 - The Gospel hadn't yet gone out to the world, so only the Jewish people had a relationship with God
 - So to a Jew, the phrase "to pray like a Gentile" meant to pray as an unbeliever, as someone who doesn't know the true God
 - And that's what Jesus means...God's children should not approach our Father in Heaven in prayer as if we don't know Him
 - Using meaningless repetition and calling it "prayer" is approaching God the way the unsaved try to find God
 - Buddhists chant, Catholics recite the rosary, Jews recite daily prayers, and many unsaved in Protestant churches recite liturgy
 - And in all cases, the use of meaningless repetition in place of true prayer is the mark of unbelief, Jesus says
 - Understanding this connection between a lack of saving faith and a reliance on

mantra, is key to understanding the true nature of prayer

- Prayer is, by definition, a form of communication with God, a conversation that we initiate with the Creator of the Universe
- It's a conversation that comes from our heart, and like all communication, it has a sender, receiver and a message
- Obviously, the believer is the sender and the message is the thoughts of our heart
- It's personal and specific, and it's directed to an audience we know intimately, based on faith in Jesus Christ
- But those who have never placed their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ don't have a relationship with the Father
 - Without faith in Jesus, they have no intercessor before the Father, no High Priest
 - Consequently, they are like the demons, James says, knowing *about* God yet not *knowing* God
 - In fact, because they lack an intercessor, the Bible says, God does not even hear the "prayers" of unbelievers
 - Spiritually speaking, unbelievers are grasping in the dark, operating without wisdom or understanding, trying to find a God they don't know
 - And therefore they have no choice but to resort to babbling, to mindless repetition
 - It's what babies do who have not yet learned to communicate with the parents
 - And it's what unbelievers do because they have not been given a spiritual relationship to communicate with God
 - At the end of v.7, Jesus explains what the unbeliever hopes to achieve from this behavior
 - They hope to make up for, in *quantity*, what they lack in *quality*
 - By repeating words over and over, they expect to impress God with their persistence and devotion to the task
 - They aren't speaking *with* God, they're speaking *at* God
 - It's actually a form of superstitious behavior
 - They hope God will reward them for their personal sacrifice of time and effort
 - But God doesn't need anything we have to offer – He owns the world – He is not impressed by Human effort
 - It's like trying to open a locked door by trying different keys until we find the one that fits the lock
 - But Jesus says God isn't impressed with their devotion to chanting a mantra
 - To God, their repetition is merely the sound of a baby babbling
- Remember, the Scriptures say that by the blood of Christ, we may approach God boldly with our petitions

- This is a high honor and an incredible privilege that Jesus died to make possible
 - So, if we take that special opportunity and toss it aside in exchange for mindless chanting, we're trampling the grace of God
 - And we're acting like unbelievers, instead of like children of God
- This was the way Pharisees instructed Israel to practice prayer, but historically, Judaism never relied on prepared, scripted memories for prayer
 - From the beginning, all Jewish prayer was supposed to be extemporaneous
 - We can see examples of Old Testament characters, like Moses or David or Nehemiah, praying without a script
 - When these men prayed, they simply cried out to God from their hearts, as God intended
- Yet by the time of Jesus, the unbelieving Pharisees had instituted repetitious prayer, because that's all they knew of God
 - They prescribed prayer books that dictated every prayer a Jew could give under every circumstance
 - Jews had daily prayer books, Sabbath prayer books, prayer books for special holy days, such as Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, *etc.*
 - Within a few centuries, the Pharisees had transformed Jewish prayer to mimic the prayers of unbelieving Gentiles, as Jesus said
 - Mindless repetition took the place of meaningful conversation
- So Jesus tells us not to pray in this way, because it's a hypocritical way to pray
 - When we turn off our brain and revert to mindless repetition, we're merely pretending to communicate with God, without actually doing it
 - We're going through the motions, acting pious and godly, putting on a show for others or for ourselves
 - Yet in reality, we're checked-out of the process
 - Because repeating a mantra doesn't engage the heart or mind in a true conversation with God
 - On the contrary, it puts our spirit to sleep and gives opportunity for the enemy to influence our thoughts
 - Which is why chanting and similar forms of meditation are such a big part of Eastern mysticism, and are so dangerous for believers
 - We don't have to look very hard today to find true Christians making this mistake
 - In many churches on Sunday, congregations are still taught to recite prepared prayers together each week
 - And many Christian families recite the same meaningless prayer over dinner each night
 - And Christian parents teach their children to chant the same mantra every night before bed

- A recent book taught Christians that a prayer by an obscure Old Testament figure was the key to unlocking God's blessing
 - The book suggested that we only needed to repeat that same prayer to get what we desire from God
 - It made God look like a genie, and it was complete nonsense and a direct contradiction of Jesus' instructions here
- Prayer is supposed to be a conversation with God, and mantra isn't the same as conversation
 - If you doubt me, then try this experiment at home
 - Every time you want something from your spouse, just repeat the same statement over and over again until you get it
 - Some wives in the room are probably saying, "I've tried that Steve, and it didn't work."
 - And some of the parents in the room are probably thinking that's exactly what my kids try to do to me all the time
 - Exactly! And when they do that to you, how does that make you feel?
 - Does it feel like they are engaging in a conversation?
 - Does it feel like they are building a relationship with you?
 - Or does it feel like an annoying attempt to manipulate you?
 - Now, if instead of trying to wear you down with meaningless repetition, what if your child simply had a conversation with you?
 - They began by making a sincere, well-considered request?
 - Then depending on your response, your child engaged in a respectful exchange, seeking a compromise
 - Perhaps they suggest other options or make rational appeals?
 - Wouldn't you be delighted?
 - Or perhaps you might say, "Who are you and what did you do with my child?"
 - Now consider this...in most cases, you probably knew what your children wanted, even before they started their begging
 - And you probably also knew what your answer would be before you heard their request
 - Nevertheless, you still would have been pleased if the child had engaged you in a meaningful conversation on the issue, right?
 - In that situation, the value of the exchange wasn't in deciding the issue, since you already had a decision in mind
 - The value would have been in building a better relationship with them, teaching them to appreciate your wisdom in the matter
- That's exactly how the Father uses prayer for our sake
 - The purpose in prayer is for us to engage in a meaningful conversation with our

Creator

- The point of that conversation is not to wear God down with our mindless repetition
- God already has all knowledge and wisdom and perfection
- By comparison, we know nothing, understand nothing and are imperfect in everything we do
- Furthermore, Jesus says in v.8, that the Father already knows what you need before you ask
- So obviously, the more time we spend in communication with God, the better things will be for us
 - So we shouldn't waste the opportunity by babbling like an infant
 - Incessant repetition does nothing to change God's mind...we just miss opportunity to learn from Him
- So knowing how not to pray, Jesus then gives us the right way to approach our conversation with God

Matt. 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way:

**'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.**

Matt. 6:10 'Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.**

Matt. 6:11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

Matt. 6:12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matt. 6:13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

- Before we look at the content of Jesus' prayer, let's acknowledge that this prayer has led to perhaps the greatest irony in all the Bible
 - An irony is a state of affairs that goes deliberately contrary to what one expects
 - And the irony here, is that many Christians use this prayer in a way that is deliberately contrary to what Jesus expected
 - Jesus just finished teaching the Church not to engage in repetitious prayer
 - And yet, what prayer do Christians mindlessly repeat more than perhaps any other? The "Our Father" prayer
 - People commonly chant verses 9-13 in unison, even though Jesus said in v.7, don't use repetition
 - You can't make this stuff up
 - So knowing that Jesus did *not* want us to recite this prayer mindlessly, why *did* He give it to us?

- Because every good conversation requires sensible structure and logic
- So our prayers aren't to be repetitive, but they *are* supposed to be planned and thoughtfully constructed
- Notice in v.9, Jesus says pray in this *way*
 - He didn't say pray this prayer...which means He wasn't asking us to pray these words verbatim
 - Now, because this model is Scripture, we can certainly read it verbatim and even "pray" it as we might pray any Scripture, like Psalms
- But when we engage in personal prayer with the Father, we should not recite these words assuming they have magical properties
 - Praying these words verbatim actually displays a lack of understanding of the context of Jesus' words, not an appreciation for them
 - Instead, we are to pray according to this *format*
- So let's look at the structure of this prayer
 - Jesus' example has six parts, and each part should be present in our prayers
 - We don't necessarily have to cover all six parts in every moment of prayer
 - But in general, our prayer life should touch upon these areas, at least periodically
 - And the first part is the destination for our prayers, and Jesus says in v.9, that our prayers should be directed to the Father Who is in Heaven
 - The Person of God Who receives prayer is the Father – not Jesus, not the Holy Spirit, but the Father
 - Jesus and the Holy Spirit play roles in prayer, of course
 - Jesus is our High Priest, Who intercedes on our behalf with the Father, and by His blood, our petitions may come before a holy God
 - And the Holy Spirit is our Teacher, Who guides us in our prayer life, instructing us on when and how to pray
 - But the audience for our prayers is always the Father
 - So if in the past, you've prayed to Jesus – or anyone or anything else – then you now understand that was incorrect
 - Direct your prayers to the Father only, and as you do, take note that Jesus says He is your Father in Heaven
 - By your faith in Jesus, the Bible says you have been adopted into the family of God, made a fellow heir with Christ and have peace with the Father
 - So as you pray, recognize you are speaking to a Heavenly Father Who cares for you, Who has adopted you and wants the best for you
- Secondly, Jesus says at the end of v.9, that we should declare, "hallowed be your name"
 - The word "hallowed" means "sanctified", set apart for holiness
 - So we're saying God alone is holy, set apart from the rest of Creation

- Unique and unequalled in all time and space
- Nothing can compare to the Creator
- Jesus' point is that our prayer life should include time glorifying and praising the Father for Who He is and what He has done for you in Christ
 - We have the opportunity to approach Him boldly, but we should never take that for granted
 - Devote some of your prayer time to simply acknowledging God for Who He is
 - Doing so will set your heart in the right place for the rest of your prayer
 - Think of it as a private time of worship
- Thirdly, Jesus says in v.10, we should be Kingdom-minded in our prayers
 - Jesus gives us the example of praying for the arrival of the Kingdom and the realization of God's will being done on earth one day
 - This is such great insight for your prayer life, and I hope you will embrace it
 - Jesus is saying we need to have eyes for eternity in our prayers
 - Yes, our lives on earth will give us ample material to pray about
 - But don't forget that this world and all its problems are passing away
 - And one day, Jesus will return and His Kingdom will be set up on earth
 - And when that happens, we will be in new, eternal bodies that will never die, serving Christ without sin or shame
 - That is the true life we are promised, and it's the one that will last for an eternity
 - Meanwhile, for a short time, we endure this miserable, sinful world and our brief life in it
 - Don't spend all your time praying about the fleeting things of this world
 - Make sure you spend some time in prayer about the eternal things to come
 - Pray for a good reward and the strength to earn it while it's available
 - Pray for a good position in Christ's Government, which depends on a good testimony
 - Most of all, pray in excitement and expectation for the chance to see a world ruled in perfection and justice by our King Jesus
- Fourthly, Jesus says in v.11, to pray for your daily bread, which means to pray for your personal needs
 - Remember this is a model, not a prescription, so we aren't all necessarily going to pray for bread literally
 - Our daily needs vary, and so will our prayers
 - But Jesus' point is that prayer for daily needs is both expected and appropriate for the believer
 - So whether that's a financial need, a health need, a relationship need, or whatever, bring them before the Lord

- But notice where this request falls in the priority of Jesus' example
 - It comes after praising God's goodness and sovereignty
 - And it comes after turning your attention to Kingdom matters, to things eternal
- And that's a healthy way to approach your prayer life...putting those things above your personal needs
 - If your prayer life is dominated by personal concerns, then it probably means your eyes are directed downward too much
 - There will always be problems in your life of one kind or another, but we can't allow the needs of this life to obscure our hope for what's coming
 - We must reverse that perspective...living with eyes for eternity, knowing that in this world we will have tribulation, but we've overcome the world
- Fifthly, Jesus says make room in your prayer life for forgiveness, both for yourself and for others
 - Jesus is coming back to this particular issue after He finishes His model of prayer in vs. 14-15
 - So rather than spending much time on this particular topic now, I'm going to put it off until we cover it next week
 - For now, it's enough to say that we should spend some time confessing our sins to the Lord and seeking His forgiveness
 - Likewise, we should spend time resolving our resentment and anger toward others who have hurt us
 - Ask the Lord to help us come to resolution with others' offenses against us, so that we can truly let them go and find forgiveness for others
 - As we'll learn next time, these two things are closely linked, spiritually speaking
- Finally, Jesus says our prayers should include a request for protection from spiritual warfare
 - Satan is real and so are the demonic angels that followed him in rebellion against the Father
 - They are present in the world, operating continuously and aware of who their enemies are
 - As born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we are enemies of the enemy and his forces
 - And therefore, we are going to experience their attacks from time to time – even more so, as we become more effective witnesses for Jesus
 - We need prayer-cover to withstand their attacks
 - We need to pray that the Lord would protect us from falling for the schemes of the enemy
 - The wording of v.13 is unfortunate in the English translation
 - It makes it sound as if there is possibility the Father may lead us to be tempted by Satan, which is never true

- But in the original Greek, Jesus simply meant, lead us away from the enemy's temptations
- So we should pray that as the enemy schemes to tempt our flesh to do the wrong thing, that the Lord would rescue us from ourselves
- So in summary, we don't want to practice our prayer life in a hypocritical way, which is praying like those who don't have a relationship with God
 - Instead, approach the Father boldly, taking full advantage of what He has made available to us through Christ, and engage Him in a meaningful conversation
 - In that conversation, structure your prayer to include the six major areas Jesus gave us in His example
 - Because Jesus says that what pleases the Father and that's where we have a great opportunity for reward
 - But don't recite the words Jesus gave
 - Fill in the details with your own words, your own needs, your own desires, from your own heart
 - And consider that your eternal rewards depend, to some degree, upon your prayer life – on whether you pray, whether you pray hypocritically, on what content you put before God, and the nature of your heart in prayer
 - And as you do, anticipate God's response...because He will be speaking to you too

- Let's return to our study of Matthew 6 and to Jesus' explanation of how to live-out our righteousness
 - Jesus focuses His teaching on four examples of religious life, so He can contrast hypocritical piety with genuine obedience to God
 - His four examples are giving, prayer, fasting, and wealth
 - When we practice these things from a hypocritical heart, we practice these things to be noticed by other people
 - We do so, hoping to receive their praises
 - In such cases, Jesus says these men have already received their reward
 - But when we practice these things with a true heart, we do so quietly, secretly seeking to impress our Father in Heaven
 - And our Father in Heaven will see our obedience
 - And He will assign us eternal, Heavenly reward in a day to come
 - As Paul says

1 Cor. 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

- In the end, our praise will come from God, and that praise is based on the motives of our hearts, not merely on our actions
- Last week, at the end of our teaching on prayer, we studied through the model Jesus gave us, which we call the "Our Father" prayer
 - As we learned last week, Jesus didn't want us to repeat this prayer in some mindless fashion
 - He wanted us to pray to the Father in our words, but structure our conversation with the components He gave us
 - So our prayers are addressed to the Father, they include adoration and praise of God, they are Kingdom-minded
 - They lift up our needs before Him on a daily basis and seek relief from temptation
 - But near the end of Jesus' model, He says our prayers should include time seeking the Lord's forgiveness for our sins, as we forgive others
 - I didn't cover that part last week, because it's a complicated issue and Jesus spends additional time on it, following the prayer
 - So today, we take time to understand the need to seek forgiveness and what that means
 - Following that, we'll take a brief look at Jesus' third example of fasting

- Let's jump back into the middle of the prayer, starting at v.11

Matt. 6:11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

Matt. 6:12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matt. 6:13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

Matt. 6:14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Matt. 6:15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

- In v.12, Jesus said we are to ask the Lord for forgiveness of our debts
 - Perhaps you've heard this part phrased as "forgive us our sins" or "our transgressions"
 - The actual Greek word in the text, is the word for "debt"; nevertheless, the other versions are also accurate
 - The Jewish people used the word "debt" as a euphemism for sin, because they recognized that sin was a debt before God
 - And sooner or later, someone must pay our sin debt
 - And you can either pay it yourself – which is eternal separation from God – or you can accept Christ's death on the cross as the payment acceptable to God
 - So Jesus says we should ask the Father for forgiveness for our sins in our prayer time
 - And upon hearing this, many Christians become confused
 - Because we know that the Bible teaches that as we came to faith in Jesus Christ, we were forgiven of our debts once and for all

1 Pet. 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

- Jesus' death on the cross was a payment, a perfect offering made for our sake to cover our sin debt before God
- And by His perfect life, we are credited with the perfection required to enter Heaven
- As the Bible says:

Heb. 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Heb. 10:15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

Heb. 10:16 “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM
AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD:

**I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART,
AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,”**

He then says,

Heb. 10:17 “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS
I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”

Heb. 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

2 Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- So by that offering on the cross, Jesus perfected us forever, and therefore Jesus paid our debt in full...we have complete, eternal forgiveness from the Father
 - Yet Jesus tell us in Matthew 6:12, to continually seek the Father’s forgiveness in our prayers
 - Which leads some to wonder if the forgiveness we received when we believed was temporary?
 - Or perhaps God’s forgiveness wasn’t sufficient to cover all our sins
 - This leads to bad theology, which steals the joy of the Gospel
 - Well, for any who might share those concerns, let me put them to rest
 - The Bible is abundantly clear that by our faith in Jesus, we are set free forever from the penalty of sin

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

John 8:35 “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.

John 8:36 “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

- When the Son of God sets us free from slavery to sin, truly we are free indeed, Jesus says
- His grace is sufficient and His forgiveness complete
- And if you fear you are no longer worthy of receiving His grace, please remember that God’s mercy was always unmerited
 - You were just as unworthy to receive His mercy when you first came to faith as you are now
 - That fact won’t change, no matter how much sinned yesterday or how much you sin today or tomorrow

- You weren't saved because you did good things, and you won't be unsaved because you do bad things – it has nothing to do with what you do
- You are saved by faith alone – it's not a works-based message
- It also doesn't matter if you aren't as godly as someone else in the Church
 - Because none of us were good enough to be saved, which is why we all needed God's grace and Christ's perfection
 - Two Christians arguing over who was more worthy of God's grace is like two passengers sitting in deck chairs on the Titanic arguing over who has the better view...
 - It's a pointless argument, because you both needed to be rescued
- God rescued us by His grace while we were still His enemy, and God determined to forgive us in Christ before we even understood the need for that forgiveness
 - God is way ahead of us, so we can't sin our way out of His love
 - And don't let the enemy deceive you by thinking that God has turned His back on you – he knows that he has lost you in the eternal, because you are saved
 - But he can deceive you into diminishing your witness and your reward – don't let him do it
 - As Paul says so powerfully in Romans

Rom. 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, Rom. 8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Therefore, knowing we have been utterly washed clean by the blood of Christ and eternally forgiven of our debt, why must we seek forgiveness from God?
 - First, you need to understand that the Bible speaks of two types of forgiveness from God
 - First, there is the forgiveness for sins that is Heavenly and eternal
 - That is the forgiveness we received when we placed our faith in Jesus Christ
 - At that moment, the Bible says we were born-again by the Spirit and made an adopted child of God
 - Our spirit was reborn in the image of Christ, so our spirit is like Christ's spirit, no longer under condemnation and no longer a slave to sin
 - Our new spirit remains with us forever, which is why Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of Christ
 - Once we shed this old, dying, sinful body, our perfect spirit will be received by Christ
 - That's why Jesus can assure us that He loses none of those the Father gives Him

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 6:39 “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:40 “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

- This kind of forgiveness is how we receive the promise of eternal life; therefore, we call this type of forgiveness eternal, Heavenly forgiveness
 - It's eternal, because it cannot be taken away from us
 - And it's Heavenly, because it assures us that we will be received into God's presence in Heaven when we die
 - That's the forgiveness every believer has from the moment they place their trust in Jesus Christ
 - We can never be condemned by God ever again because He has already paid for our sins on the cross...our Heavenly debt has been paid
- But the Bible also talks about another kind of forgiveness, one that's temporal and earthly
 - Even though we have received a new, perfect spirit, that new spirit still inhabits a sinful body ravaged by sin
 - Our sinful flesh constantly pulls us back into disobedient thoughts and actions, even as our spirit wants to obey God
 - This is a war within ourselves, and in this war, we will experience great victories and suffer setbacks
 - Nevertheless, our goal as Christians is to mature in our walk so that we see our victories becoming sustained and more triumphant
 - And our losses becoming infrequent and less severe
 - So sin is inevitable in the life of a believer, and we know that even if we sin, our eternal destiny remains unchanged
 - But that doesn't mean there aren't consequences for continuing in sin
 - Sin damages our relationships with other people and with God
 - In the case of our earthly relationships, sin produces hurt, anger, fear, jealousy, mistrust and resentment, driving a wedge between us and others
 - And in our fellowship with God, sin pulls us away from an abiding walk with Christ
 - And left unchecked, unrepentant sin may provoke the Lord to bring discipline against us
 - We're talking about earthly and temporal consequences of sin
 - They are earthly, because their impact is limited to our life on earth...our

eternal salvation is never at risk

- And these consequences are temporal, because they can only last until we die and leave this body
- Once we enter the Kingdom in our glorified sinless body, we will no longer suffer the consequences of our earthly mistakes
- But just because the consequences of our sin are limited to the here and now, don't assume they aren't worthy of your concern
 - When you sin, you are breaking fellowship with God, which means you set aside the counsel of the Holy Spirit, as you follow your flesh instead
 - It's a foolish tradeoff
 - It's like ignoring the counsel of your loving parents to heed the advice of your local drug dealer
 - Similarly, when we decide to sin, we're turning away from the Spirit's counsel to heed the counsel of the enemy or the world or our own flesh
 - That's a recipe for disaster, because it usually sets in motion a set of events that may bring us to ruin
 - Sooner or later, we're likely to find ourselves in difficult, painful circumstances of our own making
 - Circumstances we could have avoided, had we listened to wiser counsel that had our best interests at heart
 - It's not hard to find believers in court, in prison, in bankruptcy, in emergency rooms, out of work, out of friends, out of options...
 - Suffering in a variety of ways, because they decided to persist in sin or because others in their life sinned against them
 - These are the natural consequences of sin
- And beyond all this, the Bible also says a believer engaged in unrepentant sin should expect to receive discipline from the Lord

Heb. 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Heb. 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Heb. 12:9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

Heb. 12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

Heb. 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- Our Father in Heaven may bring specific consequences against us to teach us not to sin in the future
 - These consequences are not punishment *per se*, but rather, they are a form of instruction
 - Notice the writer says the Lord's discipline will be unpleasant in the moment, but in time, it teaches us to live righteously
 - It's not a pleasant thing, so it may feel like punishment, but it's designed to get our attention and convince us to stop sinning
 - That's what a loving Father does for His children...He uses every tool at His disposal to encourage us to live a godly life
- So when believers sin, we place ourselves in jeopardy of both the natural consequences of sin, as well as God's discipline
 - But here's where God's grace and mercy comes back into the picture
 - God's mercy and grace isn't limited to eternal, Heavenly forgiveness
- The Bible says that the Lord is also willing to grant us forgiveness from the earthly, temporal effects of our sin
 - John tells us this in his first letter

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- John is referring to a believer confessing sin to the Lord to receive relief from the earthly, temporal consequences of that sin
- That's the type of forgiveness Jesus was describing in His model of prayer
 - That during prayer, we should confess our offenses, seeking the Father's forgiveness so that we might not suffer the consequences here and now
 - We know that by the blood of Christ, we will not suffer the eternal consequences of our sin
 - And now, we learn that because we are loved in Christ, the Father is also willing to forgive the earthly, temporal consequences of our sin...if only we would ask Him
 - As we seek His forgiveness, John says the Father is both faithful and just to forgive us
 - He is faithful in forgiving us, because the Lord is patient and kind with His children
 - As the parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates, the Father delights in welcoming back his wayward children
 - He waits patiently, watching for us to return and, spiritually-speaking, runs to greet us as we come back in repentance
 - We need not worry whether the Father will receive us...the Bible says He is

faithful to do so because of Christ

- And when the Father forgives us in this way, He is also being just, John says
 - By the blood of Christ, our sin debt has been paid, having been nailed to the cross
 - Which means the Father is just in overlooking our sin and removing the consequences every time He does so
 - Because those consequences ultimately fell on Christ instead
- So we can be sure that when we truly repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness, we will receive it
 - Which means the Father withholds His discipline, granting us mercy instead
 - And it may also result in God's limiting or removing altogether the natural consequences of our sin
 - The Bible never guarantees that He will remove all consequences, and life teaches us that God doesn't choose to do that in every case
 - But I believe He delights to surprise us with His kindness by lessening those consequences as we take steps of repentance
- But there is another side to this second type of forgiveness...one that we must understand, if we are to gain the benefit of what Jesus is offering
 - God's willingness to forgive our sin is connected to our willingness to forgive those who have acted against us
 - Notice in v.12, Jesus says we should pray that God forgive us *as* we forgive others
 - The connecting word "as" could be translated "to the degree"
 - So the Father's willingness to grant us mercy for our sin, is dependent on our willingness to grant mercy to others when they sin against us
 - Jesus re-emphasizes this connection in vs.14-15
 - He says if you are willing to forgive, you will be forgiven
 - If you are not willing to forgive, you will not be forgiven
 - Once again, the context here is earthly, temporal forgiveness, not eternal
 - We know this is true, because obviously, we do not possess power over someone's eternal destiny
 - When I fail to forgive someone else, I'm not keeping them from Heaven
 - Furthermore, if salvation depended on a willingness to forgive others, Jesus would be teaching a works-based Gospel
 - That tells us that Jesus must be speaking about the earthly, temporal type of forgiveness, both in our forgiving of others and God forgiving us
- Essentially, Jesus is asking why should we expect God to grant us more mercy than we're willing to grant someone else?
 - Jesus explains it this way in Luke's Gospel

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

- Jesus says that the measure we use in judging (or forgiving) others will be the Father’s measure when He forgives us
- If we are unkind and unmerciful, we demonstrate a hard heart, which is itself a sin
- And therefore, if we condemn others to suffer the consequences of their mistakes against us, the Father will likewise allow us to suffer the consequences of our sin
- On the other hand, if we are forgiving of others, we give opportunity for the Father to demonstrate mercy to us also
- Once again, we’re talking only about forgiveness in an earthly, temporary sense from the consequences of sin here and now
- So knowing this, let’s make sure our prayer life includes time to confess sin
 - We can’t benefit from pretending our sin doesn’t exist, as the Pharisees did
 - We will experience even more of God’s love and mercy as we confess, repent and humble ourselves, seeking His forgiveness
 - And we will demonstrate even more of His love to others when we extend that same mercy to others who have hurt us
 - Jesus says it’s in your own best interest to be forgiving in this way
- Now at this point, I need to state the obvious: it’s better not to sin in the first place
 - As Samuel said:

1 Sam. 15:22 Samuel said,

“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices

As in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

And to heed than the fat of rams

- It’s better to obey than to sin and ask for God’s forgiveness
- And one of the ways we can discipline our sinful flesh, keeping it from leading us into harm’s way, is to starve it a little
- Both literally and metaphorically
- I’m talking about Jesus’ third example of fasting, which we are going to cover briefly tonight

Matt. 6:16 “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do,

for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matt. 6:17 “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face

Matt. 6:18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- The basic outline of Jesus’ third example follows closely with the first two examples, which means we can cover it fairly quickly
 - First, we see Jesus highlighting the hypocritical ways the Pharisees practiced fasting
 - Pharisees typically practiced fasting several times each week as a regular routine
 - As we discussed in an early lesson on Jesus’ fast in the wilderness, Jews fasted either by eating and drinking nothing or by only drinking water
 - Obviously, such a fast tended to leave the person feeling faint and weak
 - The Pharisees wanted attention and approval for their fasting discipline
 - So they made a point of showing their discomfort on their faces
 - Jesus says they put on a gloomy face, which means they showed their discomfort on their face
 - And they intentionally neglected their appearance, so that it was obvious they were engaged in a fast
 - This is a hypocritical way of fasting, because the point of the exercise became impressing men, not obeying God
 - And so Jesus says their reward would be limited to peoples’ praises
 - So how should we fast? Jesus says do it just as you pray and give
 - We should fast in secret and for the praises of God alone
 - Don’t let it show, just go about your normal routine
 - But the Father in Heaven sees your devotion and He will reward you in the Kingdom
- In my experience, not many Christians practice religious fasting, and though the New Testament doesn’t require it, it should be a part of our spiritual walk
 - Perhaps the reason it has fallen out of practice is because we lack an appreciation for what it accomplishes spiritually
 - The principle purpose in denying our body nourishment is to gain practical experience in disciplining the desires of the flesh
 - The Bible says sin dwells in your body, in your flesh, and your sinful flesh exerts an influence on your spirit, on your will
 - Your flesh has a mind of its own, and it’s determined to get its way in opposition to the Spirit’s desires
 - Therefore, if we’re going to walk according to the Spirit, we must learn to actively

resist our flesh's desires

- Resisting the flesh requires strength, spiritually-speaking, and like any "muscle", you must develop that strength by repetition
- So we must practice disciplining our flesh, resisting its desires while attending to our spirit, so that we might become stronger in this battle
- Fasting creates the circumstances for your spirit to practice struggling against your flesh in a "safe" way
 - Your spirit must resist your flesh's desire to eat
 - This struggle creates opportunity for you to learn how strong your flesh's desires can be, and how hard it can be to deny it
 - Fasting is a safe way to practice denying the flesh, because even if you fail, you won't be sinning, since eating is not a sin
- Nevertheless, fasting regularly builds spiritual strength you can put to use in other circumstances
 - As you gain control over your body's desire for food, you'll become better at controlling its lustful desire for other, more dangerous desires
 - And that's just one benefit from fasting
 - Others include humbling us as we witness our flesh's strength, bringing our thoughts back to the Lord, reducing our attachment to this world, among others
 - To see all seven reasons, read the article on our website about fasting ([Why do believers fast?](#))
- So what have we learned today? First, as we pray, we are to seek forgiveness from the Father
 - If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then by your faith, you have received eternal, Heavenly forgiveness for your sins
 - Christ has paid your debt once and for all and you have received the promise of eternal life
 - No amount of sin can change that outcome, because Christ's death paid the price for all of it
 - Now if you have never experienced this kind of forgiveness, I urge you to humble yourself tonight and accept God's free gift of eternal life
 - On the other hand, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then Jesus says we should continue to seek for God's earthly, temporal forgiveness
 - Your Father in Heaven is merciful and loving and wants to preserve you, to some degree, from the consequences of your sin
 - He calls us to repent and confess our sins to Him in prayer
 - And if we do, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from future unrighteousness
 - Finally, if you're struggling to walk in the Spirit and to escape the power of sin in

your life, Jesus reminds us to strengthen our spiritual resolve

- Practice fasting regularly to learn how to gain control over your flesh's desires
- As you learn to control your body's desire for food, watch and see how that spiritual strength transfers over to other battles
- But as you practice these things, do it in secret as a service to God, seeking only for His approval
- And as you do, you will receive not only His grace and mercy and forgiveness, but also rewards in the Kingdom
- Alleluia and praise the Lord!

- Today, we reach the last of Jesus' four examples of how we should practice our righteousness before men
 - Jesus gave us these examples to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and to encourage us to live differently
 - His first example was giving to the poor, and Jesus said don't give to be noticed by others, but instead, give in secret
 - His second example was praying, and Jesus said don't pray using repetitious mantra, but instead, engage in meaningful conversation with God
 - Because when we give to be noticed, or pray using meaningless repetition, we're hypocrites because we pretend to be serving God, when in reality, we're serving our own interests
 - And last week, we looked at Jesus' third example of fasting
 - Jesus said that when we fast, if we exaggerate our suffering so that others witness our self-denial and admire us for it, then we're being hypocrites again
 - That kind of hypocritical piety will gain us no reward apart from those earthly admirers, Jesus says
 - Instead, Jesus commanded us to fast in secret, so that only our Father in Heaven may know of our sacrifice and reward us
- Last week, we also looked at Jesus' instructions on forgiveness
 - He said confess our sin to the Father, seeking His forgiveness, He will be faithful and just to forgive us in an earthly, temporal sense
 - He is prepared to spare us from some or all of the earthly consequences of our mistakes
 - And He may withhold His discipline from us as well
 - Furthermore, He will forgive us in this way, to the degree we are willing to forgive others around us
 - As I taught on this principle last week, I quoted from a passage in the Gospel of Luke
 - And in this well-known passage, Jesus says that God's willingness to extend us forgiveness is overflowing

Luke 6:36 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

- Jesus says don't judge others (that is, don't hold others' sins against them)...pardon them for their mistakes
- And if we are willing to pardon others, then the Father will be willing to pardon us for our

mistakes here and now

- In fact, Jesus says in v.38, that they will pour “it” into your lap until “it” is running over, so to speak
 - The “it” in that statement, refers to the pardoning Jesus mentioned in v.37
 - So the Lord promises to deliver us forgiveness and reconciliation with our adversaries, if we would forgive them
 - He uses our standard of forgiveness in providing pardon to us for the earthly, temporal consequences of our sins
- When I mentioned this passage, I also commented that there are voices in the Church today deceiving believers concerning the true meaning of this passage
 - A good number of pastors and teachers claim that in this passage, the “it” Jesus was talking about was money
 - They claim Jesus was promising that if we give money, God will respond by giving us an abundance of wealth
 - But as we’ve seen, Jesus wasn’t talking about money at all
 - So in order to come to their conclusion, these false teachers must ignore the original context of Jesus’ words
 - They pluck these verses out of the context of Luke 6, so we won’t notice that Jesus’ original topic was forgiveness, not money
 - And if we don’t return to the context and check for ourselves, we get fooled
 - Some teachers have taught this error simply because they too have been fooled or are not skilled at dividing the Word rightly themselves
 - But others propagate this lie because they are false teachers preoccupied with obtaining money for themselves
 - So they willingly manipulate Scripture to make themselves and their churches wealthy
 - As Paul warned would happen

1Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

- This leads us directly into Jesus’ final example in this chapter of living-out righteousness: wealth (or we might say, the accumulation of treasure)
 - Now perhaps you’ve never considered that the way you accumulate treasure is a spiritual issue, similar to praying or fasting
 - But this is a central teaching in the New Testament

- In fact, there is no topic more frequently mentioned in all the New Testament than the subject of accumulating treasure
- You might be surprised to know that the Bible encourages believers to seek after treasure
 - BUT, of course, what the Bible means when it tells us to store up treasure is vastly different than what the world means
 - And it's also very different than what we hear in certain corners today, as men preach that God wants to make us rich
 - That's far from the truth...it's just evidence of how the Church has adopted Pharisaical thinking, rather than biblical thinking
- So let's look at what Jesus actually says about accumulating wealth

Matt. 6:19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Matt. 6:20 “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Matt. 6:21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matt. 6:22 “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

Matt. 6:23 “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

- Like his previous examples, Jesus says there is a hypocritical way to accumulate treasure and a Godly way
 - In this example, Jesus says the hypocritical manner is to store up treasure on earth
 - Instead, He says we should store up treasure in Heaven
 - And His reasoning is obvious enough
 - Things on earth don't last...somehow, sooner or later, anything we accumulate here will be taken from us
 - Either something will destroy it (like moth or rust)
 - Or someone else will deny us use of it by stealing it or breaking it
 - Or at the very least, when we die, we leave it to someone else
 - But regardless of the cause, sooner or later, we will be without it
 - But, our treasure in Heaven is protected from such harm
 - Neither moth nor rust nor thieves can destroy a treasure reserved for us in Heaven
 - No one can steal it, and it won't break or run out of batteries
 - It's out of reach of earthly dangers
 - And it's waiting for us in a future, perfect world

- Which leads us to the second major advantage of Heaven treasure...it's ours forever
 - Unlike earthly treasure, we won't leave our Heavenly treasure behind when we die
 - We get to keep it, to enjoy it into eternity
- Now at this point, it would be helpful to clarify what Jesus means when He describes our treasure in Heaven...starting with the concept of Heaven itself
 - First, the Bible says that the spirits of those who put their trust in Jesus will be welcomed into the Heavenly realm after our body dies
 - Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:8, that to be absent the body (meaning to have died) is to be at home with the Lord (meaning in His presence)
 - In other words, when we die, our spirit is ushered into the presence of the Lord, Who is seated at the right hand of the Father in God's Heavenly throne room
 - That will be Heaven for us – but only for a short time, because God's throne room is *not* our permanent Heavenly home
 - God created human beings to live in a physical body, on a physical earth, and so that's where we eventually return again
 - In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that believers will one day be resurrected into a new glorified, physical body intended for life on a physical earth
 - Revelation 19 tells us all believers return to this earth with Jesus Christ at His Second Coming to live and reign in His Kingdom
 - When that happens, "Heaven" moves with Jesus from God's throne room to the Kingdom on earth
 - In a sense, we can say Heaven is wherever Jesus is
 - That's why Jesus told the thief on the cross that "today you will shall be with Me in Paradise"
 - The thief would be in Paradise (Heaven) because he was going where Jesus was going
- When we come into the Kingdom with Jesus, the Bible says the world will be an unimaginably better place than the one we know now
 - It will be a world of peace and joy, without war or conflict, Isaiah says
 - Revelation says our new physical body will never suffer pain or illness or death
 - We will finally enjoy the world in the way Adam enjoyed the Garden
 - But this Kingdom is a "real" place with real life
 - Every morning, we rise to spend our day working, playing, eating, worshipping, and generally enjoying all that God has made for us
 - Which means we will need a place to live, a home and provision in that world
 - The Bible calls the provision we receive in that coming Kingdom our Heavenly reward
 - Throughout this chapter, Jesus has made mention of reward (a total of seven times)

- He's said repeatedly, that we ought not seek for our reward here and now, but rather wait for our Father in Heaven to reward us
 - That reward is our future allotment in the Kingdom
- Paul says that our allotment in the Kingdom will be awarded to us by Christ at a moment called the Judgment Seat of Christ

2 Cor. 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

2 Cor. 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

2 Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- Paul says every Christian would rather be absent from the body and at home with the Lord in Heaven, than to remain here a day longer
 - But since we know we will one day be called home to be with the Lord, we must have as our ambition now, pleasing Christ
 - We must seek to please Christ, because we know we must face Him sooner or later for a judgment
- When we die, we will be held to account by Christ for how we served Him
 - Paul calls that moment the judgment seat of Christ, and in that judgment, each one of us will be recompensed (or paid) by Christ for the deeds we did in this body, whether good or bad
 - This judgment doesn't consider our sin at all, and it doesn't involve punishment either
 - Our sin debt was cancelled on the cross and Jesus bore all our punishment
- Rather, this judgment is an examination of our deeds done in this body in service to Christ
 - So the question Jesus asks at that judgment is, what deeds did we do in service to Christ?
 - Did we spend our time serving ourselves or serving Him?
- For example, did we give to the poor so that we could receive praise from our friends, or did we give to serve God's interests?
 - Did we pray just to hear our own voice or to impress others, or did we engage in a meaningful conversation with our Father?
 - Did we fast to be admired by others, or to discipline our flesh so we might become a more obedient disciple of Jesus?
- And now the question for tonight, do we store up our treasure here, where it burns up in the end, or do we live with eyes for eternity, waiting for our reward in the Kingdom?

- Storing up earthly treasure means being hypocrites
 - Because it's hypocritical to claim we're looking forward to the Kingdom, yet live as if this world is all that matters to us
 - That's what the Pharisees did...they pretended to live austere lives, forsaking the world for the promise of the Kingdom
 - And yet, they secretly loved money, the Bible says, and schemed to become rich by abusing their positions
- It's the same thing we see happening today with prosperity preachers
 - They claim to be helping you receive great riches from God
 - And then, they tell you to send your money to them so that God may reward you
 - Now I ask you...who gets rich in that kind of scheme?
 - And what does that tell you about their true heart?
- In v.21, Jesus says that kind hypocrisy is easy to spot...just follow the money
 - He says that we can know a person's heart by noting where they store up their treasure
 - Because where your treasure is, there your heart is also
 - And what do we notice about the false prosperity preachers?
 - They dress in \$5,000 suits, wear \$25,000 watches, live in million dollar homes and fly around the world in \$50M private jets
 - That's their treasure, so where is their heart?
 - Jesus says, we should be wise and see them for who they truly are...
 - And in v.22, Jesus uses a metaphor to make His point
 - He says the eye is the lamp of the body, so if the eye is clear, then the body is full of light
 - Conversely, if the eye is bad, the whole body is full of darkness
 - This is where I get one of my favorite sayings, "living with eyes for eternity," because essentially, that's what Jesus is saying here
 - Your eye, which is to say your focus in life, dictates where your body goes, that is where your life will lead you
 - If you are focused on the right things, on eternal things, then your entire life will be full of light...reflecting the glory of God
 - You will direct your life in ways that maximize your eternal reward, not your earthly gain
 - Every decision you make, every priority in your life, will turn on what pleases Christ the most now
 - But if your eye is dark, if your focus is on this world and what it offers, your life will be full of darkness
 - You squander your time and energy pursuing passing things

- Over time, we become weighed down by various impulses, lusts, distractions and wasted pursuits
- Jesus asks, if the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
 - He's saying that if the born-again child of God, the one who has come to know the glory of Christ...
 - If the one God appointed to be light to this dying world chooses to seek after the darkness of the world, how great is that darkness!
 - How great is their shame, how great is their loss, how great is that tragedy! They, of all people, should know better
 - Our salvation is never at risk, which is why we're supposed to focus our attention on protecting our testimony
 - And the godly disciple of Christ protects their testimony by recognizing there is an opportunity cost for pursuing the wrong things
 - The Lord gives us only so much time to live on this earth
 - And we have only so much energy, only so many resources
 - When it's spent, it's gone
 - Furthermore, the godly disciple recognizes that his or her place in the Kingdom is riding on how they spend the time God has given them
 - So they seek to spend it wisely, living with eyes for eternity
 - They organize the pursuits of their life to maximize their eternal reward, not their earthly treasure
 - Of course, we still have to earn a living, we still need money, we still need to save for retirement
 - And we still have to buy what we need, including houses and cars and the like
 - But the godly disciple isn't focused on *accumulating* these things
 - In fact, he or she will readily set these things aside, if Christ requires, so they might serve Him better
 - Paul expresses it this way

1 Tim. 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

1 Tim. 6:18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

1 Tim. 6:19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

- Notice, Paul didn't tell Timothy that the rich should give their wealth away, or even that it's a sin to be rich

- But what does Paul say? That those who are rich must not place their hope, their confidence for the future, in their earthly riches
- If you possess wealth to any degree, don't let your wealth interfere with storing up true riches in the Kingdom
- Paul says be rich in good works, sharing your earthly wealth generously so as to ensure a strong foundation in the Kingdom
- In the end, our choice is between serving two masters: Christ or wealth
 - The Greek word for wealth is the word *mammon*, which literally means property
 - But the root word means the thing in which we place our confidence
 - So in the matter of wealth, where have you placed your trust for your future security?
 - Are you trusting in the wealth of this world to provide you with security? If so, what happens after you die? What will be your security then?
 - Or are you living with eyes for eternity, placing your trust in the reward God may grant you in the Kingdom?
 - In v.24, Jesus says, these two are like two slave owners, and you can only serve one
 - So you must choose...it's literally impossible to trust in both
 - But some of us sure try to find a way to have both, don't we?
 - We say we look forward to the Kingdom and that we want to please Christ and receive a good reward
 - Yet we still set our eyes, our focus, on obtaining that shiny object that distracts us from serving Christ
 - In that moment, you're trading one master for the other, and Jesus says don't do it...it's a bad trade
- Now perhaps at this point, you're feeling a little conviction over this issue of wealth (hey, join the club)
 - Perhaps the Spirit is speaking to your heart, asking you to make some changes in your life
 - Maybe He's telling you to work fewer hours, so you can spend more time ministering to your family or in the Church body
 - Maybe He's telling you it's time to get out of debt, to stop spending beyond your means, so that you won't be enslaved by these things
 - Maybe that means selling a car you can't afford or a house you can't afford, or ending a hobby that consumes too much time
 - Whatever you're considering, as you contemplate these things the enemy is going to be at work to stop this process
 - He knows how important your obedience is, and he's determined to prevent it
 - So he may whisper to you that if you cut back your hours at work, the boss might be upset or you may lose your position

- Or if you liquidate your savings to pay off those loans, what happens to your safety net?
- Or if you sell your expensive house to live within a budget, how will your kids get into the right school district?
- And what will your friends think when you drop out of the country club, or what will your kids think when you have to cut back on the number of activities in the family life?
- Jesus knew these concerns might lead us to hesitate to obey, so He ends the chapter reassuring us that your Father in Heaven has your back

Matt. 6:25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Matt. 6:26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Matt. 6:27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

Matt. 6:28 “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,

Matt. 6:29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

Matt. 6:30 “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

Matt. 6:31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’

Matt. 6:32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Matt. 6:33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matt. 6:34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- This is a longer passage, and the central thought is simple...yet profound
 - Jesus commands us not to give in to our fears and worries as we transition to pursuing His agenda in our life
 - If you set your mind on serving Christ and obeying Him, then you need not worry about not having enough food or clothes or a home
 - You can obey, confident that your Father, who knows you need these things, will provide them in the course of your work
 - Now, He may not provide them to the same extent you might prefer in your flesh

- Your address might not be as fancy, your car not as new, your clothes not as fashionable
- But they will do the job, and as Jesus says, life is more than food and the body is for more than simply showing off clothes
- In other words, we don't want to make the mistake of thinking that the purpose of our life is found in the accumulation of these things

Luke 12:15 Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

- Worry over what we need in this life is the enemy's greatest weapon in keeping us from living with eyes for eternity
 - The irony is, that even when you were working so hard to obtain all these things, it was still the Lord providing for you in the end
 - In other words, your security was never found in a job or a savings account or retirement fund
 - Those things are merely the appearance of security...God has always been your provider
 - And He can remove them from you just as surely as He gave them to you (just read Job)
- And therefore, the key is remembering how much the Father in Heaven loves and protects His children as they obey Him, and that should trigger our obedience
 - And to prove His point, Jesus reminds us of how effortlessly the world around us finds what it needs day after day
 - The Father ensures that birds find food and that even the flowers are dressed in beauty
 - And yet these things count far less to God than you do
 - So what do we conclude about God?
 - Will God provide less for His most important creation than He is willing to do for the trivial things of Creation?
 - You know the answer to that question, yet at times, we still live as if we don't get it...and Jesus says that's living with little faith
 - It's operating out of an assumption, that if we don't do all we can to secure our future now, we may find ourselves destitute in the future
 - That's a lack of faith in God, because it suggests we doubt His goodness and His faithfulness to provide
 - Jesus says this is another example of living like unbelievers
 - In v.32, He says the Gentiles (meaning unbelievers) live with these worries, asking what will we eat or what will we drink, *etc.*

- And that makes sense, of course, because unbelievers don't have a relationship with the Father
- So naturally, they have no reason to trust in His provision; therefore, they focus their life on obtaining what the world offers
- But when a believer spends his or her time worrying about future security, we ruin the days we have now
 - We're needlessly distracted by future concerns, which get in the way of serving Christ today
 - It's the opportunity cost thing again...so ask yourself this:
 - What opportunities for future eternal rewards are being forfeited as you spend time pursuing things that will burn up in the end?
 - That's why Jesus says focus on today...keep your eyes fixed on serving Christ today, and don't get distracted by the what-ifs of tomorrow
- I want to leave you tonight focused on what Jesus says in v.33
 - Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and these other things will be *added* to you
 - This is your Christian priority for life
 - First, seek for Jesus' Kingdom
 - That means seeking to serve the interests of the Kingdom, which is recruiting new citizens through evangelism
 - Putting your eternal reward ahead of anything this world offers
 - And secondly, seek His righteousness
 - That means proving yourself worthy of Christ's trust by demonstrating as much godliness as possible
 - Pursue sanctification, so that you might be placed in a higher position of honor in Christ's Kingdom government
 - Now both those goals take a lot of time and focus, and if you pursue them earnestly, you won't have as much time to spend on building up your balance sheet
 - You probably won't have as much money, or live in the best zip code, or even have a great retirement savings
 - But Jesus says, if you are focused on serving the Lord in this way, He has your back
 - The things you didn't pursue will be added to you
 - Notice the word "added" there
 - It's important, because it tells us two things
 - First, it reminds us that these things are given to us by God
 - He adds them...we don't obtain them or earn them...whatever we possess in this life is something God assigns to us
 - So that even when we don't work for them, God may still provide them

- Secondly, and more importantly, these possessions God knows we need, will be added to our Kingdom focus and our pursuit of righteousness
 - So that we will have both eternal reward and the necessities of life now
 - We will be given both a provision now and a greater reward in the Kingdom
 - These things will be added
- On the other hand, the opposite is also true...if we pursue the treasure of this world at the expense of serving Christ, we will ultimately have neither
 - We will lose what we gained here because, in the end, we leave it all behind one way or another
 - And when we stand before Christ, our reward in the Kingdom may be diminished
 - Which one does the wise Christian seek? Do not seek your reward here...wait for the Father's reward in Heaven

- We've reached the third and final chapter of Jesus' first major sermon in Matthew
 - His entire sermon is focused on true righteousness
 - Beginning in Chapter 5, Jesus taught on the degree of righteousness required to enter into the Kingdom
 - And His conclusion in v.48 is that we must be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect
 - That only those, whose righteousness is equal to God's righteousness, may enter the Kingdom
 - And of course, the only way any of us can equal the glory of God, is if He assigns us His righteousness by our faith in Jesus
 - Then in Chapter 6, we studied how a Kingdom-bound believer lives-out righteousness here on earth while we await the Kingdom
 - And Jesus' conclusion in Chapter 6, was that we ought not live a hypocritical life, trusting in this world's reward
 - Instead, Jesus taught we should give, pray, fast or whatever we do, seeking to please God and receive a Heavenly reward
- Now we reach Chapter 7, and Jesus' theme remains true righteousness
 - But now, Jesus begins preparing His disciples for how righteousness works in a culture and world of unrighteousness
 - He's preparing us for a spiritual war, a war between the forces of the enemy and the soldiers of Christ
 - And like in any war, the enemy will use various tactics to try to weaken and defeat his adversary
 - He'll try to divide us, he will set us against one another, he will try to discourage us
 - And in some cases, the enemy will send his forces behind enemy lines to disrupt us from within
 - Knowing all these things will come upon the Church, Jesus begins to prepare the Church, beginning with a command that helps hold us together

Matt. 7:1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged.

Matt. 7:2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

- We open with the favorite Bible verse of every rebellious teenager and every Hollywood actor or politician who's ever been caught in some scandal (most quoted verse in the Bible)
 - They famously declare, "The Bible says do not judge..." hoping to silence their accusers
 - Of course, what they really mean is, "How dare you hold me accountable for my

mistake!”

- But holding someone accountable for their mistakes is *not* what the Bible means when it commands us to “not judge”
- This misunderstanding is a classic example of what happens when we take a verse out of context and divorce it from its intended meaning
 - Taking any verse out of context is pretext...it’s a pretext to making the verse say what we prefer, rather than what it actually means
 - In fact, anyone who interprets Matthew 7:1 to mean that we can never judge someone’s sin, is seeking license to sin
 - That’s the card we play to silence our critics and to avoid having to face the reality of our mistakes
- In reality, the Bible not only permits us to hold others accountable for their mistakes, it often commands us to do so
 - For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:12, Paul says the Church is to judge disputes between members of the Body, rather than taking each other to court
 - And Jesus says in Matthew 18, believers must confront a sinning brother or sister, to call that person to account
 - We do this in the hope of encouraging him or her to be obedient to Christ
 - Elsewhere, Paul asks the Body to carefully evaluate a man’s character before elevating him to leadership over the Church
 - And 1 John tells us to judge the fruit in a teacher’s personal life before accepting their testimony and teaching
 - And so on and so on...
 - So the life of the Body includes many instances of assessing right and wrong, evaluating character, settling disputes, checking qualifications, *etc.*
 - By definition, these are all “judgment”
 - So obviously, when Jesus says, “Do not judge”, He wasn’t prohibiting all forms of accountability
 - Nor was He asking us to turn a blind eye to sin in the Body of Christ
- So let’s understand what Jesus *did* mean when He said, “Do not judge”
 - First, remember the context of Jesus’ sermon is true righteousness
 - And more specifically, that righteousness *cannot* be obtained by following manmade standards, like the Pharisees’ Mishnah
 - You remember, we’ve learned that the Mishnah was a huge book of rules and regulations that these men invented for Israel
 - The Mishnah regulated every aspect of Jewish life, supposedly to ensure that Israel followed the Law of God
 - But in reality, the Pharisees’ rules took the place of the Law and added countless additional burdens

- Those burdens had absolutely no possibility of producing righteousness in those who followed them
- And no one could possibly keep them all anyway
- So, they always had something on someone at all times
- Meanwhile, the Pharisees sat judging Israel from the seat of Moses within the legal system of Israel
 - Pharisees were the judges and prosecutors of Jewish Law
 - They judged anyone accused of violating the Law, but mostly, they judged people for violating the Mishnah's rules
- And this overlap in Jewish culture, between the rules of religious life and the law of civil life, produced a culture of judgment
 - The same men who decided if you had committed a crime in Jewish society, also judged whether you were pleasing to God
 - So naturally, people in Israel came to believe their righteousness before God was measured against a set of manmade rules
 - So that if a Pharisee said you had violated the Mishnah's rules and must be punished, then it also meant God was displeased with you
 - That gave everyone license to judge one another in matters of righteousness, while calling it God's judgment
- Jesus says do not judge others, meaning, do not judge others' righteousness according to your rules or any rules
 - All believers have been credited with Christ's righteousness by our faith alone, which means our spirit is already righteous
 - Nevertheless, our sinful flesh still exerts its influence on our walk
 - So from day to day, we will exhibit varying degrees of righteousness in our walk
 - On my best days, my walk may approximate true righteousness
 - And on my worst days, you may question if I'm saved at all
 - But regardless of whether I'm having a good day or a bad day, my righteousness before God is never in question
 - The Bible says my spirit is perfect, and my salvation complete, by my faith alone
 - Nothing I have done, nor could ever do, can separate me from the love of Christ, Who has died to cover all my sins with His precious blood
 - And this isn't just true for me or you, but for every Christian the world over
 - We all know this intellectually, or at least we should know this, yet the temptation is to judge each other's righteousness
 - We take note of someone's walk during a brief moment in time, and based on that moment, we size them up in our mind
 - Perhaps they display a weakness in an area where we have strength

- Or perhaps they committed a mistake that we used to commit, but have since conquered in our walk
- And so, we feel justified in looking down our noses at them and judging them as less righteous than we are, less pleasing to God
- And when we do this, we forget what grace has done for all of us sinners
 - We forget how much we've been forgiven and we conveniently overlook how far we still have to go in addressing our own shortcomings
 - In the worst cases, we judge as the Pharisees did...according to our own standards or expectations, rather than by the Word of God
- And no matter how we judge, we damage the unity of the Body
 - And that's exactly what the enemy wants to see us doing
 - We create a pecking order, just like the Pharisees did...the good Christians and the bad Christians
 - We're saying that some believers are closer to Christ than others – and that's not true
 - Those who are righteous (by our standards) and those who have fallen short (again, according to our standards)
 - We promote legalism, and we deny grace
 - We encourage pride and self-righteousness
 - And we discourage the weak among us from pursuing Christ
- Jesus says do not judge one another in this way, because frankly, the Lord doesn't need your help to bring someone else into righteousness
 - The Lord has already given every believer His Spirit and He has given all His Word
 - As Peter says:

2 Pet. 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

2 Pet. 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- Peter says that God's divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness
 - God's power has granted us everything we need to arrive at godliness
 - He says sanctification will come through a true knowledge of Christ, beginning with the Word of God
 - Moreover, He gave us His Spirit, Who works with the Word of God in our hearts like a sword, cutting and exposing our mistakes
- Now let me ask you...if the Spirit of God, working with the Word of God, is not enough to

prompt obedience in someone's heart, how much do you think you can do?

- How much help are your judgments and advice?
- How much power do you have to compel obedience with your scorn or guilt trip?
- Can you argue them into obedience? Do you have better arguments than those in Scripture?
- Nevertheless, the temptation is to help God by pointing out flaws and directing others' behavior to our liking
 - Most of us have either been guilty of doing this to others, or been a victim of someone else's legalism
 - When we put some new layer on top of faith to create an *appearance* of righteousness, we distract people from following Christ
 - And usually, their rules aren't even biblical...rules like, do not drink, do not smoke...
 - And then, when we encounter a Christian who drinks or smokes or dances or has a tattoo or long hair...or God forbid, a Christian who does all those things... then we judge their righteousness
 - We conclude they could not possibly be pleasing to God, at least not the way *we* are
 - We judge them as being less righteous than we are...
 - Not because they are violating Scripture, but because they are violating our rules, which we equate to Scripture
 - When we do, we become hypocrites like the Pharisees, forgetting that we are *all* sinners and we *all* needed God's grace to be righteous
 - And likewise, we forget that we *all* struggle at times to meet the demands of Scripture for living-out our righteousness
 - And the last thing any struggling Christian needs, is to be burdened with even more rules – especially useless rules
 - Manmade rules never made anyone more righteous
 - It didn't work for the Jews with the Mishnah, and it won't work for us with our rules in the Church
 - But this judging is even worse than that
 - Because when we judge others, we actually impede our own walk of righteousness
 - Judging others inflames our pride and encourages self-righteousness and hypocrisy
- It's impossible to judge another person's righteousness without assuming a place of superiority over that person, at least in the area under concern
 - Generally, we only judge others in areas we ourselves are not prone to stumble
 - So, the one who doesn't drink or smoke will be quick to judge the one who drinks or smokes

- The one who has no interest in tattoos, looks down his or her nose at anyone who dares to get one
- Whatever you find wrong in someone else's life will likely be something you don't struggle with, or have strength to face
 - It's selective outrage, focusing on the offenses that won't convict us, so that we might appear to have our act together
 - That's exactly what Pharisees did, and it's our hypocrisy
- That selective outrage gives us away, though, because it's proof we know we're no better than those we judge
 - If we were truly interested in the cause of righteousness, we would focus on all sin, especially on our own
 - But should someone point out our weaknesses, suddenly we run back to Jesus' command not to judge
 - It's easy to be sanctimonious about someone's disobedient kids...until your child runs away from home at 16
 - It's easy to condemn Christians caught in adultery...until someone finds pornography on your phone
 - This kills unity in the Body
- And in those moments, when we face our own disappointments, we need to be reminded that our righteousness comes from Christ
 - By our faith alone, we are perfect – complete and assured the Kingdom – because by His grace, God gave us His righteousness
 - So that when the Father looks down on us, He sees Christ's perfection assigned to us...and nothing can improve upon that perfection
- And then, we can remember that everyone else in here is in exactly the same place
 - No believer in here is more acceptable to God than anyone else
 - Your faults don't disqualify you and their faults don't disqualify them
 - You will struggle, they will struggle
- But together, we can face those struggles and make progress by the power of the Spirit and by the counsel of God's Word
 - Some days, our walk with Christ will be strong and our life will reflect righteousness at virtually every turn
 - And some days, we will identify with David in the Psalms, when he declared "Oh Lord my sin is ever before me..."
 - None of us ever equal Christ's perfection in our walk; but on a good day, we'll get close – and that's always our goal
 - And yes, along the way, fellow believers play a role in helping us obey by teaching us, encouraging us, even exhorting us to obey
 - And on rare occasions, we may have to judge a believer's behavior for the purpose of correcting it

- But that's not judging their righteousness, assessing their worth before God, or their worthiness of our forgiveness and acceptance
- Judging others in those ways does nothing to strengthen them in their struggle against sin
- In v.2, Jesus says we will be judged by God, according to the way we judge others in the Church
 - Jesus says God will use our standard to judge us, showing us grace when we show it to others
 - Clearly, Jesus is not speaking about His eternal judgment of us (that would be a works-based Gospel)
 - He's referring to how He will respond to our failings while on earth, in this life
 - So if we're harsh in judging others' performance, then we're daring God to judge us in a similar fashion
 - Do you demand perfection from other believers? You'd better be prepared to be perfect
 - Are you unwilling to acknowledge their progress against sin in their life? Don't expect God to acknowledge yours
 - Are you unsympathetic to their weaknesses, then looking to God for sympathy?
 - If we become so hard-hearted that we put ourselves in the place of God, judging their righteousness, while ignoring our own faults...
 - Then we must expect the Father in Heaven to use our standard to judge us
 - It's not that His grace has failed in our life, no more than it has in theirs
 - But what's good for the goose, is good for the gander
 - If we honestly think we're helping someone else obey by our harsh judgment, then how can we complain when the Lord uses the same methods to compel our obedience?
 - So, if you see a fellow believer stumbling in some area of life and you judge them...
 - You decide they are unrighteous and unworthy of your fellowship, or some other privilege in the Body
 - Perhaps you share your opinions with them, communicating your displeasure, to make them feel unapproved, shamed, rejected...
 - Meanwhile, you drop to your knees in prayer asking the Father to overlook your stumbles...
 - And you expect the Father to overlook your failings, to bless you in spite of your failures...
 - You're failing three ways
 - You fail them, because you discourage a struggling believer
 - You fail yourself, because you cultivate a heart of self-righteousness and hypocrisy

- And you fail Christ, because you trample His grace by denying its power to redeem and sanctify
- In vs.3-5, Jesus makes His point, using one of His best-known illustrations

Matt. 7:3 “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

Matt. 7:4 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye?

Matt. 7:5 “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

- Jesus describes a person carefully working to remove the smallest speck of sawdust in his friend’s eye
 - That speck of sawdust is so small, that even the person himself barely notices it
 - Now imagine a friend approaching with a gigantic log projecting outward from his face
 - It’s so big, that it blinds him and prevents him from getting close enough to truly help his friend
 - Yet, this man with the log insists he can help his friend remove the speck of sawdust
- Jesus’ point is both obvious and subtle
 - The illustration obviously makes fun of the man’s hypocrisy
 - He who thinks he can help his brother, even as he ignores an even bigger problem in his own life
- That’s how God sees us as we judge another’s weakness, while we make excuses or overlook our own sin
 - That’s the way Pharisees operated in Jesus’ day
 - They were experts in everyone else’s sin, yet they acknowledged none in their own life
 - They kept everyone under their thumb by deciding the rules, and judging who had kept them well enough to earn approval
- If that kind of hypocrisy is allowed in the Church, we end up with another generation of Pharisees
 - We’d be run by unholy, ungodly individuals who portray themselves as gatekeepers to God
 - It’s a complete distortion of grace, and it’s a violation of everything Christ has taught in this sermon
- But Jesus’ illustration also makes a subtle comparison between these two individuals
 - Notice that the speck and that log are both made of the same material: wood
 - In other words, these two men were both in the same predicament...neither

- could truly solve the other's problems
- We all have sin in our lives, to one degree or another
- We all have major blind spots of sin in our lives, weaknesses that are serious impediments to our walk with Christ
- So none of us are experts in how to live righteously
- So, while we are called to hold each other accountable for sin, that's not the same thing as judging each other's righteousness
 - For example, as a leader in the Church, I have an obligation to exhort you to obey Christ
 - And I certainly assess right and wrong according to the Bible, when called upon to do so
- But I am never called to judge another person's righteousness
 - I can't say that any believer in here is less righteous than another believer, or that anyone here is more worthy of God's approval
 - In reality, we each commit so much sin in the course of our lives, that if we piled them up, none of us could even count that high
 - So the difference in sin between any two members of the Body of Christ amounts to nothing more than a rounding error
 - We all have wood in our eyes
- Knowing that, why spend time judging another's worthiness before God?
 - As the illustration says, why not spend time working on your own wood problem?
 - So begin this way...have you confessed Christ as your Savior?
 - Then, your faith has made you righteous...as righteous as Christ, because it's His righteousness you possess!
 - Have you sinned today? Confess it to Christ and ask for His forgiveness and you shall have it
 - Or do you think you have no sin today? Then, the Bible says you are a liar (which means you just sinned)
 - Has someone else sinned against you? Forgive them, knowing Christ has forgiven you for worse
 - And are you preoccupied by the failings of others? Are you tempted to point out their faults?
 - First, remember that it's the Spirit Who convicts and teaches, not you
 - And it's the Lord Who sanctifies them and delivers them approved to God, not you
 - And that their failings are no greater than yours, that your righteousness and their righteousness comes from Christ
- So, we are all equally righteous by our faith and we are equally sinful in our walk
 - We all have wood in our eyes

- And we can certainly be of help to one another in our common fight against sin
- But not by inspecting righteousness in another person
- But rather, by modeling righteousness to one another
- Notice Jesus says in v.5, that trying to fix another person's sin while leaving our own sin unaddressed is hypocrisy
 - Taking advice on righteousness from a hypocritical sinner is like taking financial advice from someone in bankruptcy
 - After all, if you're such an expert in compelling others to obey Christ, why waste all your good advice on others?
 - Why not take full advantage of it yourself?
 - Turn all that expertise inwardly and address your own faults
- The point again, is that we all have weaknesses, and we all need help to obey, and that's the role of the Body of Christ
 - To help one another, not to grade one another
 - And there is a biblical way to help each other live more obedient, righteous lives
- In the illustration, Jesus says we can do our fellows believers a service by taking the log out of your own eye
 - In other words, model obedience in your own life as an encouragement to other believers to do the same
 - No one follows a hypocrite
 - But we naturally follow people who set the right example and encourage us to imitate them
 - So obey the voice of the Lord, allowing Him to strengthen you against your flesh's desires
 - And then, as you strengthen your own walk of obedience, Jesus says you will see more clearly how you can assist others
 - Your experience in combating your own sin, will improve your insight, your compassion, your patience and your empathy for others fighting their own battles
 - But even more importantly, those around you will be more likely to take your advice, because they will respect your own godliness
 - When we move from critiquing to modeling, we also move from judging to loving
 - Judges find fault, but friends forgive
 - And the one who knows how much they've been forgiven by God will be the one to forgive others the most
- So remember three things:
 - First, your righteousness before God is complete in Christ
 - You cannot be more acceptable to God than you are right now

- You can't be more righteous, more loved, more forgiven
- Secondly, if that's true for you, then it's also true for every other believer you will ever meet
 - They are no less righteous than you
 - They are no less accepted by Christ, no less loved by Christ, no less destined to reign with Christ than you
 - And nothing you can offer them, no rule you give them, no critique you offer, can improve on that truth
 - So that even as we may find fault with them, remember Christ died to pay for their sins too...just as He did for yours
- So lastly, if you want to help others live obediently to Christ so they can obtain the greatest eternal reward, model righteousness in your own life
 - Don't judge their walk and don't focus on their missteps
 - Judge yourself first, working to restrain your own flesh
 - And as they see your good works, they will glorify your Father in Heaven
- And in time, your example will encourage them to press onward
 - They will seek your counsel as a friend, not a judge
 - And they will respect your counsel all the more, knowing it comes out of a love for them and for Christ
 - Rather than from a heart of hypocrisy

F.B. Meyer once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are three things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. Finally, we do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.

- Chapter 7 of Matthew contains a number of iconic sayings of Jesus
 - You've probably heard most of them before, and may have even used some yourself at times
 - Phrases like, "walking the straight and narrow"
 - "Wolf in sheep's clothing"
 - "Know a tree by its fruit"
 - "A house built on sand," *etc.*...all of these are found in Chapter 7
 - Last week, we looked at another frequently quoted phrase, probably the most quoted in this chapter, and perhaps in all the Bible
 - The phrase was "Do not judge"
 - Jesus told His followers not to put ourselves in the place of God by judging each other's righteousness
- And as we learned last week, judging in this way is wrong because all Christians are equally righteous before God *and* equally sinful to each other
 - First, we are all equally righteous before God, because we have all been credited with Christ's perfect life by our faith in Him
 - Our Heavenly accounts say "Fully Righteous" and so, our standing before God is equal
 - Therefore, none of us are any more righteous than anyone else in the body of Christ, not in eternal terms
 - And then secondly, all Christians are also equally sinful in our walk on this earth
 - We all occupy a 100% sinful body, so we each commit sin daily in our thoughts, words and actions
 - One of us may commit *different* sins than another, and perhaps some may commit *more* sin on a given day than others
 - But those differences are meaningless when judging who is more sinful, because even just one sin is enough to put us in the fiery Hell, Jesus says
 - Glory be to God that Jesus reconciled us to God, taking the penalty for our sins upon Himself so that we would not be condemned
 - Therefore, judging someone in the Body of Christ accomplishes nothing except undermining our unity
 - And rather than being preoccupied with another believer's sin, Jesus said we should contend with our own sin first
 - So that as we model obedience in our own lives, we may be an example to other believers who wrestle with their sin
 - We can be a source of encouragement, compassion, insight and inspiration to them
 - In short, don't judge one another, set examples for one another
- Jesus' teaching on judging opens a chapter dedicated to teaching His disciples how to

live-out righteousness in an unrighteous world

- We remember Jesus said we are to be salt and light in the world
 - But now, He's explaining that the world won't be interested in seeing our light, not at first
 - Scripture teaches that the world is filled with men and women and even spiritual forces that oppose the cause of righteousness
 - The world isn't just *disinterested* in the Gospel...
- The Bible says the Gospel *offends* the world, because it convicts them of sin, causing them to hate the Gospel and those who deliver it

John 3:19 “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

John 3:20 “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

- And therefore, Jesus wants us to be discerning as we go about our work
- First, we should understand that attacks will come against the Church
- The enemy will try to undermine the unity of the Body by tempting us into self-righteousness and judgmental attitudes toward one another
 - The enemy successfully fostered that culture within Israel and He certainly wants to do the same within the Church
 - Which is why Jesus told us last week not to judge, but accept one another, even as we work together to address our sin
- Which brings us now to Jesus' second point of preparation for His disciples found in v.6, concerning judging the unbelieving world

Matt. 7:6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

- Obviously, here we find another often-quoted phrase of Jesus, “throwing pearls before swine”
 - Only Matthew's Gospel records this saying of Jesus, so we don't have a cross reference from another Gospel
 - And perhaps that explains why this phrase is so poorly understood
- It's easy to hear it frequently misinterpreted as a warning not to share the Gospel with those who would reject it
 - The interpretations say something to the effect that we shouldn't offer the Gospel to those who won't receive it

- That when we try too hard to present the Gospel, we risk shaming Christ or the Gospel itself
- So if an unbeliever rejects our message, move on, don't throw your pearls before swine...etc.
- While that may seem sensible, there are a lot of things wrong with that interpretation, and I think it's worth a moment to show you why
 - First, notice the context of Jesus' illustration
 - It comes immediately after Jesus was talking about believers not judging one another in the Church
 - And it comes immediately before teaching on trusting God to do what's best for us when we seek His help
 - Furthermore, notice in v.12, Jesus gives a summary of the prior 11 verses of the chapter
 - Jesus summarizes this entire section, saying treat everyone the same way you want to be treated
 - Don't be judges of others...trust God to give each person what is best for them...treat others the way you want to be treated...
 - Inserting a teaching to not share the Gospel with those who resist it, simply doesn't fit in that line of thought at all
- Secondly, such an interpretation doesn't fit the details of the illustration
 - In the illustration, Jesus says don't throw pearls to swine
 - He isn't talking about withdrawing an offer after it's been rejected
 - He's saying never offer holy things in the first place
 - Elsewhere Jesus *does* tell His disciples that if the Gospel has been soundly rejected, we are to move on

Luke 9:5 “And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

- But notice the difference between these two passages of Scripture
- In Luke 9, Jesus was explaining what to do *after* we have *already* presented the Gospel and it's been rejected
- But in Matthew 7, Jesus insists we *never* give holy things to those unfit to receive them
- That's a different point than the one being made in Luke 9
- Moreover, how could we know who might receive the Gospel until we first offer it to them?
 - We have to throw our pearls to find out who the “swine” truly are, so to speak
 - It's only after someone has rejected the Gospel, that we discover they aren't inclined to receive it

- Finally, and most importantly, interpreting Matthew 7:6 to mean we shouldn't offer the Gospel to those who reject it, runs contrary to the rest of the Bible
 - First, the Bible says *everyone* is opposed to the Gospel...until they receive it
 - There is no one who wants to hear our message, but by the power of God, some receive it
 - So, if we only offered the Gospel to those who were inclined to receive it, we would never offer it to anyone
 - Secondly, the Bible commands us to present the Gospel to everyone indiscriminately, like seed being thrown on the ground in Luke 8
 - Some will reject it out of hand
 - Some will seem to have accepted it, though they never truly did
 - Some will accept it without living up to its demands
 - Some will accept it and truly live it out
 - So we are called to share the Gospel with everyone without exception
 - Finally, Jesus Himself routinely offered the Kingdom to those who opposed Him and His message
 - In fact, the entire nation of Israel opposed Jesus so much, they killed Him over the Gospel!
 - Therefore, if Jesus were telling us not to offer the Gospel to those who might reject it, He violated His own teaching!
 - Clearly, Jesus must be talking about something different in this passage
 - The context of the chapter, the details of His illustration, and the teaching of Scripture overall...all argue for a different interpretation
 - So, what is the holy thing we should never offer to those who would reject it?
- Let's begin with some basic observations of what Jesus *did* say
 - Jesus begins saying don't give holy things to dogs
 - On the one hand, holy things are pure, precious, undefiled, and worthy of honor
 - While dogs sit on the other end of the spectrum
 - Now today, we see dogs as cute, domesticated pets (except poodles, which are justifiably detested by all)
 - But in Israel, dogs were wild animals – unclean, dangerous and despised, the most detestable things imaginable
 - That's why Jews called Gentiles "dogs", because this was the worst insult they could offer
 - So Jesus says don't take holy, precious things worthy of honor and offer them to violent brutes that would only destroy and dishonor them
 - Then He expands on this idea, using a second contrast of pearls vs. swine
 - Once again, pearls are valuable, precious things that make the one who wears

them appear more beautiful

- On the other hand, pigs were the most unclean animal in Jewish culture and, like dogs, they were wild and dangerous creatures
- In addition, swine are utterly incapable of appreciating the value of pearls
 - If you strung pearls around a pig's neck, the pig would barely notice them, much less understand how precious they were
 - And pearls don't enhance a pig's appearance
 - You could string a thousand pearls around a pig's neck, and it wouldn't be the least bit more attractive to the other pigs
 - So if a pig can't eat it, mate with it, fight it or sleep on it, they have no interest in it (like most college frat boys)
 - So in the end, your pearls would just go unnoticed and be trampled underfoot in the mud, doing no one any good
 - Finally, Jesus adds that if we were so foolish as to offer holy things to dogs or pigs, we stand to lose more than just our pearls
 - If you approach a wild pack of dogs or pigs, the animals will feel threatened and strike out at you
 - And wild dogs and wild pigs can easily kill a human being, tearing a person to pieces, as Jesus says
 - So giving holy things to these brutes has zero chance of gaining a benefit, and it comes with a high probability of personal harm
- To finish our observations, let's return once more to the context of Matthew 7
 - In vs.1-5 Jesus was speaking about judging...or we could call it "deciding for another person how they should be righteous"
 - In those verses, Jesus says we shouldn't judge others in the Church by giving them advice on being righteous
 - When we judge in this way, we create artificial distinctions between members of the Body, which destroys our unity
 - Now coming out of that context, Jesus turns the coin over and says "And don't judge the righteousness of the unbelieving world either"
 - Don't give the dogs and swine (*i.e.*, the unclean things of the world) holy things, which are your standards for how to be righteous
 - Our advice is holy, in the sense that it is based in our knowledge of God and of His Word
 - God's Word is precious, worthy of honor and set apart for His glory
 - And the Spirit living in us directs our steps of sanctification, impressing these truths upon us and leading us to obey
 - So when we watch the unbelieving world engaged in sin, we may feel a desire to judge that behavior and offer a solution
 - We're tempted to share the insights we've learned during our years of study in

God's Word and through our experience in the Body of Christ

- But as we do this, we forget that the unbelieving world is incapable of appreciating the wisdom of our advice, much less abiding by it
- For example, let's say you befriend an unbelieving couple living together out of wedlock
 - You know their lifestyle is not what God desires
 - You're troubled by their sin, so you tell them that the Bible says they should cease fornicating and should be married
 - That counsel is a holy thing, because it's the truth – and the truth is a precious, valuable, and pure thing in a world of lies
 - And like pearls, the truth of God's Word has the power to make us more lovely, both to God and to the world
 - Nevertheless, Jesus says don't judge unbelievers in this way
 - Don't offer them holy and precious things they cannot appreciate and cannot use
 - They lack the insight to know why your advice is true, and even if they were to follow it, they do not become the least bit holy
 - Like a pig donning pearls, they are still just as unattractive as ever
- Why? Because righteousness comes from God alone, by faith alone
 - We can't make unbelievers righteous by our judgments of their behaviors
 - No amount of judging behavior can bring anyone to righteousness
 - Even if someone does what we ask of them, they are still unbelieving, unsaved, unholy and destined for eternal judgment
 - We've put our pearls around the neck of a pig, and that pig isn't the least bit more attractive for having received them
 - So if we focus our attention on correcting an unbeliever's *behavior*, rather than on their heart of faith, we're wasting our time
 - To borrow from Jesus' illustration, we're putting lipstick on a pig
 - We're trying to give someone the appearance of righteousness, without actually bringing them to righteousness
 - And if we're honest about it, we'll admit we're doing it primarily to make ourselves feel better
 - We're back to the problem of hypocrisy
 - We've done the easy thing, and pretended as if we've helped them become more pleasing to God
 - But in reality, we avoided talking about the real problem, which was their lack of faith in Jesus, so they end up in Hell anyway
- Jesus says if His Church makes this mistake, we not only forfeit the chance to be truly helpful to that person, but we also put ourselves in danger
 - The unbelieving world will turn on us and our sanctimonious advice, and tear us to

pieces, Jesus says

- And that's exactly what's happening today in the Church
- Christians have become better known for what we're *against* than what we stand *for*
- Many churches are devoted to changing culture and society, forcing unbelievers to adopt Christian morals without ever mentioning the Gospel
- And regrettably, Christians seem to prefer that work over the true mission of saving souls
 - I've found it easier to recruit believers to join in Christian protests or boycotts than to participate in an evangelistic outreach
 - We think it's a victory for Jesus when we see a court case or a legislative action against abortion or homosexual marriage
 - As if these changes in behavior equate to greater righteousness on earth
- They are examples of throwing pearls to swine...it's judging unbelievers, expecting that they will benefit from following our convictions
 - But it's putting the cart before the horse
 - We should not be surprised to see sinners sinning...that's why we call them sinners, because they sin
 - And trying to fix their sin problem by changing their behavior is like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic
 - We may make things look better to us for a while, but we haven't changed the end result...everyone dies
 - If we truly want to help the world, we can't treat the symptoms...we have to treat the disease
 - We have to cure the source of sin in the heart, and the cause of sin is the dead spirit inside every person
 - The Bible says everyone is born into the world depraved, unholy, defiled and disinterested in the truth
 - And that doesn't change, unless they know Christ
 - Paul says this is the nature of the fallen human heart...

Rom. 3:10 as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

- The world does not know God, and moreover, the Bible says the unsaved heart is incapable of understanding the truth of God on its own

1 Cor. 2:14 But a natural man [unbeliever] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- So when we judge the sinful behaviors of the unbelieving world, we offer them something they cannot use
- Most will completely ignore it, like a pig trampling pearls
- And in the worst of cases, our judgment incites anger and resentment
- So that in the end, they become hardened to the truth
- And even if some may follow our advice and adopt our morals, it's merely external change
 - Our advice won't make them truly righteous, because their heart remains unchanged without the Gospel
 - And even worse, by focusing on their behavior, we are in danger of preaching a Gospel of works
 - The Bible says come to Christ as you are, by faith alone, so that by our faith, we will be cleansed of unrighteousness and called to good works in response to our salvation
 - Yet we're teaching unbelievers that they must be clean before coming to Christ, and that He accepts us because of our good works
- So judging unbelievers' behaviors is a waste of time that does not promote righteousness, and will either alienate or confuse them from knowing the true Gospel
 - We can see evidence of this happening in the Church today...
 - A recent Barna Group study found that 45% of unbelievers view Christians as religious extremists
 - The survey asked participants to rate 20 activities on how they related to Christianity
 - Included in the list were activities like pressing the government to adopt laws based on morality, or using religion to justify discrimination in society, *etc.*
 - Over 50% of the respondents rated such activities as typical of extremist Christian behavior
 - Then, in another Barna research study, they found that nearly 75% of all Americans identified themselves as Christian
 - Yet upon closer examination, Barna estimated that less than half of that number were *actually* confessing, born-again believers
 - So in other words, a majority of unbelievers now think that Christianity's goal is imposing its morals on the culture

- They see Christians as a bunch of sanctimonious, holier-than-thou, meddlesome busybodies
- While at the same time, roughly half of those who think they're Christians, were actually unbelievers
- They joined an organization dedicated to accomplishing social change and never understood the Gospel themselves
- I wonder if those two trends may be related
 - Could it be we've been throwing pearls to swine, judging unbelievers' behaviors by imposing our standards on the culture
 - And in the process, sending the world the message that "good" people go to Heaven?
 - And all the while, we were neglecting our true mission to preach the Gospel of faith alone in Jesus Christ alone?
- Did Jesus rail against the injustice of the Roman Empire, or did He say render to Caesar what is Caesar's?
 - Did Jesus give lengthy sermons on the evils of prostitution or tax collection, or did He comfort the outcasts?
 - Did Jesus make earthly social change His agenda, or did He spend His time preaching an eternal Kingdom?
- Jesus' mission is also our mission...preaching that the Kingdom of God is at hand...preaching the Gospel
 - It wasn't changing the world
 - It was rescuing people out of this world
- Of course, we want to see the injustices around us addressed...we want to stop depravity and abuse in every form
 - Our hearts ache as we watch sin destroying lives, families, communities and the world
 - But what *will* bring an end to these things?
 - What *will* lead women away from abortion?
 - What *can* turn a person from homosexual lust?
 - How *do* we end drug abuse and child abuse and hatred and murder and all manner of unholiness on earth?
- Isn't the solution the Gospel?
 - When a heart receives the Gospel, the Spirit comes to live inside that person, and they become instantly righteous before God
 - Moreover, they can now receive the wisdom of God, so that in time, they may turn from their sin and live in righteous ways
 - The solution begins with heart change, and heart change is only possible through faith in the Gospel

- That's how it worked for us, and that's how it will work for others...that's the *only* way it ever works
- The Church is the only institution in the world in possession of the true solution, because we alone have been entrusted with the Gospel
 - Anyone can pursue political change, anyone can protest unrighteousness, anyone can judge the world's ills
 - But only the Church has the Gospel
 - We alone have the medicine that cures the disease, and that's where we must keep our focus
 - Yet, if the Church becomes preoccupied judging the unsaved world, throwing our pearls at them, then who will fulfill our mission?
 - And if they come to despise us for our self-righteousness, where will they turn when sin leaves them broken and seeking answers?
 - We can't allow the enemy to distract us by substituting earthly crusades in place of our eternal mission
 - We aren't here to turn this world into the Kingdom...we're here to recruit citizens *out* of this world
 - And to be fair, Jesus isn't asking us to turn a blind eye to sin, nor was He saying that cultural activism is wrong in all cases
 - He's saying that judging the unbelieving world's sin, prior to bringing them the Gospel, is putting the cart before the horse
 - First we save them, and then we disciple them
- So in vs.1-6, Jesus says we neither judge the believer nor the unbeliever
 - The Body of Christ is equally righteous by faith and is to be unified by that faith
 - We all have sin, so who among us is worse than another?
 - And we all stand before God equally righteous by faith, so who among us is better than another?
 - And turning the coin over, the unbelieving world is incapable of benefiting from what we know of righteousness, unless and until they come to faith also
 - So judging the unbeliever's behavior is pointless and only serves to destroy any opportunity to share the truth with them
 - Do not concern yourself with their behaviors...focus on their heart
 - Preach the Word of God, knowing that it is the kindness of God that brings them to repentance
 - And when they place their trust in Jesus Christ, then they will obtain everything required for life and godliness, just as you did

- We're engaged in a verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of Matthew
 - We've reached Chapter 7, near the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a sermon on true righteousness
 - In this chapter, Jesus is preparing His disciples to face an unrighteous world, to remain strong and united
 - And in vs.1-6, Jesus began by teaching that we must resist the temptation to judge another's righteousness
 - Judging is deciding for someone else what they must do to be approved by God, and it was a favorite pastime in Israel during Jesus' day
 - But Jesus says it's wrong
 - His teaching on judging was divided into two parts...in vs.1-5, Jesus told us we shouldn't judge other believers in the Body of Christ
 - Surely, everyone makes mistakes – including you
 - And just as surely, all have received Christ's righteousness by faith, just as you did too
 - So rather than judge others, model righteousness for them and allow the Holy Spirit to convict and guide others as He wills
 - And then last week, we studied the second part of that teaching in v.6, as Jesus provocatively added that neither should we judge unbelievers
 - Unbelievers are enslaved to sin, and they lack an internal spiritual compass to direct them into godliness
 - So judging their behavior is pointless, since they are spiritually incapable of putting our advice to good use
 - Therefore, don't become preoccupied with their bad behavior
 - Jesus says, do not throw your pearls (of wisdom) before swine
 - Don't try to "fix" their sin problem by treating the symptoms, instead of curing the disease
 - Sin is merely the symptom of a heart of unbelief
 - Of course, there's nothing wrong with offering advice when asked, giving godly counsel and even lending a hand in various ways
 - But don't think becoming someone's life coach is making them righteous or pleasing to God
 - No amount of good advice can make someone righteous, unless and until they place their faith in Jesus Christ
 - So rather than judge the unbeliever's righteousness, preach the Gospel so they might become righteous by faith
- That leaves us at v.7, and if you glance over the passage that starts from that point, you may assume Jesus has changed topics abruptly
 - But as I said last week, this opening section of Matthew 7 is not merely a series of isolated statements

- Each part is connected to a central idea that Jesus summarizes in v.12, with something often called, “the Golden Rule”
- So tonight, our task is the same as always...to understand what Jesus is saying in these verses in the context of what He’s already said

Matt. 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Matt. 7:8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matt. 7:9 “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?

Matt. 7:10 “Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

Matt. 7:11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

- Jesus uses another illustration, and this one centers around asking, seeking and knocking
 - In v.11, we learn that the One being asked and sought after is our Father in Heaven
 - And therefore, the ones doing the asking and seeking are His children, those who by faith in Jesus Christ have been born-again
 - In fact, Jesus compares our process of seeking things from our Father in Heaven to the way our children seek things from us
 - Also notice that in this passage, Jesus addresses believers in the second person plural “you” (or y’all in Texas)
 - And in Greek, the verbs “asking”, “seeking” and “knocking” are conjugated in the present tense
 - Which indicates a continuous action, a never-ceasing dependence on the Father
 - So Jesus is illustrating believers continuously seeking something from the Father
 - Now at this point, it’s tempting to jump to a conclusion concerning Jesus’ main point
 - And it’s a particularly easy jump in this case, since all the details seem to lead us there
 - We see Jesus talking about asking the Father, and the Father giving us something in return, and we assume Jesus is teaching a lesson on prayer
 - That we should bring all our needs to the Father in prayer and He will answer our prayers, giving us what we ask Him for
 - As logical as that assumption may be on its face, it’s wrong
 - In fact, you can only come to that conclusion if you divorce this passage from

the immediate context of Chapter 7 and from the rest of Scripture

- So just as we did last week, let's take a moment to first consider why Jesus *can't* be talking about prayer here
- First, the immediate context of Matthew 7 is simply not on the topic of prayer
 - We know vs.1-6 were on the subject of judging, becoming preoccupied with fixing other peoples' behavior problems
 - That doesn't lead naturally into a discussion of prayer, of asking the Father for our daily needs, *etc.*
 - Now glance down to v.12, where Jesus summarizes this section
 - We'll get to that verse soon enough, but even just reading it quickly we can see Jesus is wrapping up a point
 - The verse even begins with "In everything, therefore..."
 - The word "therefore" indicates that Jesus is making an application from what He has just taught above
 - Yet as we read His summary in v.12, it makes no sense whatsoever coming out of a teaching on prayer
 - Consider how nonsensical this sounds...
 - "Ask the Father and He'll give you good gifts, therefore in everything treat people the way you want to be treated...?"
 - That's called a *non sequitur* (a conclusion that does not logically follow from the previous argument)
 - And Jesus was not prone to speaking in *non sequiturs*
- Secondly, assuming Jesus is teaching a lesson on general prayer contradicts other Scripture
 - You may remember that only a short time earlier in this very same sermon, Jesus addressed the topic of prayer
 - In Chapter 6, Jesus gave us a model of prayer we call the "Our Father"
 - So, for Jesus to come back to the topic of prayer now, in the middle of a discussion on judging, just doesn't make sense
 - It makes Jesus look like He's got ADHD, as if He's forgotten something on prayer and he's forced to back up again
 - More importantly, if we look at what Jesus taught in the previous chapter, we find a very different focus
 - In Matthew 6, Jesus said that our prayers should go this way

Matt. 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way:

**'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.**

Matt. 6:10 'Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.**

- The focus of our prayer life should be seeking for the Father's will, not our own desires
- Jesus Himself followed this pattern in His prayer time with the Father
- On the night He prayed in the Garden before He died, He said this

Luke 22:42 saying, **“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”**

- Yet now in Matthew 7, Jesus is supposedly telling us to ask the Father for whatever *we* want in prayer, and it will be given to us?
 - In fact, notice Jesus says *everyone* who asks receives, and *everyone* who seeks finds
 - There are no exceptions to this ask-and-receive promise
 - Moreover, whatever we ask, we *will* receive
 - And we will receive it not sometimes, but *every time*, Jesus says
- Now this is an incredible promise in the context of prayer, isn't it?
 - Any request of the Father will be answered positively, 100% of the time
 - And it will be done for 100% of those who ask Him
 - And it will always result in something good being given
- Friends, the Bible simply does NOT teach that God answers every prayer affirmatively or that whatever we ask of the Father we will receive
 - Such a notion contradicts Scripture and it's self-evidently NOT the way God works
 - For example, have you asked the Father to heal someone you know and yet, in His providence, He determined not to heal them?
 - Have you asked the Father to receive a job or a promotion or a new house or a spouse or something else you dearly desired...and yet He refused?
 - Those moments serve as proof to us that the Lord's will be done, not our own
 - Therefore, whatever Jesus is promising here, it can't be a general statement about how God answers prayers
 - Nevertheless, many false teachers have taken this passage out of context to support their brand of false teaching
 - For example, prosperity liars tell you that if you ask for wealth, you're guaranteed to receive it because Jesus said so
 - Of course, we don't see all Christians living in splendor the world over, do we?
 - False healing gospels claim you may ask for physical healing of some kind
 - And that if you ask for healing, you will be healed every time, because Jesus said so here in Matthew 7

- They conveniently ignore the fact that no one is healed 100% of the time
- Household salvation heretics maintain that Jesus is promising salvation itself for everyone you love
 - So if you ask Jesus to save an unbelieving family member, it will be done for you because Jesus said so
 - And on and on...
- All of these teachings run contrary to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 and elsewhere
 - God doesn't give us what we want, because that would not be good for us in most cases
 - The Bible does teach us to pray without ceasing and that God hears our prayers
 - But our prayer life is supposed to be focused on God's will being done, not our will
 - So we cannot ask God for whatever we want and think that because of Jesus' teaching here in Matthew 7, we will receive it
- Therefore, the context of Matthew 7, the overall teaching of the Bible and our own experience confirm Jesus was not talking about prayer in this passage
 - So what was Jesus promising? Notice that Jesus never names the "it" in these statements
 - Jesus says ask and *it* will be provided, seek and *it* will be found...
 - That is, when we pray for a *certain* something, a specific thing, then the Father will give us that specific thing 100% of the time
 - Jesus says that in doing so, the Father is doing exactly what we do for our children, even though we are evil
 - We give our children good things when they ask for it
 - The key here is "good things"
 - We don't give our children everything they ask for, because we know many things they want are wrong for them
 - But when they ask us for good things, then we delight to meet their request
 - In Jesus' example, the child asks for bread or fish, which were the basic staples of everyday life
 - These were the meat and potatoes of Jesus' day
 - Naturally, if a child wanted more good food, Jesus says an earthly father wouldn't respond with an evil gift
 - Likewise today, if your child asked you for good things, you would give them those good things 100% of the time
 - If your child asked to eat more spinach or more green beans, you would say "yes" every time
 - Or if a young child asked if they can do more homework or if they can go to bed a little early to get more sleep, you would say "yes"

- It's your teenager asking if they can give up playing video games, social media and Netflix so they can spend more time reading the Bible, you would faint... and then say "yes"
- It's your young lady or young man asking you if they could work to earn the money for their car instead of you buying it for them...you would say "certainly"
- If you ask your parents for good things, you will get a "yes" 100% of the time... because what parent wouldn't say "yes" to those requests?
 - We do this, even though we are sinful and prone to making mistakes
 - And Jesus says our Father in Heaven is an even better parent than we could ever be
 - So He too gives us good things every time we ask
- But in this case, we still need to understand what is this certain good thing that Jesus says we will receive 100% of the time?
 - The answer must come out of the context of this chapter
 - Well, what was Jesus talking about in the preceding verses?
 - In the preceding verse, Jesus mentioned holy things, which was godly insight on how to live righteously
 - Those pearls of wisdom that we shouldn't offer to unbelievers
 - And before that, in vs.1-5, Jesus was talking about the same thing... unsolicited advice on righteousness offered to our brothers and sisters
 - So the context leading into v.7, is on judging unrighteous behavior
 - We can't promote righteous behavior by placing ourselves in God's place and judging others and offering advice
 - Instead, Jesus says focus on yourself, take the log out of your own eye, concern yourself with your own behavior and your own witness
 - That's the context...
 - Now that's a challenge worth considering for a moment...correcting our own behavior
 - After all, it's fun to talk about logs sticking out of eyes, but it's a lot harder to actually address that problem
 - It's hard to rein in your sin nature, to live-out righteousness in a daily fashion, isn't it?
 - In fact, some days, living righteously feels darn-near impossible, doesn't it?
 - On the other hand, it's easy to dole out advice to others, isn't it?
 - In most cases, we can size up someone's problem pretty quickly
 - We judge them in a moment and we're quick to offer our unsolicited advice on how they should change their lives
 - But we're not actually fixing them, of course
 - And if truth be told, we can't fix ourselves either

- If handing out life advice was the solution to everyone's sin problem, then Dr. Phil would be the pope and the Bible would be found in the self-help section
 - Advice isn't a solution to another person's sin or even to our own
 - We can't talk ourselves out of our problem, we can't name it and claim it, we can't "speak" victory into our lives
 - We all know this to be true, as we deal with our own sin
 - We each know our own sin better than anyone...we know the things we do wrong and we know what we should change
 - We even know that what we're doing is wrong, even as we're doing it!
 - Yet we keep on doing it, don't we?
 - And when our sin comes crashing down on our heads, how helpful are all those "Job's counselors" that tell us how to become more righteous?
 - How useful is their advice?
 - Even if their advice was accurate, it didn't compel your obedience, did it?
 - Because here's the truth...our sin problem isn't caused by a lack of information...
 - The problem is, we lack the moral strength to put that knowledge to work in controlling our flesh's desires
 - Which is why judging others' bad behavior is of no advantage in the fight to become more Christ-like
- So in vs.7-11, Jesus says we shouldn't be searching on earth for answers that can only come from Heaven
 - We all need godly counsel, yes, but even more, we need the spiritual strength to put that counsel into action in combating our sinful flesh
 - And that strength comes from above
 - So Jesus says, as you contemplate taking logs out of your eye or becoming a better witness to unbelievers, turn to your Father in Heaven for help, and He will give it to you every time
 - Ask for strength to overcome your sin, and you will have it
 - Seek for righteousness, and you will find it
 - Knock on the door, and the Lord will open and come to you and make His home with you
 - The "it" here is that missing ingredient in obedience, in living-out your righteousness
 - It's the difference between being a slave to sin and living a life pleasing to God
 - It's the power to crucify your flesh and to obey the Word of God
 - It's the mind of Christ, the knowledge of what pleases Him and leads us into righteousness
 - It's the alternative to judging others...it's the solution to taking the log out of your own eye

- In short, it's the power of the Spirit
- We get confirmation of that interpretation when we look at this same passage as recorded by Luke

Luke 11:9 “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luke 11:10 “For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Luke 11:11 “Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?

Luke 11:12 “Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?

Luke 11:13 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

- In this same passage, Jesus says that the thing we will receive when we ask is the Holy Spirit
- The Spirit is the “it” we’re to ask for, the thing we are to seek
- Jesus is talking about asking the Father to give us the power by His Spirit to silence our desire to judge others
- And the grace to overcome our own inadequacies
- And that’s a request the Lord will grant to every believer 100% of the time
 - Because that’s like asking for more spinach
 - That’s like asking for more time to read the Bible
 - The Lord delights to hear His children asking for the grace and power to combat sin...you can’t ask for a better thing
 - And if you ask for that grace, if you seek for His righteousness, then you can be sure He will give you a very good gift indeed
 - He will give you the power of His Spirit
- Now as we reach this conclusion, let’s be careful about making another misinterpretation in the process
 - Jesus isn’t talking about *receiving* the Holy Spirit
 - All believers already have the Holy Spirit solely on the basis of our faith in Jesus
 - The Bible says that at the moment of our faith, we are born-again by the Spirit, and He comes to dwell in us permanently

Rom. 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Rom. 5:2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this

grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Rom. 5:3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

Rom. 5:4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

Rom. 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

- Notice, Paul says that all those who have been justified by faith have peace with God
 - And we have been introduced into His grace
 - And we will have tribulations, which build our spiritual character, leading to an unshakable hope in what is to come
- And then Paul says that our hope will not result in disappointment, because we already have God living in us by His Spirit
 - The deposit of the Holy Spirit in each believer is our proof that God will keep His Word to us
 - It's like earnest money we put down on a house contract
 - That earnest money is proof the buyer intends to follow through with the purchase of the house
 - And the Spirit living in us is evidence that God intends to keep His promises to resurrect us and bring us into glory one day
- So when Jesus tells us to ask and we will receive the Holy Spirit, He doesn't mean we obtain the Spirit, for we already have Him
 - He means we will receive an outpouring of the Spirit's wisdom and power to deal with the sin struggles we face
 - The Lord will grant to us the specific understanding we need to avoid falling into temptation yet again
 - Peter says in 2 Peter 2:9, that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation
 - He knows how to get us out of those predicaments, and if you ask Him, He will share that knowledge with you
 - Think about how easy it is to buy something using Amazon 1-Click; sometimes, when we know we shouldn't buy something, it just won't work – the Internet's down or something – what's God doing in that moment?
 - Yet if we persist, we'll eventually get the Internet back again – God doesn't just wipe the slate clean and make it impossible for us to sin
 - One of the best examples of this is in Genesis, in the story of Lot
 - Lot was in a bad place in the city of Sodom; he shouldn't have been there, he made a bad choice to go in
 - Once he was there, he got trapped by the culture
 - When it came time for that world to be judged, God knew who were His – the

believers – Lot and members of his family

- So He went in to rescue Lot – but He had to drag him out with angels and left him outside the city, in harm's way
 - And he had to flee to the mountains to escape what was coming
 - Once he was outside the city, it was no longer as much of a temptation – he could see it with a proper perspective and could then respond to God's call to escape
 - God moves our circumstances just enough that what we couldn't do on our own, we're now able to do – but we still have to make the right choice, we still have to respond
- Paul says this to the Church

1 Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- Paul says God will provide you with a way of escape, which is an off-ramp that takes you away from the sin you are pursuing
- He will calm our lust, stop our jealousy, anger, fear or whatever is motivating us to act in unrighteous ways
- So when your resolve is failing, turn to your Father in Heaven and ask Him to strengthen you against yourself and He will respond
- Could it be this straightforward? Could it be that our struggles with sin have persisted because we haven't asked the Father to help us deal with them?
 - Ask yourself, when you are feeling pulled into the thing you know you shouldn't do or think or say, how often have you stopped in that moment and prayed for strength to avoid the sin?
 - Could it be that we've veered into sin so often and so easily, because we've never even asked the Father to help us stop?
 - And if so, could it be we actually like our sin? We prefer it some days?
- Jesus said don't judge others, deal with your own sin problem, but He didn't say deal with it by yourself
 - Again, if that worked, we wouldn't need Jesus and His Spirit
 - We wouldn't need the Word of God or the Body of Christ
 - We could just make ourselves righteous
 - But the flesh is powerful, and even though we want to live to please the Lord, we simply lack the power to do it on our own
 - We need the Father to grant us the grace to win that battle
 - And He is inclined to help us in that way, for it is a good thing to hate our sin

- Jesus says ask the Father to help you fight your sin, and He will give it to you by His Spirit
- Seek to live more righteously, and you will find the way by the Spirit
- Knock, and as Jesus said

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

- Tonight, we reach the end of Jesus' sermon on true righteousness, often called His Sermon on the Mount
 - We pick up in v.12, which serves as a summary of Jesus' teaching on righteousness and a transition into the final section

Matt. 7:12 **"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."**

- That statement is a brief summary of all Jesus has taught on righteousness
 - And it's also a concise summary of the first 11 verses of the chapter
 - We have come to call this standard "the Golden Rule", named such by an unbelieving Roman Emperor, Alexander Severus
 - He was reportedly so impressed by Jesus' maxim, that he had it engraved in gold on the walls of his palace
 - Thus, it became known throughout the Empire as "the Golden Rule"
 - Aside from its unique name, this rule of thumb is well-known for its power to produce good behavior
 - Parents tell their kids to live by this rule
 - Teachers tell students to follow this rule
 - Employers tell employees to use it
 - Everyone appreciates its brilliance
 - The maxim says that in any particular situation, you can determine what righteousness requires through a simple thought experiment
 - In your mind, trade places with the other person...put yourself in their place and put them in your place
 - Then consider how you would want to be treated if the roles were reversed?
 - And then whatever you decide, that's what you should do for them
 - This is such an elegant solution for knowing how to act in any given situation... assuming you conduct the experiment sincerely
 - We can't play games with our answer, or else we won't land on the righteous response
 - For example, when trying to decide whether to offer someone your opinion on their choice of outfit, you can't say to yourself, "Well, if I were her, I would want to know that my dress is ugly."
 - That's not answering honestly...the truth is, you wouldn't want to be embarrassed or insulted, and that insight should guide your response to them
- But when used properly, this is a very powerful tool, and it isn't limited to just some situations
 - Jesus says this standard will guide you into righteousness "in everything"

- So no matter who is involved, or what your situation may be, trade places with the other person, and you'll see the proper course
- Examples of this rule at work are literally endless...
- When you drive in traffic, do the thing that you want the other drivers to do for your sake
 - Like use your turn signal, don't tailgate, don't drive aggressively, don't cut someone off in traffic
 - Let someone else have that good parking spot by the door
 - If you hit someone's car in the parking lot, leave your contact info
- At home, consider what you would want from your family members living with you and then do that for them
 - Husbands, offer your wife the TV remote, do the dishes voluntarily, and put the seat down
 - Wives, say "no thank you" to your husband when he offers you the remote, help him do the dishes and put the seat up
 - Parents, enforce rules consistently with your kids, but have grace for their mistakes and never make your love for them conditional on good behavior
 - Children, obey your parents consistently, accept their judgments when you fail, and never make your respect for their authority conditional on getting your own way
 - And so on...
- Now notice, the rule didn't tell us to imagine what we think is best for the other person...
 - Jesus didn't ask us to take a position of judging another person so we could decide what we think is best for them
 - Rather, the rule says do what *you would prefer* be done to you
 - We must become them for a moment in our mind
 - So that as we act selfishly, we're putting our selfishness to work for their sake
 - And that's the secret for why this rule works so well
 - This method harnesses the part of you most responsible for your sin – your pride and ego – and puts them to work for the other person's benefit
 - Pride always acts in its own interest...it's always looking out for #1, it's always seeking to maximize its own outcomes
 - So by putting pride to work for the other person, we naturally arrive at the most selfless response possible
 - Because it's so powerful, I think the Golden Rule is the perfect name for this Scripture
 - Because by following this rule, you can increase your obedience and thereby your potential for reward in the Kingdom

- Less selfishness and greater selflessness equals more opportunity for the Lord to bless you in eternity
- Before we move on, let's take a second look at the end of v.12, as Jesus mentions the "Law and Prophets"
 - That statement should remind us of something He said earlier
 - If we glance back to the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Chapter 5, we find Jesus making a similar statement

Matt. 5:17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

- So as He began His teaching, Jesus declared that He was not an enemy of the Word of God
- And now, here He is again, claiming that His teaching is in line with God's Word
- In Scripture, we call this matching of beginning and end an *inclusio*
 - It's an indication to the reader that everything in between these bookends is related under a common theme or subject
 - So in this case, Jesus is indicating that all His teaching between these two statements was consistent with the Word of God
- Why does Jesus want to emphasize that point? Because His teaching, no doubt, sounded radical to His audience
 - He was teaching concepts that were very different from what a typical Jew had heard about the Kingdom and righteousness
 - But His teaching wasn't radical because it contradicted Scripture...
 - It was radical because it contradicted the Pharisees' teaching
- So Jesus knew that the Pharisees would soon come after Him, accusing Him of trying to abolish the Law and of teaching against Moses, *etc.*
 - Which is why He pre-empted their attack here by defending His teaching as true to the Word
 - More importantly, Jesus wanted His disciples to know how to find and verify spiritual truth...
 - And you discover spiritual truth (and weed out the lies) by comparing what you hear to the Law and the Prophets (the Word of God)
 - Remember, Israel in Jesus' day – like the Church today – was a largely biblically illiterate culture
 - Despite their reverence for the Old Testament, the average Jew understood little of it
 - They relied on the Pharisees to teach them about God
 - And the Pharisees, for their part, preferred to teach people the rules in their

Mishnah, rather than teaching Scripture

- So for the remainder of the chapter, Jesus gives more rules of thumb for discerning between truth and error, between true teachers and false
 - This final section of His sermon is organized as a series of four pairs
 - Each pair features a contrast between spiritual truth and spiritual lies, and the outcomes they produce
- So let's begin with the first pair

Matt. 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

Matt. 7:14 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

- His first contrast is between a narrow gate and a wide gate
 - For a first century Jew, this analogy would have been easy to appreciate
 - Cities in that day were walled for protection, and they had gates in the wall for entry and exit
 - A large city, like Jerusalem, would typically have half a dozen or more gates of various sizes and purposes
 - These gates were designed to support the commerce of the city
 - So wider, more heavily trafficked roads led to larger gates
 - Naturally, the larger gates were the preferred entrance for most people who traveled on these roads
 - There were also smaller, narrow gates located in out-of-the-way places in the wall, away from major roads, facing fields or valleys
 - They typically led to narrow dirt paths that shepherds used to lead flocks into the field, or to valleys where refuse could be dumped
 - So Jesus compares finding spiritual truth to entering a city by way of a narrow gate and path
 - He's saying that finding spiritual truth requires going against the crowd and going out of your way
 - While conventional wisdom would tell us to stay on the wide, easy road and enter the large, more appealing entrance
 - To follow the crowd
- But Jesus says when it comes to entering into spiritual truth, to finding the way to the Kingdom, we can't rely on conventional wisdom or crowds
 - In other words, the Kingdom won't be found by following the majority or by listening to the so-called religious experts
 - In Jesus' day, conventional wisdom held that all Jews were saved simply

because they were Jewish

- The Pharisees taught that God's promises to Israel in the covenants assured every Jew a place in Heaven
- There was even a story told of Abraham standing at the gate of Hades, watching for any Jew who might be sent there by mistake
- Should a Jew end up at the gates of Hell, Abraham would intercept him and send him back to Heaven
- So the Jewish people were taught they were assured the Kingdom
 - That's equivalent to following the wide path and entering by the wide gate... following conventional wisdom with the crowds
 - But Jesus says the masses of Israel – and the world in general – are on a path to destruction
- When Jesus says destruction, he's talking specifically about the Lake of Fire, the Second Death, eternal separation from God
 - We know Jesus means Hell, because He contrasts "destruction" with "life" in v.14, meaning eternal life
 - So it's eternal life on the narrow path, and eternal destruction on the wide path
 - So if someone expected to be in the Kingdom merely because they were Jewish, that was taking the wide path, and it wasn't going to end well
- This same kind of thinking still exists today...I call it the safety-in-numbers myth
 - People generally assume if they are a part of something large, in the majority, then that affirms their point of view
 - That's why businesses tell us they are the largest company in their particular field
 - The largest bank, largest insurance company, largest car maker, largest online store, *etc.*
 - Because if something is big and popular, that means it must be doing something right, we think
 - And that same mentality also guides many people in their search for God and religion
 - We assume that if a particular religious perspective has a large following, or is popular, then it means that religion is onto something
 - And that if a church has an impressive building, a large congregation, a nationally-known pastor, *etc.*, then it's right
 - And we all want to be associated with success, because success and popularity equals "truth", doesn't it?
 - But Jesus says that is not how you find truth
 - That in fact, the truth about God and Heaven is a lot harder to find than most people realize
 - It's not usually found with the majority, because Jesus says in v.14, that few

ever find it

- Which means that if your strategy for Heaven is to follow the crowds, assuming they're onto something, you should think again
- In Jesus' day, the crowds were following the Pharisees and their teaching
 - While Jesus was the narrow path, a way that few elected to take
 - The Pharisees taught the conventional wisdom of the day, the traditional view, long-accepted and time honored
 - While Jesus was saying things that weren't familiar
 - And in many cases, Jesus taught literally the opposite of what the Pharisees taught
 - So only a few, only those who were willing to listen closely and consider what He said, found His path – and it led them to the truth
 - That's still the truth today...when it comes to spiritual truth, the crowds are usually wrong
 - First and foremost, the world is generally made up of unbelievers
 - There are far more lost than saved in the world, so the road to Heaven is very narrow in that sense
 - But even in the Church, we should be careful about accepting conventional wisdom when it comes to understanding God or the Bible
 - Because the more I study the Bible, the more I find that much of the popular teaching of our day is wrong, or at least incomplete
 - On the other hand, a teaching about God or Heaven isn't automatically right simply because it's unconventional
 - The key to knowing what is truth and what isn't, is to compare what you hear to what the Bible actually says (not what someone told you it says)
 - Jesus validated His own teaching by testifying that it was the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, the Word of God
 - Therefore, we should use the same standard
- So we don't accept teaching because it's the common perspective, nor do we reject it out of hand simply because it's new or different
 - In all cases, you should consider what you hear in light of what the Bible says on the matter
 - And if the teacher can't back up their teaching with Scripture, then you have good reason to be suspicious
 - And if they cite Scripture that doesn't support their conclusions, then you should reject the teaching, even if it's conventional wisdom and popular
 - But if what they teach lines up with Scripture and is supported by Scripture, then you can accept it, even if it's not the prevailing view
 - And as you do, you will look around and realize that you're not in the majority anymore...but that's OK. It's always been that way

- This technique is especially important today, when the Church overall is largely biblically illiterate
 - Most Christians know little or nothing of what's in their Bibles, and so how do they decide what's true? They follow the crowds
 - That's a recipe for false teaching and false teachers filling stadiums around the world with deceived people
- Speaking of false teachers, that takes us to the next contrast

Matt. 7:15 “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matt. 7:16 “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

Matt. 7:17 “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Matt. 7:18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Matt. 7:19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matt. 7:20 “So then, you will know them by their fruits.

- I could preach a whole sermon on this passage, but for today, we only need to focus on the contrast Jesus is emphasizing
 - And the contrast is between the fruit of two trees
 - At the very beginning, Jesus explains that the “trees” represent teachers or spiritual leaders
 - So immediately, we understand that Jesus’ point is that we must choose our teachers carefully if we are to find the narrow path
 - We are to watch out for false prophets, but this will be very challenging for us because these people will look the part while inwardly, they are something else
 - Jesus says they will look like sheep on the outside, as if one of the flock
 - But inside they are actually wolves, which in this context, implies being unbelievers who desire to harm the flock
 - Simply put, false teachers are unbelievers masquerading as believers for nefarious reasons, usually personal gain
 - Clearly, we don’t want to take our spiritual instruction from men who do not even possess what they claim to be offering...godliness
 - Peter also warns us of such men

2 Pet. 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon

themselves.

- But this presents a problem...how can we spot these wolves if they are dressed up as sheep?
 - In Jesus' day, Pharisees were the wolves, but to the untrained eye, a Pharisee seemed like the epitome of a godly teacher
 - And in fact, some Pharisees *were* godly, like Nicodemus
 - So how do we tell them apart?
 - Jesus says you look at the fruit...we need to judge the tree by what it produces
 - In this case, the product (fruit) of a false teacher is the spiritual impact of their teaching ministry
 - What comes from them spiritually? Are people under their influence growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus?
 - Does their teaching lead people away from following their sinful flesh and toward obedience to God's Word?
 - Do they cause men and women to act more godly?
 - Or does their teaching appeal to the lusts of the flesh and encourage a love for this world and leave people spiritually malnourished?
 - You can spot false teachers fairly easily using this rule, and when you do, Jesus says you should reject their teaching
 - Not just the bad parts...all of it...because there will be no good parts
 - If the source is bad, then all the fruit is bad...even if it looks good or sounds good
 - So that, even if our favorite preacher or favorite author occasionally says something worthwhile, if they are a bad tree, then we must reject them 100% of the time
- Which leads to the third contrast...because not all who claim to represent God are truly His

Matt. 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Matt. 7:22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

Matt. 7:23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

- I've heard people quote this passage frequently, and many have asked me what this means...because it's such a provocative statement
 - But notice in the context, Jesus is still talking about false prophets, those who claim

to know God and speak for God, yet do neither

- This is not a test for individual Christians...so it was not intended to cause us to doubt what we know we have by our faith in Jesus
- It's supposed to alert us to the reality that not all leaders and teachers are legitimate
- In fact, Jesus focuses on their works, including prophesying in Jesus' name, casting out demons in His name and performing other miracles
 - In this contrast, Jesus doesn't challenge the truthfulness of their assertions, so we should take them at face value
 - These false teachers possessed power, demonic power, to perform signs and wonders before the people
- And yet, those signs were not evidence that these people knew God or could speak on His behalf
 - When the judgment day comes, Jesus says they will be rejected because Jesus never knew them
 - He quotes from Psalm 6:8, which is David declaring that God will put those who are enemies of David far from him at the judgment
 - That's a not-so-subtle way of saying that the Pharisees were not on the side of David and the prophets...they were God's enemies
 - Simply put, they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, and that's what's required for access to Heaven
- This contrast serves as the counterpoint to Jesus' earlier contrast of fruit
 - As Jesus said in the earlier contrast, we are to look at the fruit of a man's ministry, to see if He is truly who he claims to be
 - But now, Jesus adds that the fruit we inspect does *not* include looking at their miraculous signs and wonders
 - Such displays are not proof of anything by themselves
 - And the reason why that's true is because the enemy, Satan, can counterfeit signs and wonders
 - He can grant people the power to do supernatural things at times
 - Later, in Chapter 8, we'll study more of the power and practices of demons
 - But for now, just understand that demons can be clever imitators of God, using miraculous signs and wonders to fool us
 - But the one thing Satan can't counterfeit is godliness
 - So if a false teacher is working with Satan's power, instead of God's power, then though he may have many miraculous signs...
 - His ministry won't be able to produce godliness in those who follow after his teaching
 - That's the fruit we want to inspect, to know if someone is true

- And in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were clearly not godly, loving, charitable, forgiving, compassionate men...they had no fruit
 - And in our day, we need to do our homework
 - We need to understand that just because someone has a large following on TV or elsewhere, tells us nothing about whether they are true
 - Nor can we assume a man is speaking on behalf of God because he displays special powers
 - We just quietly compare his teaching to the Bible, and we take note of its effect in the hearts of those who follow him
- Finally, Jesus turns His attention to His followers for His final contrast

Matt. 7:24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matt. 7:25 “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Matt. 7:26 “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

Matt. 7:27 “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall.”

- With the word “therefore”, Jesus begins to make His final conclusion, using a contrast of two builders
 - Notice in v.24 & v.26, the builders each represent those who hear Jesus' teaching
 - First, there are those who hear what Jesus says, know it to be true, and act on them
 - These are the few who find the narrow path
 - These are the ones who look at the results of Jesus' ministry and recognize it to be fruitful
 - Jesus says these people are building wisely, placing their eternal dwelling on rock
 - And when that dwelling is tested by the elements, it will pass the test
 - It will still be standing when it's over
 - On the other hand, those who hear Jesus' teaching, but reject it in favor of more conventional or preferred views, are fools
 - He's built his house on sand, which is ridiculous because when the storm comes, the house will certainly be washed away
 - It will fail the test
- It should be obvious to all of us what Jesus is implying by His final contrast
 - In fact, there's an interesting progression across all four of these contrasts, if you

stitch them together

- If we want to enter Heaven, the Kingdom, we must select the right way to get there
- Because not all ways lead to Heaven...only one, narrow path will lead us there
- That's placing your trust in Jesus Christ, relying on His death to pay for your sin and accepting His righteousness by faith
- Now even after you have begun down that narrow way, you still must beware false teachers who may try to stumble you and lead you astray
 - So as we go along, we pay attention to the fruit of these men
 - We need to be fed to have strength for the journey, so to speak, and we want to select good fruit, good teaching
 - And even if these men should try to impress us with their large followings or their displays of miracles, we ignore such things
 - We only consider the product of their teaching and make our choices accordingly
- Finally, if we take this path, having heard Jesus' Words and acted on them (that is, having accepted them and placed our faith in them), then we will be prepared for the final test
 - When the judgment day arrives, we will stand for judgment without fear and without destruction, having passed the test
 - We pass it, not because of our accomplishments or wisdom
 - But simply because we believed the truth that we heard from Jesus
- While those on the wide path will face utter destruction on that coming day...they choose to dwell in a house of lies and it will come crashing down in a moment...so choose wisely

- It's time to turn the page (literally) in our study of Matthew
 - Tonight, we move away from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and into a new section of the Gospel
 - Last week capped off His teaching with a series of illustrations that contrasted His teaching with that of the Pharisees
 - For centuries, the Pharisees misled the people of Israel on the nature of righteousness and the Kingdom
 - Because of their negative influence, the nation of Jesus' day was largely biblically illiterate and unfamiliar with the truth
 - So naturally Jesus' sermon was stunning
 - It challenged everything they had ever heard
 - But what was even more challenging, was the way Jesus taught on that day
 - Notice what Matthew himself said about it

Matt. 7:28 When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching;

Matt. 7:29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

- He says that as Jesus finished His first true sermon, the crowds were amazed at His teaching
 - The word "amazed" is more often translated, "astonished"
 - The people just couldn't believe what they were hearing and seeing from Jesus
- In v.29, Matthew says what amazed the people most was that Jesus could teach as one having authority, not as the Pharisees typically taught
 - To understand what Matthew meant, we need to appreciate the normal rabbinical method of teaching
 - I can best explain this problem by comparing the rabbinical teaching tradition to the children's game of telephone
 - That's the game where someone says a phrase to someone else, who then repeats what they hear to the next person, and so on
 - The message changes a little, with each repetition becoming more confusing over time, until it's indistinguishable from the original
 - That's similar to how rabbinical teaching handled the Word of God
 - In the beginning, scribes like Ezra taught directly from the Word of God
 - But as their teaching was handed down from generation to generation, a new tradition developed
 - That tradition required that a new rabbi could not contradict previous rabbinical teaching or attempt to interpret the Word of God directly

- Instead, a rabbi's teaching had to be based on prior teaching, using it as their starting point, without contradicting it
- The idea is similar to the concept of legal court precedent
- A judge renders his or her opinion in a case, based on prior case law, so that his decision is rooted in prior decisions
- So rather than go back to the source, to the Word of God, the rabbis began studying and building upon each other's teaching
- It was like a centuries-old game of telephone
- So by Jesus' day, rabbinical teaching commonly involved summarizing and applying the teaching of former rabbis
 - A rabbi would introduce his own teaching by saying, "Rabbi Solomon said in the name of Rabbi Saul..." and so on
 - In that way, each rabbi's authority grew out of the authority of those who came before him
 - This tradition also had the effect of keeping any new rabbis in line with prior teaching, thus showing respect for past teachers
 - Ironically, while this system gave a rabbi his legitimacy, it also stripped his teaching of any legitimacy whatsoever
 - Each new generation of teachers had to work from the presumption that all prior rabbinical interpretation was accurate
 - So over time, rabbinical teaching moved further and further away from Scripture
 - And since rabbis weren't permitted to go back to the Scriptures themselves, there was no hope to correct false interpretations
- So by Jesus' day, the original message of Scripture was but a faint echo, which is why Jesus' sermon was such a revelation to the crowds
 - For the typical Jew who never studied Scripture for himself and only ever heard the rabbis' twisted interpretations, Jesus was a breath of fresh air
 - They were told to trust their rabbis, since they were part of an unbroken chain of authority going back to Ezra and Moses
 - But the rabbis gave the people rules, not truth, and they substituted manmade speculation for godly insight
 - The people might not be scholars, but they knew truth when they heard it
 - So when they encountered a man like Jesus, full of grace and wisdom and power, teaching self-evident truths straight from Scripture...
 - Never once referring to another rabbi's teaching to support His own conclusions...they recognized Jesus' authority instinctively
 - And when Jesus said His teaching was in keeping with the Law and Prophets, something inside them confirmed He was right
 - But by the same token, it began to dawn on some in the crowd that the

Pharisees were wrong

- Jesus' teaching not only undermined the teaching of the Pharisees, it also challenged their very source of authority
 - Jesus invalidated the rabbinical traditions and delegitimized the Pharisees as guardians of God's truth
 - His teaching proved that understanding the Word of God was not a privilege reserved for ancient rabbis
 - The Word exists apart from everything in Creation, such that even after the Heavens and Earth have passed away, the Word of God will remain
- Most importantly, Jesus set Himself apart from the Pharisees as a Man who could teach by His Own authority
 - And that truly astonished the crowds
 - Jesus' teaching was self-evidently true and wise, and it was wholly different than what the rabbis taught
 - The Church can never again allow a privileged few to claim ownership over God's truth
 - Nor should we assume that past teaching, even by scholarly men, is automatically right when it contradicts Scripture
- So in the span of little more than 20 minutes, Jesus has called out Pharisaic Judaism as an illegitimate system
 - He has repudiated Israel's entire religious system and its leaders
 - And He's declared their view of God and righteousness and the Kingdom invalid and in conflict with the Word of God itself
 - In the process, Jesus has knowingly sowed the seeds of His own death
 - This won't be the moment that the Pharisees launch their conspiracy to kill Jesus, but it sets the stage
 - From this point forward, everyone knew that Jesus was on a collision course with the religious establishment of Israel
 - So where does Jesus go from here?
 - Well, in Chapter 4, Matthew ended by saying Jesus was teaching and healing many diseases, including demonic possession
 - Jesus used the miracles to draw crowds and to validate His message as coming from God
 - The argument goes, that if Jesus has authority over the demonic realm and over the Creation itself, then clearly He is more powerful than both
- So naturally, as Jesus wraps up a powerful teaching about the Kingdom, He moves now to showing His power as the promised King over the world
 - And what follows next is a section in Matthew running from Chapter 8 to the end of Chapter 9, in which Matthew records 10 miracles of Jesus
 - These ten accounts support Jesus' claims to be Messiah

- Matthew arranges these 10 miracles to invite comparisons with the 10 plagues of Egypt, though in an opposite manner
- While Moses' miracles bring destruction to Egypt, Jesus' miracles bring healing and restoration to His people
- Matthew reports miracles spanning three areas
 - Jesus' ability to heal the body, His power over Creation, and His authority over the spirit realm
 - Most importantly, Matthew's section begins and ends with two miracles that are critical to validating Jesus' claim to Messiah
 - We'll study the first one of those tonight

Matt. 8:1 When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him.

Matt. 8:2 And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

Matt. 8:3 Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matt. 8:4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

- Descending the hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus is now leading a large crowd, Matthew says
 - As Jesus approached Capernaum, he encounters a man with leprosy
 - Leprosy, called Hansen's disease today, is a bacterial infection
 - Only about 5% of the world's population is capable of contracting it; 95% of the world is naturally immune
 - Interesting fact...here, in South Texas, armadillos naturally carry the bacteria that causes the disease
 - The bacteria is very slow growing, so the disease progresses through a series of stages over many years
 - First, the nerves in the extremities are attacked, leaving fingers and toes permanently numb and susceptible to injury
 - Then, over the next 10 years or longer, the numbness spreads and lesions develop under the skin over the whole body
 - The skin and hair near the lesions will adopt a yellowish-whitish color, causing the person to begin to turn white all over
 - In later stages, the lesions break through the outer layer of skin, forming sores and scabs and making the skin hard and scaly
 - Nails swell and fall off, gums bleed constantly
 - The nasal passage becomes permanently blocked, there is a constant stream of

- saliva, and the person loses taste and smell
 - In the very last stages, the disease attacks the internal organs
 - The victim suffers from chronic diarrhea, chronic thirst, and a burning fever and ultimately death
- Today, the disease can be treated successfully with a 1-2 year course of antibiotics, but in Jesus' day there was no cure
 - So leprosy sentenced a person to a slow, painful death
 - And because the disease was so mysterious, it made those who contracted it pariahs in their community
 - In Luke's account of this scene, Luke the doctor described the man as "covered" or "full" of leprosy, which means the man was already in the later stages of this horrible disease
- But beyond the horrible physical and social aspects of the disease, we also need to appreciate a uniquely Jewish perspective on this affliction
 - The disease of leprosy is specifically mentioned in Leviticus
 - In fact, this relatively rare disease is the focus of two entire chapters in the book of Leviticus...a total of 116 verses
 - No other disease receives so much attention in the Bible
 - In Leviticus, all suspected lepers were required to be officially diagnosed by the priesthood
 - Once a person was designated a leper, he must tear his clothes and wear torn clothes thereafter
 - He must cover himself from the nose down whenever in public
 - And depending on the stage of the disease, a leper could be clean or unclean, ritually speaking, for periods of time

Lev. 13:9 "When the infection of leprosy is on a man, then he shall be brought to the priest.

Lev. 13:10 "The priest shall then look, and if there is a white swelling in the skin, and it has turned the hair white, and there is quick raw flesh in the swelling,

Lev. 13:11 it is a chronic leprosy on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean...

Lev. 13:12 "If the leprosy breaks out farther on the skin, and the leprosy covers all the skin of him who has the infection from his head even to his feet, as far as the priest can see,

Lev. 13:13 then the priest shall look, and behold, if the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce clean him who has the infection; it has all turned white and he is clean.

Lev. 13:14 "But whenever raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean.

- During some stages, leprosy left the skin intact while turning the body white, and during this stage, a person could be declared clean
 - During more active stages, open sores would be present on the body, making the person unclean
 - As the disease progressed, open sores were the norm and therefore, the person remained in a perpetual state of uncleanness
- The Jewish people understood leprosy to be a defilement, something that made a person unclean to God
 - In fact, even the Hebrew word for leprosy reflects this thinking
 - The word *tzaraat* translates “mark” or “blemish”
 - It refers to something that marks or stains something that is otherwise clean and pure
- When unclean, a leper could not enter the Tabernacle or Temple compound to worship or give sacrifice
 - They were barred from the feasts and family
 - They could not even touch another human being, for doing so made that person unclean for a time
 - Lepers were made to walk down the road yelling “unclean” to warn others to steer clear
- But Leviticus also gave instructions for when a leper was healed of their disease
 - In Leviticus 14, the Lord instructed the priests to verify any supposed healing of leprosy
 - They carefully examined the person’s body for a week, including shaving all body hair to examine the skin
 - If after seven days, there was no evidence of leprosy found, the person was declared healed and the eighth day became a day of rituals to mark the healing
 - The priests conducted a sin offering, a trespass offering, a burnt offering and a meal offering
 - Blood was applied to the leper’s body on the right ear lobe, right thumb and right big toe multiple times, and the body was anointed with oil
 - During the history of Israel, there had never been a time when Leviticus 14 had been used
 - Now there had been famous cases of people struck with leprosy
 - Miriam – however she came before the Law
 - Gehazi, Uzziah were all struck with the disease
 - And none of them were ever healed under the Law
 - In fact, in the time since God gave Israel the Law in Leviticus, no Jew had ever been healed by God of leprosy
 - So the healing rituals in Leviticus 14 had never been put into practice...the

eighth day ritual had never been done

- For all these reasons, the disease had come to be a picture of sin itself
 - Like leprosy, sin lives in the flesh of our body, growing over time to consume us
 - It defiles the body, robbing us of our senses and destroying our fellowship with others
 - It renders us unclean and unable to approach God
 - Ultimately, sin is a death sentence for everyone, just like leprosy
 - And like leprosy, no one can be cured of sin apart from God's mercy
 - But also like leprosy, when we are clean of sin, we are as white as snow

Is. 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"

Says the LORD,

"Though your sins are as scarlet,

They will be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They will be like wool.

- And the Bible also says that such a cleansing can only be accomplished by the application of blood
 - In the case of curing leprosy, Leviticus 14 required the blood of animals to be applied to the body
 - But in the case of sin, only the blood of a perfect sinless human being will satisfy God...only the blood of Christ
- By the time of Jesus' day, the leprosy cleansing ritual had never been instituted because God had not yet provided a cure for the disease
 - And in the case of sin, the solution had not yet appeared either
 - As it turned out, both awaited the arrival of the Messiah
- In fact, the similarities of leprosy and sin led rabbis to conclude that God intended to associate the healing of leprosy with the arrival of the Messiah
 - They concluded that the first person to heal a leper would be the Messiah Himself
 - Supernatural healing was not unknown in Israel
 - The Lord permitted ordinary men to heal the sick and raise the dead by His Spirit, men like Elijah and Elisha did these things
 - But the Father validated His Son's claims to being Messiah by performing similar miracles in Him
 - So that begs the question, how would the Father distinguish between the miracles regular prophets performed from those done by His Son?
 - The answer is, the Father reserved certain specific miracles for Jesus, miracles that no other man had ever been permitted to perform

- Dr. Fruchtenbaum has coined the term “Messianic Miracles” to describe these special, Messiah-authenticating miracles
- One of these unique miracles was the healing of leprosy described here in Matthew
- Until this moment, no Jew had ever yet been cured of leprosy, so Leviticus 14 had never been put into action
 - But now, a man approaches Jesus with advanced leprosy, and as he does, he bows before Jesus
 - And as he seeks healing from Jesus, he begins saying “if you are willing”
 - Those two details tell us everything we need to know about the man’s heart
 - First, by kneeling before Jesus, the man enters into a posture of worship
 - He makes a public declaration of deity, which is no small thing in Jewish society
 - Jews were extremely adamant about not worshipping anything other than Yahweh
 - They even barred images of people or animals on their coins for fear of violating the commandment against idolatry
 - Yet here’s a Jew willing to give His worship to Jesus, which indicates he recognized Jesus to be God in some sense
 - And saying “if you are willing”, the man acknowledges that Jesus has the power to do something that had never been done before in history
 - For this man, it wasn’t a question of if Jesus could accomplish this miracle
 - The man knew Jesus had the power to heal leprosy, so the only question was whether it was God’s will to do so
 - Taking those two statements together, there’s no doubt this man believed Jesus to be the divine Messiah promised to Israel
- So by his faith, this man sets the stage for Jesus to perform the first of three Messianic Miracles, proving His claims to be Messiah
 - And in the process, He also takes the opportunity to distinguish Himself once more from the Pharisees
 - Jesus stretched out His hand and did the unthinkable in Jewish society...He touched the man
 - This may have been the first human contact this man had experienced in years
 - No self-respecting Pharisee would have dared to do such a thing, even if he had the power to heal leprosy
 - But Jesus touches the man to make Him clean
 - So in effect, Jesus makes the man clean by taking upon Himself the man’s uncleanness
 - Symbolically, Jesus took the man’s curse so that the man might be freed from it
 - And in the process, Jesus performed the Messianic miracle

- He didn't just stop the progression of the disease
- That's all modern medicine could have done for this man...killing the bacteria just stops the worsening of the conditions
- But existing damage can't be repaired
- Unless you're God, of course
 - The Gospels say the man was instantly cleansed, as in all traces of the disease were removed immediately...a divine miracle
 - The man was as good as new
- Now notice in v.4, what Jesus tells the man to do next
 - Jesus first says, see to it that you tell no one
 - Jesus' concern wasn't secrecy, but rather priority
 - Jesus knew this man would be overjoyed at his healing, and naturally, he would want to share it with everyone he knew
 - But Jesus' priority was the fulfillment of Leviticus 14, and so He commands the man not to become distracted with celebrations
 - Instead, Jesus wants the man to take the three-day journey south to Jerusalem to present himself to the priests in the temple as Leviticus 14 requires
 - And when he arrived at the temple, the man was to present the offering as Moses commanded
 - This was that 8-day complex series of offerings required by Leviticus 14, an event that had never before been seen in all Israel's history
 - So what do you suppose the response was going to be among the priests and all the leaders of Israel when a cleansed leper arrives at the temple?
 - They will not be able to deny his healing
 - Because Leviticus 13 would have required this same man to present himself to the priests on numerous occasions in the past
 - And so his leprosy would have been well-known and his diagnosis would have been recorded in the temple records
 - But now the man appears fully cleansed, and not just in remission, but his body completely restored
 - As they recognize the magnitude of what has happened, the priests will realize that one of the Messianic miracles will have taken place
 - They will have no choice but to acknowledge that the Messiah was in their midst
 - What's more, the priests will be digging out Scripture to remind themselves of what they do next in response, since it was unprecedented
 - And as they accomplish the rituals required, they perform a beautiful picture of the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the sake of sin
- That's why Jesus ends His instructions in v.4, saying this will be a testimony to them
 - This man's healing was certainly a blessing to him personally, and as such, it was a

beautiful display of God's mercy and grace

- But more importantly, the restoration of His body was intended to communicate something far more important to Israel
- That a divine Healer had arrived, the One Who had power to heal both the body and the soul
- And that He had the power and willingness to make men clean
- As a result of this miracle, Mark reports that Jesus could no longer openly enter a city, for fear of the Pharisees
 - Because as soon as the Pharisees learned of this healing, they traveled down from Jerusalem to investigate the miracle
 - That was a requirement of rabbinical law, that when a Messianic miracle took place, an investigation must follow to verify the man's claim to be Messiah
- So the question was, would these religious leaders embrace Jesus as Messiah in light of the incontrovertible evidence Jesus was giving them?
 - But there's where things get difficult
 - Because for the priests and scribes to acknowledge Jesus was Messiah, meant they also must concede that their system was bankrupt
 - Jesus has set Himself against the establishment and its way of teaching, so you couldn't have it both ways
- So if you were a rabbi invested in the current system, you had to make a tough choice
 - In order to embrace the Messiah and the Kingdom, you had to reject your culture, your system, your livelihood, your own identity
 - Or you could hold on to your prized position of power and reject Jesus despite His miracles, which meant you must find a way to discredit His claims
- Every generation since then has been faced with the same choice...keep the system that rules your life, or reject the world and come to Jesus

Matthew 8B

- When Moses spoke to the people of Israel, following the Exodus, he promised them that one day in the future, the Lord would bring Israel another deliverer

Deut. 18:15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

- This new Prophet would be raised up from within Israel, Moses says, and He would be far greater than Moses was
 - Because though Moses freed God’s people from slavery in Egypt, this new Prophet would free Israel from slavery to sin
 - And though Moses offered Israel entry into Canaan, the new Prophet would usher Israel into the eternal Kingdom
 - And just as Moses’ ministry was accompanied by great miracles, so would the ministry of this new Moses include miraculous signs
- Matthew recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, that prophet foretold by Moses
 - So as Matthew moves into Chapters 8-9, and begins describing Jesus’ miracles, he draws upon the Exodus story for inspiration
 - In these two chapters, Matthew records ten miracles Jesus performs during the early weeks and months of His ministry in the Galilee
 - We know from other Gospels, that these ten miracles did not happen in the sequence Matthew presents, or even within the same period of time
- Instead, Matthew takes artistic license in compiling these ten incidents so that he could tell a larger story
 - He creates a single narrative that gives us an overview of Jesus’ miracles in the Galilee
 - And more importantly, it draws our attention back to the Exodus story and Jesus’ connection to Moses in Scripture

- But keep in mind, that these ten miracles are not direct parallels to the miracles Moses did
 - We won't find Jesus working with flies or frogs or blood and the like
 - These ten miracles connect Jesus to Moses only in loose ways
 - For example, they are connected simply by the fact that Matthew chose to report ten miracles in this section, just as there were ten plagues
 - Secondly, the first miracle in this discourse, which we studied last time, involved a healing of leprosy
 - Similarly, Moses' start in ministry began with God giving him a miraculous demonstration of healing leprosy

Ex. 4:6 The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

Ex. 4:7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

Ex. 4:8 "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

- Once again, the circumstances are different, but the parallels are evident
 - So Matthew places Jesus' healing of leprosy at the start of this section to emphasize a connection to Moses' ministry
 - And then we also noted last time, that this was a Messianic miracle, proving Jesus was the promised successor to Moses
- Later in this section, Matthew will record Jesus showing command over a stormy Sea of Galilee
 - Obviously, that moment evokes a memory of Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea
 - So in these ways, Matthew implies that Jesus is the greater Moses Who was promised to Israel
- One final note...Matthew divides his account into three sections; and these sections are separated by short scenes relating Jesus' power to His authority

- So the first section opening Chapter 8, consists of miracles over the body
 - That section is followed by a scene demonstrating Jesus' authority over His disciples
 - Then, we have a second section of miracles over the Creation itself
 - And that's followed by a scene depicting Jesus' authority over His enemies
 - Finally, we end with miracles concerning the spiritual realm
- So by the end of Chapter 9, Matthew will show Jesus having power and authority over all things, whether on earth or in Heaven
 - He has command over both the body and soul
 - He has authority over His followers and over His enemies
 - And He rules over this world and the next
- With that, let's look at Jesus' second healing miracle

[Matt. 8:5](#) And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him,

[Matt. 8:6](#) and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented."

[Matt. 8:7](#) Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

- Jesus' second miracle takes place in His home base in the Galilee, in a small fishing village on the NW side of the Sea of Galilee
 - This is the hometown for Peter and Andrew, and earlier, we learned Jesus had moved here with His mother and brothers from Nazareth
 - As He returns from the hillside and enters the town, Jesus encounters a request from a Roman centurion
 - A centurion was an officer in the Roman army, responsible for a hundred men, so he's a man of some importance
 - More importantly, the centurion is not Jewish, obviously

- So we should ask why is a Roman centurion coming to a Jewish rabbi for help?
- Normally when Romans needed supernatural assistance, they appealed to their gods in pagan temples, not to Jewish rabbis
- Moreover, Jews and Romans were enemies, and had nothing to do with one another, except when absolutely required
- So why did the Roman think that Jesus might be inclined to help him?
- In fact, in Luke's Gospel, we learn that the centurion didn't even presume to come to Jesus personally with this request
 - Instead, Luke reports that the centurion sent a group of Jewish elders of the city to represent his interests before Jesus
 - They testified to Jesus of the centurion's good works on behalf of the city's Jews and their local synagogue
 - The Roman likely assumed Jesus wouldn't entertain a Roman's request for help otherwise
- So what was the centurion thinking?
 - First notice, he calls Jesus "Lord", not rabbi
 - The term means "master" or "one of authority"
 - So the centurion is acknowledging that Jesus is more than a teacher
 - His words suggest that he knows Jesus possesses real authority
 - Secondly, the Roman is seeking help for a sick servant
 - That's notable, because in Roman culture, servants (or literally the word means a "young slave") were expendable
 - They were commodities that could be easily replaced, and so a sick slave was not reason for great concern
 - Certainly, a Roman officer would not go to this effort to seek care for his servant, especially from a Jew
 - Finally, the servant's sickness is described as a fever that paralyzes and torments the slave terribly

- The centurion knew Jesus wasn't a doctor, yet he expects Jesus to heal the man
- And the description of the ailment, using the word "torment", strongly suggests his affliction may have been the result of demonic possession
- If so, then the centurion's choice to seek after Jesus suggests he recognized that Jesus had authority over both the body and the spirit
- So what conclusion would we draw about this man, given those details?
 - First, he sees Jesus as a spiritual authority
 - Secondly, he has a history of showing regard for God's people, even though in earthly terms, Israel was Rome's enemy
 - Thirdly, he demonstrates uncommon love and concern for the weak and vulnerable under his care
 - And finally, he believes Jesus has power over the body and over the spirit
- The only logical conclusion is, this Roman has been touched by the Spirit of God and come to believe in not only the God of Israel but also His Messiah, Jesus
 - Simply put, the Roman centurion is a believer and his actions are a reflection of his heart of faith
 - And Jesus' response to him in v.7 gives us added evidence
 - Notice, Jesus immediately says He will come to heal the man's servant, which suggests Jesus sees this man as one of His
 - So here, we find the first Gentile in Matthew's Gospel to show faith in the Messiah
 - Remember, the themes of Matthew's Gospel are that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and Abrahamic covenant
 - Matthew already showed Jesus healing a Jew with leprosy for the first time, which is evidence that Jesus fulfills the Davidic covenant
 - And now, we see a Gentile being included in the Kingdom

- Which is a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that his seed, the Messiah, would bless all nations, both Jew and Gentile
- Even more remarkably, God has chosen a Gentile whose role in Roman society must have greatly constrained his ability to live-out his faith
 - A centurion was charged with guarding Roman interests in Judea, usually at the expense of the Jews
 - And as an officer in the Roman army, he would have been expected to worship the emperor and Roman pagan gods
 - So as this man embraced Jehovah, he would have immediately been conflicted over following his heart or obeying his culture
 - Yet somehow, he didn't let his position in Roman society prevent him from keeping the two greatest commandments
 - He's showing love for God and for his fellow man
 - But that doesn't mean it was easy or came without cost
 - I wonder if he paid a price for his support to the local Jewish synagogue or if his kindness to them raised suspicions among his superiors?
 - Or when he sought the help of a Jewish rabbi for a servant, did the men under his command think he had gone soft?
 - And when his duties required he pay homage to Roman gods in the local pagan temple, did he struggle with his conscience?
 - Obviously, we won't find answers to these questions in the text, but I think it's safe to assume this man faced such challenges
 - Yet, it's equally evident he found a way to deal with them
 - Perhaps he explained his desire to fund the local synagogue to his superiors as a way of maintaining Jewish support in the town
 - Perhaps he defended his regard for servants as proof he was a commander who looked out for those under his charge
 - Perhaps he made appearances in the Roman temple when required, but silently prayed to the God of Israel rather than to idols

- Whatever he did, he's a great example that devotion to Christ won't be easy, but it doesn't mean we have to retreat from participating in our world
 - On the contrary, our involvement in this world is how we bring light into darkness
 - Sometimes, we can work the two worlds together easily
 - But many times, we will have to make measured choices that carry some risk
- Just do your best to stay engaged in the world, while remaining faithful to your witness
 - But don't be afraid to take risks at times...like this man must have done...as he did when he came to Jesus publicly
 - Because often, that's when you'll see God work the biggest miracles
- So Jesus agrees to go, and according to Luke's Gospel, Jesus begins to follow the Jewish elders toward the centurion's house
 - But when the centurion hears that Jesus is coming, he quickly dispatches a second group of friends to meet Jesus along the way to give Him a message

Matt. 8:8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Matt. 8:9 "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."

Matt. 8:10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.

Matt. 8:11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;

Matt. 8:12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matt. 8:13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.

- The centurion tells Jesus it's not necessary that Jesus physically come to the centurion's house
 - He said he was not even worthy or deserving to have the Messiah enter into his home
 - And the centurion probably meant this in two ways
 - First, he no doubt would have known that Jews could not enter a Gentile home out of concern for becoming ritually unclean
 - Knowing this, the centurion didn't want to defile Jesus or become cause for Jesus to be dishonored
 - Secondly, the centurion had obvious reverence for Jesus, and having God's anointed in his home was simply too great an honor
 - And while that was true, Jesus was still willing to go
 - Because by the grace of God, the Messiah came to redeem sinners like this man, but the centurion didn't understand that
 - So he insisted that Jesus not lower Himself by entering the centurion's home
 - Instead, the Roman declares that he knows Jesus has the ability to heal from a distance merely by His Word
 - Now, Jesus never claimed to have this ability, and up to this point, Jesus has never done such a thing
 - So this man has made a remarkable assumption about Jesus' power to heal
 - Keep in mind that the centurion had to send a second delegation to intercept Jesus and tell Him not to bother coming
 - Which tells us the centurion never expected Jesus would come to his house in the first place
 - Which is why he quickly dispatched a second group of messengers to stop Jesus when he learned Jesus was coming
 - His faith was so great, he assumed from the beginning that Jesus could heal by His Word

- Interestingly, that first delegation of Jewish elders that the centurion sent to Jesus never thought to suggest that Jesus could just heal by His Word
 - They were ready to escort Jesus back to the centurion's house
 - It never occurred to those Jewish elders to tell Jesus, "You don't need to travel", because they didn't have such faith
 - That tells you how truly special this centurion's response was
- The man's assumption is so remarkable, in fact, that he felt compelled to explain his rationale to Jesus upfront
 - He says through his messengers that he understood how authority worked
 - Being a man in command, he knew that a word was all that was required to get results
 - When he issued a command, results followed, just as his word declared, because that's the mark of authority
 - There's an obvious leadership principle evident at work here, of course, and certainly that's part of the man's thinking
 - The desires of one in authority will be carried out by those who are under his or her authority
 - But the man is testifying to a lot more than merely good leadership principles
 - He's saying something very special about Jesus
- First, ask yourself: over what did the centurion believe Jesus had authority? That is, how did he expect Jesus' Word to result in the slave's healing?
 - In the case of a centurion's authority, it's easy to appreciate how his word would lead to action
 - A soldier under his command would hear the commander's instructions, decide to obey, and then do what was ordered
 - But by what mechanism did the centurion assume Jesus would exercise His authority?
 - So who listened when Jesus spoke? Who would carry out His instructions? The slave? The demons? The human body itself?

- And that question is especially important, considering the centurion was expecting Jesus' Word to operate from miles away
- These questions lead us to our second and more profound conclusion
 - Somehow, this man concluded that Jesus' Word had inherent power and authority
 - That as Jesus spoke, His Words would accomplish things merely by their very existence
- How did he arrive at this conclusion?
 - I imagine that somewhere along the way, the centurion must have been taught by his Jewish friends from the Scriptures
 - He must have learned that all things in the Universe were brought into existence by the Word of God
- As in Genesis 1 where the Lord said, "Let there be light", and it was so
 - That by the authority of His Word, God brought the Creation itself into existence
 - And that the same Creator Who brought everything into existence by His Word, could also direct the course of that Creation by His Word
- So by logical deduction, this centurion concluded that Jesus' Word was the Word of the Creator
 - That merely by speaking His Word, Jesus could make things happen
 - His Word could expel demons, His Word could heal the body, His Word could restore a slave to health
 - And since Jesus' Words were power in themselves, it didn't depend on anyone or anything hearing Jesus or acting for Him
 - Rather, the Word of God possesses inherent power over Creation
 - God's Word immediately and completely accomplishes all that it declares, merely on the basis of its existence
 - The Word of God itself makes this claim

**Is. 55:11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,**

Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- Notice that Isaiah says the Word of God has inherent power to accomplish whatever God has declared
 - The Word of God isn't a set of instructions waiting to be put into action by some other agent or power
 - It is an agent of action...it is power
- Notice in v.13, that as Jesus witnesses this man's faith, He responds by saying it will be done as you have believed
 - Jesus doesn't say *because* you have believed, but *as* you have believed
 - In other words, what the man was saying about the power of God's Word was true
 - So as the centurion believed the Word of God to be, so will it now be shown to be, Jesus is saying
 - And instantly, Matthew says, the slave was healed back at the centurion's house
 - I love to imagine how this occurred from the perspective of the centurion himself
 - Remember, Jesus and the centurion never meet
 - The centurion remains in his home, probably waiting by the side of his servant
 - And then suddenly the servant is healed before his eyes, based on a Word spoken by Jesus miles away
 - I ask you: was the centurion surprised?
 - Perhaps he was startled by the moment, but I don't think he was surprised by the outcome
 - He knew Jesus was willing, because Jesus was already on His way
 - The centurion was simply waiting for the Word of God to accomplish what God desired

- He knew it could happen, and so he was just waiting on God's timing
- This example is why this church and every Bible-believing Christian should care so much about the Word of God
 - We recognize that in this book, we will find not only truth that guides our thinking, but also power to see it come to pass
 - As the Word of God is read, declared, studied and understood, lives will be changed in miraculous ways
 - The Word of God has power to strengthen relationships, break habits, heal hurts, bring repentance, and save souls
 - These things come to pass in God's timing, according to His will, but the power to bring them about is found in the Word of God
 - But that power is altogether different than what can be accomplished by the words of men
 - And to understand what I mean, consider a simple example
 - How should we help men become better husbands to their wives?
 - An accomplished counselor could teach a seminar for a group of men, explaining how they should treat their wives better
 - He could speak eloquently, provide principles and examples, and give a long list of reasons why his advice is correct
 - The men could nod their heads in agreement and commit to applying what they learned
 - But regardless, the man's words had no power by themselves to bring about any positive change
 - They might be true and sensible, and they make the men feel better about marriage
 - And some men might even benefit from what they learned
 - But good advice and psychology only find their power for change in the will of the individual who receives that advice
 - And how much trust do you place in your own will to accomplish anything good and lasting inside yourself?

- But when we turn to the Word of God and read:

[Eph. 5:25](#) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

[Eph. 5:28](#) So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

- Those words might sound very similar to the ones spoken by our marriage counselor or friend
 - But the difference is, the Word of God comes with power
 - The Lord has given every believer in the Church His Spirit to guide us into holiness, into Christ-like thinking and living
 - He's like a spiritual engine inside us, working out the changes we need to make in our lives and empowering us to make them
 - In time, husbands experience conviction, hearts are softened, behaviors change, healing begins, godliness takes hold
- But like all engines, the Spirit needs fuel to operate
 - And the fuel for that engine, the Bible says, is the Word of God
 - So how much spiritual change you experience in your life will depend, in part, on how much fuel you consume
- But you won't fully realize the power of the Word of God, unless you understand it the way this centurion did
 - You have to recognize that the Word of God has *inherent* power that nothing else can equal
 - Knowing this, you devote yourself to pursuing a life-long relationship with God through His Word
- And don't mistake an intellectual pursuit of information for a relationship
 - We're talking about being like this centurion
 - Seeking out the will of God as expressed by His Word, confident that what God has declared, He will accomplish

- And then living our lives by the light of that revelation
- This centurion apparently understood the deep theological truths that Jesus was God in the flesh, and that His Word had inherent power over Creation
 - And this was such astounding insight and faith, that it impressed even Jesus
 - When Jesus heard this man, Jesus genuinely marveled at his faith
 - This is one of those moments in the Gospels when you can see how the deity of Jesus was limited by His human form
 - Because Jesus isn't pretending or lying
 - He truly didn't expect to hear this response from this man
 - And we know that because Jesus had already begun to walk toward the man's house
 - Jesus says his faith was unequalled in all Israel
 - That's both condemnation and praise in one statement
 - First, Jesus is condemning the Jewish leaders – and Jewish society in general – for not having the same appreciation
 - Consider that this is a Gentile centurion, yet he demonstrates a remarkable insight into Jewish theology about God
 - So he must have spent time in personal study of the Torah
 - And that study awoke him to the truth of God and of a Messiah, and that recognition resulted in his obtaining eternal life
 - Secondly, his study softened his heart toward God's people, leading him to be generous and kind to the Jews of the city
 - Thirdly, it gave him love and compassion for those under his charge, even for the least within his household
 - Finally, it gave him a confident faith in God's Word, believing it could accomplish anything in God's will
 - That's a cycle, or pattern, we should all follow and it begins and ends with God's Word

- First, studying the Word brings us to God, then it changes us to be more like God, and ultimately it makes us dependent on His Word
- Then, as our dependence on God's Word grows, so does our desire for God and for God's people
- And as our love grows, so does our reverence for the power and authority of God's Word
- So why didn't the Jewish people see the same things?
 - Jesus gives us the answer elsewhere in the Gospels

[Mark 12:24](#) Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

- He says it's because they didn't examine the Scripture with honest intentions, nor with an appreciation for its power
- Back in Matthew 8:11-12, Jesus says this centurion's trust in God's Word is an example of the many Gentiles who will be in the Kingdom
 - That there will be many from east and west who will sit with the Jewish patriarchs at the banquet table in the Kingdom
 - After Jesus' Second Coming, a feast will inaugurate His 1,000-year Kingdom period on earth, the Bible says
 - That feast will be the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, and Jesus says it will be attended by all saints
 - Obviously, the patriarchs will be in attendance, probably seated near the head of some unbelievably huge table or tables
 - But Jesus also says that people from east and west will be there too, referring to Gentile nations from across the world
 - You and I will be seated there...and that day is not that long away....it will be here before you know it
 - But there will be some people missing from that moment, Jesus says, people who were expecting to be there, seated in the choice seats
 - Jesus calls these missing people the "sons of the Kingdom", which was a term that the Pharisees often used to describe themselves

- Pharisees expected God to reward them for their self-righteous, ritualistic piety
- But Jesus says that nonsense won't get them a ticket to the banquet... only faith in the power of Jesus' Word gets us a seat at that table
 - Instead, they would be in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth and outer darkness
 - Those are Matthew's favorite terms for the Lake of Fire, the final eternal abode for all unsaved souls
 - In Greek, the text says "the" weeping and "the" gnashing, meaning intense sorrow and intense anger at what they will experience
- The Bible is filled with ironies like this...
 - So-called wise men, who were really fools when it came to God, while the supposedly lost and forgotten were those remembered by God
 - What determines who will be who? What you believe about Jesus and His Word...faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ

- Let's return to Matthew's two-chapter section on Jesus' miracles in the Galilee
 - Performing miraculous signs was one of the key ways Jesus demonstrated the truth of His claims
 - Because talk is cheap, but miracles are currency
 - Miracles are, by definition, extraordinary happenings that can't be explained by natural means
 - So when a man accomplishes a miracle, it means God is with him
 - And if God is willing to bestow His power on that person, then it also means God is endorsing the person's claims
 - And therefore, as Jesus accomplished miracles, the Father was testifying by His Spirit that Jesus' claims were trustworthy
 - So these miracles validate every claim Jesus made about Himself
 - In fact, Jesus' miracles were such powerful testimony, that they forced His critics to try and explain them away
 - Like the young Jewish boy who tried to explain one of God's best known miracles

Little Moishe, aged 6, comes home from synagogue excited and his father asks why. He replies that he learned the story of Passover today and it was totally fascinating.

He explains, "Moses was about to take the Jews out of Egypt when suddenly the Israeli Air Force appeared with their thundering jets, and bombed Egypt. Then the Egyptian forces sent out their helicopters and the Israeli Air Force shot them down, whereupon Moses crossed the ocean on Israeli ships."

The father, incredulous at his son's rendition of the Exodus story, asked him, "Is that the story they taught you in school?"

The boy replies, "No, but if I told you the real story, you wouldn't believe me."

- That's the power of miracles...they forced Jesus' audience to consider His claims
 - So in this section, Matthew highlights ten miracles Jesus did while in the Galilee that support His claims to be Messiah and deity
 - He compiled these miracles carefully, to provide a representative cross-section of all that Jesus did in the Galilee
 - And they emphasize Jesus' power and authority over everything: Heaven and earth, body and spirit, this age and the next
 - But as I've mentioned, Matthew changed the order of these events and combined them into three groups of miracles to tell a larger story
 - Today, we cover the final miracle in the first group of physical healings
 - And in this miracle, we'll see clearly how Matthew moved the order of events around

Matt. 8:14 When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever.

Matt. 8:15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him.

- In Matthew's account, Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law is recorded after His encounter with the centurion
 - But in reality, these events happened in another moment, on a Sabbath day, immediately following a Sabbath service in Capernaum
 - In that service, Jesus had just healed a man possessed with a demon, and the impact on those present was immediate
 - In our upcoming visit to Israel, we will walk into the very same synagogue in which Jesus performed this miracle
 - And Mark 1:29 tells us that immediately after the Sabbath service, Jesus traveled to Peter's home
 - Turning back to Matthew's description of these events, the first thing worth noting is that Peter had a mother-in-law
 - Which means that Peter had a wife
 - In fact, Paul says in 1 Cor 9:5 that all the apostles and all of Jesus' brothers took believing wives
 - And Paul adds that this was the right of any servant of Christ
 - Which is a denial of any doctrine that claims God's servants must remain unmarried and celibate
 - It's likely Peter invited Jesus to his home to serve him a meal following the Sabbath service, not necessarily for the sake of the mother-in-law
 - Nevertheless, as they arrive at the house, Mark says the disciples immediately told Jesus about her condition
 - That suggests her situation was serious, and it occurred to someone that Jesus could be the solution
 - In that day, a fever was considered a disease, rather than a symptom
 - As we know today, fever can be caused by any number of ailments, and we don't know what disease she had
 - But whatever the cause, her fever was serious enough that it prevented her from rising from bed
 - And we must assume that it was serious enough that it warranted a supernatural healing
 - Matthew then says Jesus went to see the woman, touched her hand, and she was immediately healed
 - Mark describes Jesus as raising the woman out of bed by lifting her hand, and Luke says Jesus rebuked the fever

- So all three things happened...Jesus spoke against the disease, reached out to touch the woman, and as she was healed Jesus helped her to her feet
 - The touch of Jesus instantly removed the fever and she was all at once able to function normally
 - What an amazing feeling that must have been for her
- This is the third healing of a physical body Matthew has recorded in this first section of miracles
 - There are three groups of miracles in these two chapters
 - This first group consists of miracles of healing the body
 - The second group of miracles consists of power over Creation
 - And the third group of miracles shows Jesus' power over the spiritual realm
 - As we complete each section, I want to take a moment to consider Jesus' power over healing, over Creation and over the spirit realm
 - In this section, Matthew showed Jesus healing three diseases: leprosy, paralysis and a general fever
 - The first healing was done by Jesus' Word alone
 - This third healing was done by His touch
 - And in between, Jesus healed without a word or touch, but merely by His will
 - Matthew's point is to show us that Jesus has inherent power over the physical condition of humanity
 - He has power to correct our physical weaknesses, our infirmities, our injuries – all our physical limitations
 - Sometimes, He chose to employ a physical element in the process, like a touch or word, but He is not dependent on anything physical
 - He isn't dependent on a word or even on being physically present
 - Merely Jesus' will to heal someone is enough to bring it to pass
 - There's something in theology called "The Conservation of Miracles" – it's a principle that holds that God chooses to work through natural means 99.9% of the time
 - This suits His long-term purpose to not turn the whole thing into a side-show
 - This requires us to depend on faith from the Word, not on sight from miracles
 - This doesn't mean that God *can't* do them, or *never* does them – it means He *rarely* does them, because He chooses to work through natural means most of the time
 - So it doesn't mean that God didn't intervene if an Aspirin solves your problem – there was still the blessing of God making that available to us
 - But there is still a place today for God to work outside of the natural
 - Which means that even though Jesus has departed from the earth for a time, and isn't physically present with us, nevertheless, He still has power to heal

- Jesus lives to intercede for His Church, and He may heal us when He desires, from a distance and without a touch or word, merely by His will
- And the Bible encourages us to pray for His mercy to heal
- So we should take full advantage of that opportunity, knowing He has this power to do it
- But even as we recognize Christ's power to heal, we must also acknowledge that He does not grant healing every time we request it
 - In fact, the last time I checked, the death rate for Christians is 100%
 - This body will fail us eventually...and unless Christ returns for us first, physical death is inevitable
 - Therefore, regardless of how many times Christ may say "yes" to our request for healing, sooner or later, His answer to that prayer will have to be no
 - Sooner or later, He will withhold healing and allow our bodies to fail
 - In fact, being healthy is simply the slowest possible way to die
 - Which leads us to an important conclusion that Matthew wants us to understand from observing Jesus' power to heal the body
 - If Jesus has power to reverse the very causes for why our body fails, then that means He has power to grant us eternal life
 - And yet, because we know He doesn't preserve this body forever, then self-evidently, He must have something better in store for us
 - And in fact, Scripture teaches that one day, Christ will heal your body permanently and completely
 - But that healing is not accomplished by repairing your current body
 - The Bible says your present body is not an appropriate home for your spirit
 - Your current body is flawed, broken, defective...it was born with a birth defect called "sin", and that problem simply can't be fixed
- So Christ has something better planned for you...He's going to replace our defective bodies
 - In fact, when I say "you", I'm not talking about your physical body at all
 - Because your physical body is not you
 - I like to compare the physical body to a rental car, something we use for a while and then turn back in when we're done with it
 - And like a rental car, we shouldn't get too attached to our current bodies because we know we're going to return it soon
 - The Bible says your body will return to dust, along with the entire earth and all the universe
 - It all burns up and disappears in a future day
 - But the real you, that is your spirit, lives on eternally
 - Ironically, the unbelieving world gets this whole process completely backwards, as

is so often the case with unbelievers

- The world thinks that the physical world will last forever (*i.e.*, billions of years)
- But they then tell us that people are temporary, that we live a few decades, and then we cease to exist
- So they make their goal getting the most out of this world, while ignoring any questions of eternity or Heaven or Hell
- But the truth is exactly the opposite...the world is temporary, it's going to disappear in a day to come, and so will your physical body
 - But you last forever
 - Your body may die, but your body isn't you, and after you shed this container, you get something new and life goes on
 - So don't put much focus on the condition of your rental car body
 - Instead, consider the question of where will we spend eternity?
 - And what will you find when you get there?
- So Christ's plan for healing you isn't an extended warranty with unlimited repairs of your current body
 - His solution is replacing that failing body with something much better
 - The Bible says in a day to come, we will be resurrected into new, eternal, glorified bodies
 - Our new bodies will be like Christ, Paul says
 - We will never die again, never hurt, never experience sickness or infirmities, never grow weak, never get old
 - Can you wrap your brain around that?
 - How amazed will we be to experience that life?
 - Will we not thank the Lord every day for having been freed from this curse of death?
 - That will be our eternal state, living with Christ
 - And Jesus' healings in Matthew 8 is our proof that Jesus has the power to make these things happen
 - Our bodies are clay in His hands, and He can mold them – or remold them – as He pleases
 - And He promises to do that for those who come to Him in faith
 - So let me ask you, which would you rather have forever?
 - Would you prefer to hold on to your current body with all its wear and tear and mileage and problems and limitations?
 - Having to experience getting sick, getting injured, and then Jesus healing you only to get sick again down the road?
 - And all the while, your body just gets more wrinkled and frail?

- Is that what you prefer?
- Or would you prefer to turn-in that lemon of a body for a shiny, new body with the new car smell and no dents, no rattles?
 - It never breaks down, it never gets dirty
 - It can't run out of gas
 - It's perfect forever
- Obviously, we all want that new shiny car, and most of us are ready to dump our old, worn out body
 - But as the saying goes...everyone wants to go to Heaven, but no one wants to die
 - You have to be ready to let this one go whenever that time comes, in order to receive that new and better body
 - Consider Paul's attitude when it comes to this topic

2 Cor. 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

2 Cor. 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

2 Cor. 4:18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Cor. 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Cor. 5:2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,

- Paul says don't lose heart by focusing on the decay of your physical body
 - That's what happens when you place too much emphasis on trying to save this body...it causes us to lose heart
 - Because you can't save it, it's a losing battle
- The course of every person's life, Paul says, is decay, whether that happens quickly or takes many decades
 - Knowing this, Paul says take satisfaction in your internal man, that is your spirit, as it's being strengthened and matured during this time
 - Christ will use your experiences and trials on earth to train you for greater things to come
- Paul calls these experiences light and momentary afflictions
 - Your physical ailments are light and momentary
 - Our crises and disappointments and setbacks and failings and hurts and persecutions are light and momentary

- They are light when compared to the weight of the glory coming in our new bodies in the Kingdom
 - And they are momentary compared to how long our blissful eternal life will last
- Instead, Paul says Christians should take heart in knowing our “tent” (*i.e.*, our earthly body) is being torn down (dying)
 - For as long as we live in this body, we will groan, meaning we will lament its weaknesses
 - But we also know we’re destined by faith in Jesus to receive a new building, a new body from God in the future
 - That new body will be our eternal dwelling, a glorified body for our new spirit in Christ...
 - And that’s where we find our hope to get through each day here while we await that glory
- That’s a biblical perspective on healing
 - We earnestly seek healing from Jesus in our prayer life, and sometimes, He will choose to heal us
 - But we also know that eventually, He is going to bring this body to an end, one way or another
 - Yet, we know that doesn’t mean He’s unconcerned with our suffering
 - Rather, He loves us so much that He died in our place to give us something far better...an eternal glorified, sin-free body
 - And when we receive our perfect eternal body, then we’ll be able to declare, “Jesus has healed me once and forever!”
- That’s what Matthew wanted us to understand about Jesus’ healing ministry
 - He wanted us to see it with eyes for eternity
 - And notice what Matthew records next

Matt. 8:16 When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill.

Matt. 8:17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES.”

- After Jesus’ healing that morning in the local synagogue on that Sabbath morning, the news spread fast around that little town
 - Because it was the Sabbath, people didn’t venture out seeking Jesus immediately
 - The Pharisees’ Mishnah declared that healing was a work that couldn’t be done on the Sabbath
 - So the people had to wait until the Sabbath was over
- Notice in v.16, the people called on Jesus only after evening, when the Sabbath had

ended

- So they begin coming to Jesus and He continues to heal all who were ill
- He's turning no one away, He's not placing demands or preconditions on the people, He just heals them
- But then, Matthew adds commentary in v.17, by quoting from Isaiah 53:4
 - Now when New Testament authors quote an Old Testament Scripture verse like this, they expect the reader to revisit the entire Old Testament passage
 - It's not just that one line that Matthew is referencing, but the entire content
 - So in this case, Matthew is drawing our attention back to the whole context of Isaiah 53
 - Let's read a larger part of that chapter from where this verse comes from

**Is. 53:3 He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.**

**Is. 53:4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.**

**Is. 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.**

- Many of you will immediately recognize that this passage is describing Jesus' atoning death on the cross
 - Isaiah says the Messiah will be despised by men in His day
 - The Father will assign Christ the role of bearing our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions
 - God's chastening for sin fell on Jesus, instead of upon us
 - He was crushed because of our iniquities
- Then Isaiah says that by Jesus' scourging, we are healed
 - Now kept in its proper context, it's clear Isaiah was speaking of a spiritual healing
 - The language of the passage is entirely spiritual in nature
 - It talks about transgressions and iniquities
- So the griefs and sorrows refer to the consequences of sin, including both physical consequences now and eternal consequences later
 - Jesus bore our griefs as He hung pierced on the cross

- Jesus carried our sorrows as He suffered in our place
- He paid the price for our sin so that we could be spiritually healed through our faith in His sacrifice
- But some have claimed that Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4 to suggest that Jesus promises to heal our physical bodies every time
 - Their confusion arises partly out of misunderstanding Matthew's version of the Isaiah quote
 - Because it reads a little differently than my Bible's version
 - In my version, the text reads "surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried"
 - Matthew's quote renders it "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases"
 - Those differences are a result of subtle differences in how we translate the Hebrew
 - The word for "griefs" is literally the word for "sicknesses" in Hebrew
 - And the word for "sorrows" is literally the word "pain" in Hebrew
 - So you can translate Isaiah 53:4 to sound as if it's describing physical healing
 - But the context of Isaiah 53 makes it clear that the prophet was describing the penalties our sin deserved
 - Christ took our place, being pierced, enduring grief and sorrow, smitten of God and afflicted in our place
 - So why did Matthew use the quote here in the context of physical healings?
- And ironically, Matthew was trying to take our attention away from Jesus' physical healings and direct it toward His spiritual healing
 - Because physical healing will always draw a crowd...it brought crowds to hear Jesus' teaching and it will still bring attention today
 - But in that fact, it also has the potential to distract us from the real healing Jesus offers
 - It tends to focus our attention on the temporal, on this body and on this earth
 - And as a result, we may miss the bigger picture
 - That Jesus' ministry wasn't about fixing this world...it was recruiting people out of this world and preparing them for the next
 - He wasn't here to repair our body or even this earth...His plan is to replace them both
 - And unless Jesus pays the price for our sin in the way Isaiah described, then there could be no physical healing
 - Without Christ's sacrifice, there's no spiritual rebirth, there's only judgment
- The true healing we all need is to have our spirit healed
 - Healing the spirit puts an end to our sin problem, and with it, comes a solution to our body's decay and death

- You see, if the body is healed, it still dies eventually anyway
- But if your soul is healed by Jesus, then you get both a spiritual healing and eventually, a new body that will never die
- And in the meantime, the Lord in His mercy may also grant you relief from your body's weaknesses and infirmities
 - By healing our bodies, Jesus may allow us a few more years on earth to serve Him, and that's an honorable and godly desire
 - It's a mark of a mature Christian that we hold these two truths at the same time...
 - We have confidence in Jesus' ability to heal, while looking forward to the day we leave this body and receive something better

- We're back in our study of Jesus' miracles in the Galilee, and we're preparing to move into the second section of the miracles Matthew recorded
 - You remember that Matthew has carefully selected ten miracles to highlight in Chapters 8-9
 - They are grouped into three groups of like-kinds of miracles
 - The first group (which we just finished) were miracles over the body
 - Those miracles showed that Jesus is the Creator God Who has power over the body, including the power to grant us eternal life
 - The second group of miracles are miracles over the Creation itself
 - But before we get into that section, Matthew inserts a moment between Jesus and the disciples
 - You may remember when I gave an outline for Chapters 8-9 a few weeks back, that I told you Matthew separates his three groups of miracles with two scenes
 - One scene demonstrates Jesus' authority over His disciples, and the other scene shows Jesus' authority over His enemies
 - So that by the miracles and these scenes, Matthews tells the story of Jesus having power and authority over everything in existence
 - Today, we study the first of these two scenes, where Jesus explains His authority and expectations for His disciples

Matt. 8:18 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea.

Matt. 8:19 Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."

Matt. 8:20 Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

- This scene also appears in Mark's and Luke's Gospels, so we have a good appreciation for all that's happening here
 - We know from Luke, that Jesus was in the area of Magdala, a small town on the northwestern shore of the Galilee
 - Today, you can see the ruins of that town being excavated
 - It's best known for its most prominent citizen, Mary of Magdala
 - Jesus healed Mary and several other women of demon possession while teaching in that region
 - Luke and Mark also tell us that Jesus had just taught the parable of the Sower and Seed in this area
 - In fact, Mark says Jesus taught the parable while standing in a boat a few yards off shore
 - Jesus taught on a boat to put distance between Himself and the crowds

pressing in for healing, so they would stop and listen

- As the crowds become unmanageable, Jesus decided to remain in the boat and ventured across the Galilee to the land of the Garasenes
 - Garasa was the name for the east side of the Galilee, which was largely settled by Gentiles
 - It was located directly across the northern tip of the Galilee, opposite from Magdala
- Notice in Matthew 8:18, we're told Jesus is preparing to cross the lake, which suggests this exchange happened in the same moment
 - Luke also records this conversation happened after the Sower and Seed parable
 - But Matthew records the parable of the Sower and Seed much later in his Gospel
 - So Matthew has left this story in its proper place, but chose to save the parable for later in His Gospel (for reasons we will understand when we get to Chapter 13)
- So, in Matthew 8, Jesus is about to start a short journey by boat across the northern tip of the Galilee
 - And as Jesus is standing in the boat and preparing to depart, a scribe in the crowd proclaims that he will follow Jesus wherever Jesus goes
 - The scribe calls Jesus "teacher", which is another word for "rabbi"
 - So the man is indicating his desire to be a disciple of Jesus
 - And he makes his pledge of discipleship very publicly, so that everyone would hear it
 - That seems a little self-serving, doesn't it?
 - The scribe probably assumed Jesus would approve of his comment
 - Perhaps he expected Jesus to commend him for his self-sacrificial attitude
 - And most likely, the scribe was hoping Jesus would reward him by inviting him to accompany Jesus in the boat as they crossed
 - This was certainly the way Pharisaic Judaism worked
 - Disciples were expected to lavish praise and honor on their rabbis, who in turn, favored these students
 - It was a mutual admiration society, and scribes learned how to work within this self-serving system
 - But this guy isn't fooling anyone by playing this game, certainly not Jesus
- Jesus seizes on the scribe's pledge of devotion to expose his insincerity
 - Jesus begins by rejecting the scribe's attempt to ingratiate himself
 - The scribe's declaration wasn't a pledge of personal sacrifice...it was flattery
 - Remember the scene...Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of thousands, scrambling to get close to Him

- And He's been moving about the Galilee constantly to minister to the crowds – and at times, to escape the crowds
- But this wasn't a typical rabbinical pattern...rabbis tended to stay put in a single place to run their rabbinical schools
 - They didn't need to move about constantly in this way, since they didn't command such attention
 - But clearly, Jesus was on a different level...He's the talk of the Galilee
- So in the midst of this throng, this man offers to follow Jesus anywhere
 - It's like teenage groupies shouting at the popular rockstar, "I want to have your baby!"
 - The scribe is flattering Jesus by acknowledging His popularity, that Jesus is a man widely traveled and in demand
 - And as the scribe pledges to go anywhere with Jesus, it's hardly a statement of sacrifice...he's trying to get invited to the party
- I've heard similar things said to me from time to time (though not the "have my baby" comment)
 - For example, when I mention I'm booked to teach at a church in Hawaii or Singapore or London or Costa Rica or Norway or New Zealand...
 - Inevitably, someone will say, "If you need someone to carry your luggage on your trip, I'd be willing to go with you..."
 - Obviously, they're making a joke about how nice it is to travel to such beautiful places, and they want to go too
 - But they don't realize how difficult ministry travel can be...
- This is how we need to understand the scribe's offer to Jesus, although he wasn't joking...he wanted to join Jesus in His ministry adventures
 - But Jesus is having none of it, so He rebukes the man, resisting any suggestion that His ministry is glamorous and appealing
 - He says the foxes have holes in the ground and birds have their nests, but Jesus doesn't even have a home of His own
 - In other words, even animals have something in this world to call their own... holes and nests and the like
 - And yet we never feel any envy over what they have, do we?
 - We wouldn't trade the comfort of our home for a fox's hole in the ground? Certainly not
 - But that's what this man was signing up for, though he didn't understand that
 - Jesus says the Son of Man didn't even possess the basic necessities of life, like a home – something even animals have
 - The term "Son of Man" refers to the Messiah, and Jesus used it whenever He wanted to emphasize the Messiah's humility and suffering
 - Jesus was pointing out the scribe's false assumptions about discipleship

- Discipleship under Jesus wouldn't be a pursuit of the best things in this life... instead, it was a life of self-sacrifice
- Jesus was very unlike the rabbis of His day, who used their popularity and power to enrich themselves
- Jesus set a different example, of not pursuing the world's agenda
 - He didn't focus on earning a living, climbing the social ladder and seeking a secure retirement
 - Jesus wasn't destitute, because He had His benefactors, but He was not a Man *seeking* wealth or privilege
 - But Jesus pursued a Kingdom that was not of this earth, so He sacrificed the daily pleasures of life to obtain Heavenly praise
- So the scribe's assumptions were completely wrong
 - Following Jesus wasn't an adventure vacation
 - It required personal sacrifice in this life for the promise of a better eternal life
- By His response, Jesus established the first of two important rules of discipleship
 - Jesus' disciple must be prepared to deny himself what he wants in this life, so that he may follow and serve Jesus
 - Discipleship requires we step back from pursuing the world's agenda
 - Because we only have so much time on earth...you only have so much energy and resources at your disposal
 - And you can't spend it twice...when it's gone, it's gone
 - So if we pledge ourselves to following and serving Jesus in this life, then it requires we forgo our own desires
 - You can't have your cake and eat it too
 - Now at this point, I need to emphasize that following Jesus as His disciple is different than coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ
 - Our faith in Jesus is a gift, the Bible says
 - And we enter into our relationship with Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit, not by our own effort
 - Our salvation comes by faith alone, not because of anything we have done or will do in following or serving Christ
 - So when Jesus speaks about the need for commitment and sacrifice, He's talking about how we serve Him, not how we come to know Him
 - Discipleship is a process of becoming a faithful follower of Jesus, and it's a mindset that manifests in a life lived differently
 - It's a changed outlook in life, made possible by our new identity in Christ
 - But not everyone who has come to saving faith in Jesus will embrace this changed outlook
 - Simply put, not everyone who is born-again becomes a disciple of Jesus

- You became a child of God because God crucified Jesus
- You become a disciple of Christ by crucifying your own flesh
- Over the centuries, millions of believers have come to faith and received eternal life in Christ, yet never took the next step of serving Jesus as His disciple
 - They confessed Jesus as Lord, they went to church, they may have even read their Bible from time to time...they were typical Christians
 - But they didn't change their direction in life
 - They merely scheduled Christianity into their life, just like making room for bowling night and kids' soccer games
 - They trusted in Jesus for their salvation, but trusted in the mighty dollar for their security and satisfaction
 - They pursued fame or career or recreation or hobbies or whatever...instead of pursuing a life of serving Christ
 - And those choices came at a cost...they traded the opportunity to build an eternal Kingdom to chase after a fading world
 - This is perhaps the greatest self-deception within the 21st century Church, particularly in the West
 - Our world is so wealthy, our culture so inviting, and our comfort so important, that we have no appreciation for the cost of discipleship
 - In fact, churches routinely preach that following Jesus is a win-win
 - We get Heaven when we die, and in the meantime, our life here gets shinier, brighter, happier and more prosperous
 - Now of course, all Christians have to live in the world, so by necessity, we are all pursuing the things of this world, at least to some degree
 - But Jesus isn't demanding we live as if the world didn't exist
 - He's talking about our heart's desire, the thing that gets us up in the morning and defines our goals in life
- Believer, are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you live to please yourself or are you committed to pleasing Jesus?
 - Do you care more for the world's approval than what Jesus thinks of you?
 - Do you live with eyes for eternity? Are you thinking about that Kingdom that's right around the corner and coming up fast?
 - Or are you still trying to build your own kingdom in this world?
 - If we're not careful, we are tempted to think about discipleship like this scribe
 - We'll follow Jesus anywhere...so long as it fits our schedule and preferences!
 - We'll follow Him on a short-term mission trip...to an exotic destination with safe drinking water, nice beaches and souvenirs
 - We'll follow Him to church...so long as it's a sensible contemporary worship service in casual clothes and without having to sing too loudly

- We'll serve in the Church or join small groups or give within reason...so long as it doesn't disrupt our plans for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness
 - But that's not discipleship, according to Jesus
- This scribe wanted to be Jesus' disciple for the thrill and excitement and privilege of being associated with a rockstar
 - But he hadn't counted the cost
 - He wasn't considering how much sacrifice discipleship requires
- So Jesus said if the Messiah didn't have a home in this world, how much worldly reward do you suppose you will gain by being His disciple?
 - Is the disciple greater than his Master?
 - If a disciple truly desires to follow Jesus, we must be prepared to deny ourselves
 - Jesus asks His disciples to do things and sacrifice things that our flesh or our spouse or parents or friends don't want to see us sacrifice
 - He's going to ask for your time...time you would rather spend on yourself or your family or your career
 - He's going to ask for your money...money you would rather spend on yourself or not spend at all
 - He's going to ask for your blood, sweat and tears
 - It's easy to be a Christian...just believe! But discipleship is hard
 - He's going to ask you to leave things behind, so you can serve Him in building the Kingdom
 - Not every disciple will be poor, but many will
 - Not every disciple will be weary, but some will
 - Not every disciple will be persecuted, but a few will
- That was the first rule...disciples must be willing to deny themselves to serve Jesus
 - So let's look at the second rule

Matt. 8:21 Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."

Matt. 8:22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

- As Jesus is departing, a second disciple of Jesus offers Jesus an explanation for why he couldn't accompany Jesus across the lake that very moment
 - The scribe had made the mistake of committing to discipleship too quickly, without counting the cost
 - Now, this man is making the opposite mistake of hesitating to make a commitment

- He asks Jesus for opportunity to deal with family matters first
- He says he has to bury his father, which seems like a reasonable request to us, doesn't it?
 - Who shouldn't be allowed a little time off to take care of such an urgent family matter?
 - Which makes us view Jesus' response as harsh and uncaring
- But things are not as they first seem, because the man is working from a particular aspect of Jewish culture
 - In a family, the oldest son was expected to honor the father by remaining in the home until he died
 - He cared for the father in his old age and worked the family business or land until the father passed
 - That event was probably still years away for this man, so he's not asking for a short delay
 - He's telling Jesus his family responsibilities exempt him from making the lifestyle change that discipleship requires
- But once again, Jesus is having nothing of it...He says, let the dead bury their dead
 - That's a euphemism, because obviously, a literal interpretation makes no sense
 - A dead person can't bury another dead person, obviously
 - But first, mention of the dead refers not to physical death, but to those who are spiritually dead, meaning unbelievers, the unsaved
 - The Bible calls unbelievers those who are dead in their trespasses and sins, as Paul says in Ephesians
 - And this world belongs to unbelievers
 - This world is not our home...it's passing, and we are destined for something better
 - As I like to say, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, this world is as bad as life will ever be for you
 - But if you're an unbeliever, this world is as good as life gets
 - Because as rough as this world is, it's all the unbeliever will ever have to call his own
 - So Jesus is saying to His disciples, let the unbelieving world attend to the business of this world...it's their world, it's not ours
- A disciple of Jesus has better things to attend to...Kingdom matters
 - Our Kingdom hasn't arrived yet
 - So we're to live like Abraham lived in his day

Heb. 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where

he was going.

Heb. 11:9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

Heb. 11:10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Heb. 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Heb. 11:14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Heb. 11:15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Heb. 11:16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

- Abraham was called to follow the Lord by living in a land that God showed him
 - The Lord brought Abraham to Canaan and told Abraham that this land would be his in a future day
 - But Abraham understood that it wouldn't be his until after the resurrection
 - According to God's promise, Abraham and his descendants would possess it in the Kingdom
- And Abraham believed God would be faithful to that promise
 - And as a disciple of the Lord, Abraham pledged to live life as a nomad while in the land, never entering the cities or claiming any land for himself
 - Hebrews says that Abraham chose to live in this way as a testimony to the world that he knew his reward wouldn't come in this lifetime
 - He was content to set his sights on what he would receive in the Kingdom to come, so he turned his back on the world's offerings
- That's living with eyes for eternity, and it's the second rule of discipleship
 - The second rule is that discipleship requires placing the needs of the Kingdom above any earthly obligations or commitments
 - We should let nothing distract us from the mission, nothing tempt us away, nothing scare us into quitting
 - Because we have no relationship to this world now that we've come to Christ
 - Like Abraham, we're looking for that city God has prepared for us in the Kingdom...we're passing through this life, ambassadors for Christ
 - So earthly obligations must take a backseat to answer Jesus' call to follow Him

- These two rules of discipleship work together in keeping us focused and obedient to Christ
 - Rule #1 warns us not to let our own desires get in the way of obedience
 - And Rule #2 reminds us to keep our eyes focused on eternity
- Because discipleship, taking up your cross to follow Jesus, brings a reward
- We will be called to make sacrifices here and to set aside the world's priorities, but in the Kingdom we will see the fruit of that sacrifice
 - Elsewhere in this Gospel, Jesus reminds us of this fact

Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Matt. 16:25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Matt. 16:26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Matt. 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

- When Jesus returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom, believers will join Him in that future world of glory
 - And as we all arrive with Jesus, the Lord says we will receive our eternal inheritance
 - He will repay us according to our deeds, referring to the deeds of service we did in faith as His disciples
- Discipleship means following Jesus faithfully, so that He may be pleased by our service
 - And as we please Him, He promises to reward us, which makes our sacrifices well worth it in the end
 - Remember, the statement Jesus says His disciples will hear?

Matt. 25:23 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

- That's what we all want to hear when we see Jesus
- It starts with setting aside a love for the things of this world
- And it continues in a life of placing the needs of the Kingdom above the priorities of this life
- Now if you're wondering how to put into practice what Jesus has said, then let me suggest a simple rule to get you started
 - Christ typically asks us to follow Him in a life-long series of steps

- He knows it's hard for us to move away from the world and toward serving Him and the Kingdom
- So in grace, He will move us in that direction bit by bit, much as He told Abraham "go to a place I will show you"
- That is, Jesus showed Abraham the place to go, even as Abraham was already moving
- So as someone once said, God can't steer a stationary object...we need to be in motion for Him to steer our lives
 - So the first step of discipleship is to do the first and obvious thing Christ is calling you to do
 - And then trust Him to reveal the next steps as you walk with Him
 - You might ask me, "What is that first and obvious thing?"
- I don't know...it will be personal, based on what Christ is speaking to your heart...but I can assure you, it will be obvious
 - It's something you already know you should be doing...something you need to start or stop
 - Something you need to give up or give away
 - Something you need to change, something that will please Christ
- It's probably that thing you've been thinking about doing for some time already, but you've been delaying...maybe for the reasons these men had
 - Maybe the cost seems too high
 - Or maybe you're too invested in serving the priorities of this world
 - And if that's true, then Jesus has placed a test of discipleship in your path, and He's waiting to see if you will pass that test
 - Will you be His disciple?

- Of all Jesus' miracles recorded in the Bible, the ones that most impress us are usually those involving power over nature
 - Parting the Red Sea for Moses, making the sun stand still for Joshua, causing fire to come down and consume a wet sacrifice for Elijah...
 - It's the stuff of movie special effects
 - Miracles like those rightly fascinate us because they break the rules of nature, which to us, seem unbreakable
 - These types of miracles are more impressive to us than even bringing a dead body back to life
 - Probably because they operate on such an unimaginable scale and are accomplished by such awesome power
 - Nothing says you're God more than making the physical world obey your voice
 - So naturally, the Lord's ministry on earth included His share of miracles over Creation
 - A few come to mind immediately...
 - Walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, causing fish to enter Peter's nets
 - And then there's the one we study tonight...Jesus stilling the storm on the Galilee
 - This miracle opens the next section of Jesus' miracles, which are loosely organized around a theme of Jesus' limitless power
 - The first miracle shows Jesus' power over the natural world, in the same way as those miracles from the Old Testament
 - The second miracle shows Jesus' power over animals and His power in the coming judgment
 - The third will show Jesus' power and authority to extend forgiveness
- As we've noted before, these miracles are part of Matthew's theme that Jesus is the Creator God, Who has sole power and authority over all things

Matt. 8:23 When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him.

Matt. 8:24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep.

Matt. 8:25 And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!"

Matt. 8:26 He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.

Matt. 8:27 The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

- You may remember last week, that Jesus was standing in a boat on the Galilee as He called His disciples to obey Him and follow Him

- So now, having made those comments, Jesus is ready to proceed across the Sea of Galilee to Garasa, with His key disciples in the boat
 - People have found ancient fishing boats in the mud of the Galilee shoreline
 - So we have a pretty good idea of the style and size of boats in use during that period
- Generally, they were around 30 ft. long, 8 ft. wide, and probably about 5 ft. deep
 - They had a flat bottom design to allow the boat to get close to the shore
 - On either end, were benches covered with cushions for reclining in the boat
 - And they had masts and oars for navigation and propulsion
- Most likely, that's the type of boat Jesus entered with His disciples to travel across the lake
 - Though these boats weren't huge, they were still large enough to easily carry a dozen men in calm seas
 - But with so much weight onboard, the boat was probably riding low in the water
 - The sides of the boat were likely only 12-18 inches above the waterline
- As they traveled from Magdala to Garasa, they moved due east, cutting across the northern tip of the body of water
 - The trip probably took a couple of hours by rowing, or less, if they had the prevailing westerly winds in their favor
 - That track would have kept them relatively near the shore, probably not more than a mile or so off shore at any given time
 - Yet despite being near the shore, they were in deep water
 - The Sea of Galilee is a deep fresh water lake, and in the area where Jesus crossed, it was probably about 80 ft. deep
 - The depth of the lake, combined with the high hills and mountains surrounding the lake, contributes to violent weather patterns
 - High winds can race down the hills to the water's surface, leading to fast rising storms and waves
 - Even in calm weather, the lake can become stormy
 - It's common for the lake to start glassy smooth in the morning hours when winds are calm
 - But by late afternoon, in the hot desert climate, the winds from the Mediterranean pick up and the lake becomes choppy with rolling waves
 - If a storm system blows through, the lake's relatively small surface area, combined with its great depth, allows high waves to develop quickly
 - And likewise, when the winds stop blowing, the lake will calm down very quickly as well...much like water in a bathtub
- Now according to Mark, Jesus' crossing happened at the end of the day, as night was

falling, so the lake would have been choppy already

- But then, a storm comes up suddenly
 - All three of the Synoptic Gospels describe this particular storm as unusually strong and quick to develop
 - Matthew says it was a great storm; Mark says it was a fierce gale of a wind, and Luke confirms the same
- So this is no ordinary thunderstorm...this was a once-a-year event
 - Matthew says the boat was covered by the waves, and Mark tells us that the waves were breaking over the boat
 - This isn't surprising, since the boat was low in the water, but it meant the boat was filling with water and in danger of sinking
- And the way the disciples reacted – including several who were experienced fishermen – tells us the situation was serious
 - They are on the verge of panic, probably barking orders over the sound of the waves and wind
 - They would have been desperately bailing water out of the boat with their hands or cloaks
 - They would have been trying to steer the boat into the waves to prevent it from capsizing
 - It would have been chaos
- And then we have that statement at the end of v.24, that seems totally out of place... Jesus was asleep in the boat
 - Mark says He's positioned Himself on a cushion at the stern of the boat, where He could catch some shut-eye during the two-hour journey
 - Because He is lying on a cushioned bench, He's high enough to stay out of the water filling the bottom of the boat
 - Nevertheless, Jesus is almost certainly getting splashed with water off the waves from time to time, so He's still getting wet
 - Which makes His situation seem crazy to us
 - But if you're thinking that no one could sleep through a storm like this, then you don't know how it feels to be in war
 - When a soldier is physically exhausted and at his limit, he can sleep almost anywhere
 - He can sleep in rain, wind, sun, cold, anywhere
 - A soldier can even sleep in a foxhole with a battle raging nearby
 - So anyone who has reached his physical limit under difficult conditions could easily sleep in Jesus' circumstances
 - And we can safely assume that Jesus was physically exhausted from attending to the crowds for days on end

- He probably never has a free moment uninterrupted
- Remember, He just said He didn't have a home, so He probably slept outside on many nights
- And so, I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus even had to deal with people waking Him in the night, seeking His healing
- He's probably completely exhausted
- So though it's hard for those of us accustomed to the comforts of modern life to understand, Jesus could sleep under these conditions
 - A little wind and waves don't bother Him at all
 - But then we have His disciples...
 - Poor Jesus...He just wanted to sleep without interruption, but He can't catch a break
 - The disciples are fighting for their lives, or so they think
 - So they felt the need to wake Jesus to inform Him they were perishing
 - Mark adds that some accused Jesus of not caring, as if Jesus was indifferent to their plight
 - These men were experiencing genuine fear for their lives, and they ask Jesus to save them
 - I think that's a strange request, in a way
 - What did they expect Jesus to do for them?
 - We might assume they expected a miracle, but when Jesus performs a miracle at the end, they are astonished
 - I don't think they were looking for a supernatural response from Jesus at all...I think they just wanted a natural response
 - They wanted to know He cared, or that He sensed their concern
 - That's why Mark records them asking if Jesus cared they were perishing
 - They were probably upset that Jesus wasn't lending a hand in the work of bailing out the boat
 - They perceived His sleeping as indifference to their plight, and it made them mad and hurt
- So if circumstances were so dire, why was Jesus so calm?
 - Well, our first thought is to credit Jesus' divine perspective
 - We assume Jesus could rest easy because He knew He wasn't in real danger in this moment
 - We think Jesus already knew when He would die and how He would die
 - So He knew that His death wasn't happening today, and it wasn't going to happen by drowning on the Galilee
 - So Jesus slept free of concerns or reasons to worry

- But if you look at Jesus' response to His disciples, I think it leads us to a different conclusion
 - Because Jesus chastises the men for their fear, calling it evidence of too little faith
 - In effect, Jesus is asking them why they were so afraid of this storm?
 - You didn't have to be God to know that things were going to work out ok
- Now under most circumstances, that assumption would not be logical
 - The storm was a serious event
 - These men could legitimately be concerned about drowning
 - So fear was a natural reaction
- Nevertheless, Jesus says their fears were *unreasonable* under *their* circumstances
 - Why should they not have feared under circumstances that naturally warranted fear?
 - Jesus gives us the answer in the second half of His statement
 - He says they were men of little faith, or we could say insufficient faith
 - Now when you see the word "faith" used like this, the first question we have to ask is faith in what?
 - Remember, "faith" is a verb that requires an object...you can't say you have "faith" without identifying what you have faith in
 - So what did they lack faith in?
 - Some have concluded they lacked faith in Jesus' Word when He says they were going to cross to the other side of the lake
 - After all, if the Messiah said they would cross to the other side, then by faith, they should've expected to survive the storm
 - This makes some sense, but I think it's a stretch to expect these men to draw that conclusion from Jesus' statement alone
 - Faced with such a serious storm, I wouldn't expect them to dismiss the danger merely because Jesus set out with intentions to cross
 - And I don't think Jesus was expecting that either
- Instead, I think Jesus expected the men to have greater faith in Jesus' concern for them, since after all, they accused Him of not caring for them
 - In fact, whenever Matthew uses the term "little faith", it's always used in reference to someone who is missing the big picture
 - So what was the big picture in this case?
 - The big picture was that Jesus was in the boat too, and He wasn't worried
 - And if the Lord is with you and isn't worried, what do you have to worry about?
 - The Lord brought this storm to teach His disciples an important lesson
 - But they weren't responding to the trial with spiritual eyes

- They were operating in their flesh out of fear
- Jesus probably expected His disciples to take note of His posture in the midst of the storm and gain spiritual insight from following the Master
 - Rather than rebuking Jesus for not caring about them, the disciples should have asked themselves, *why* wasn't Jesus concerned?
 - After all, they knew Jesus was the Messiah, and they knew He had supernatural power
 - They may not have assumed He could still the waters by His Word, but still, they knew He was in communion with the Father
- So if Jesus was sleeping in the boat, they should have concluded Jesus knew something they didn't know
 - Instead, they assumed *they* knew something Jesus didn't know, which was an absurd conclusion
 - After all, did they seriously think that Jesus was unaware of the storm?
 - So if Jesus isn't fearing the storm, neither should they
 - If Jesus is willing to ride it out, so should they
 - So their lack of faith was in not trusting Christ's love, regardless of their circumstances
 - They didn't lack trust in His identity or even His ability, but in His love for them
 - And because they doubted Jesus' love, they didn't see the storm with spiritual eyes
 - They assumed it came to defeat and destroy them, when in reality, it came to test them
 - They didn't consider that God had a good purpose in bringing the storm, and this was true, regardless of how it turned out
 - Perhaps the storm will subside, and all will be well
 - Or perhaps the storm will take their lives – but if so, they'd be in the Kingdom together with Jesus afterward, which is even better
 - That's how our faith in Jesus should operate during storms in life
 - Don't assume the presence of difficulties means Jesus is uncaring or unwilling to help us
 - Rather, assume He has good purpose in bringing them, and seek the benefits these tests offer
 - Having faith in Jesus' good intentions allows us to face storms the way Jesus did, at peace with the outcome, no matter where it takes us
 - Ask yourself this...how differently would this story have ended if the disciples laid down in the boat to sleep with Jesus during the storm?
 - Sure, we wouldn't have seen Jesus perform the miracle that stopped the waves
 - But as amazing as miracles are, how much more amazing would it be for these

- men to sleep through a violent storm?
- Jesus could sleep that way because His divine understanding knew there was nothing to fear
 - And the rest of the men could have slept that way too, because they were in the same boat as Jesus
- If you think this sounds impossible, that only Jesus could have slept this way, then think back to the story of Jonah
 - Jonah was riding in a ship that was also in danger of sinking from a storm
 - Experienced sailors aboard had done all they could to save themselves and were resorting to praying for their lives
 - And where was Jonah during the storm? He was asleep in the hold of the ship
 - So how could Jonah sleep through such difficult circumstances?
 - For the very same reason Jesus was sleeping in His boat
 - Because by His faith, Jonah knew there was no reason to fear the outcome of the storm
 - He knew that whether the storm took his life or spared his life, he belonged to the Lord, so Jonah was at peace with the outcome
 - His faith in the Lord allowed him to keep his emotions in check and remain at peace over his circumstances
 - Now ironically, in Jonah's case, he was at peace with dying because it furthered his aim to avoid doing as the Lord had commanded
 - But the point here is the same
 - His trust in the Lord and his confidence in a secure eternal future of glory allowed him to set aside concerns for the present
 - He knew the storm couldn't end his relationship with the Lord
 - It couldn't change His eternal destiny, it couldn't rob him of his inheritance in the Kingdom
 - That was the faith Jesus was expecting from His disciples...a confidence that if Jesus is OK, I'm OK
 - Believer, you're in the boat with Jesus all the time
 - So ask yourself, which type of response to life's difficulties will present a better testimony to the unbelieving world?
 - When you face crises in life, and you react in fear and anxiety and stress and worry, what does that communicate to the world?
 - And even if Jesus miraculously fixes our bad circumstances, is that what the world will remember most about our situation?
 - Won't they just remember that we panicked like everyone else?
 - They'll take note that we acted just like they did...the only difference is when our situation resolved, we credited Jesus

- Does that pattern reflect faith in the Lord?
- On the other hand, what if we respond to crises like Jesus...resting peacefully in the midst of the storm, then what will people say?
 - What if we set aside anxiety and ended our complaints against God and trusted His goodness
 - What if we praised Him for the blessing of the trial, as James tells us to do, and as Paul did while in prison?
 - Won't that witness make a lasting impression?
 - Won't they marvel at your faith?
- And then, should the Lord choose *not* to rescue us from the danger, the world can marvel at our faith all the more
 - So our witness of faith all comes down to our perspective in trials, not to the outcome of our trials
 - The world isn't nearly as impressed by a healing as they are when they see you facing sickness without worry
 - They won't be so impressed when the Lord rescues you from the ashes of disaster, but they'll be amazed when you praise Him for the fire
 - They won't look twice when the Lord spares your life, but they take note when we face death without fear
- Our reaction to trials speaks far more about our faith than the actual outcomes do
 - Which is why Jesus wasn't concerned about the storm, but He was concerned about the disciples' response to the storm
 - He says they had insufficient faith because they were with Him, and that should have been enough
- And your trust in Jesus' love and good purpose is enough reason to see trials as opportunities to show your faith
 - We need to appreciate what our relationship with Jesus says about our life today and in the future
 - By faith, we already possess something greater than anything to be found in this world...eternal life in a Kingdom to come
 - And so by that faith, we can face trials without concern
 - Because we know that no matter the outcome, we'll soon be in a new world where these things won't be remembered
- Now obviously, we all experience human emotions in response to difficult circumstances...that's normal and expected
 - Jesus never expected His disciples to feel nothing in the face of a trial
 - After all, even Jesus experienced emotions at times
 - He wept at Lazarus' death, for example
 - He experienced fear and anxiety in the Garden at the prospect of His own death

- But when it came time to act, Jesus always acted in keeping with faith in the Father, not out of emotion
 - Though he mourned for Lazarus, He still waited three days to allow him to die
 - Though He was terrified over the pain of the cross, He still went forward, despite His fears
- Similarly, I don't believe Jesus expected His disciples to hide their emotions in that boat
 - But neither did He expect them to act out of fear, but in keeping with their faith and knowledge of Him
 - Waking Jesus up and chastising Him for not bailing water was not a response driven by faith
 - It was a response of doubt and fear...it was insufficient faith
- And that's the standard for every disciple...
 - It's OK to experience fear or doubt or sadness at times
 - Nevertheless, we know Jesus is with us in these moments, causing all things to work for good for those who love Him
 - And therefore, we counsel ourselves to act out of a heart of faith, rather than out of ignorance or emotion
- But that kind of spiritual maturity doesn't come without effort
 - That's precisely why the Lord brings us trials...because they expose the limits of our spiritual maturity and give us opportunity to grow
 - When we fail those tests, it's a sign to us that our faith in Jesus remains academic...
 - We understand Him in our heads, yet we haven't allowed our knowledge of Him to influence how we experience the world
 - Our faith is still genuine, but it's impotent, immature
 - Jesus expects His disciples to bring our feelings and perceptions into alignment with our knowledge of Him
 - So we can respond to life's circumstances with eyes for eternity
 - As Paul says:

Col. 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Col. 1:11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

- We must be filled with a knowledge of His good will so that we can understand His ways
 - And in understanding His ways, we may then walk in a manner that pleases Him
 - Strengthened in His might, attaining steadfastness and patience and even joy in the face of trials
 - The ultimate demonstration of faith in trials is giving thanks to the Father for the trials we experience
 - And we do that, knowing it's qualifying us to share in an eternal inheritance
- So to conclude this miracle, we see Jesus stilling the waves
 - He stands up and rebukes the waves
 - A rebuke is a censure or stern rebuff...the word in Greek literally means "to muzzle"
 - Rebuking a person causes that person to go silent
 - And so it was with the storm
 - My Bible says the water was perfectly calm, but the phrase in Greek is actually "great calm"
 - The language indicates that the storm ceased instantaneously
 - One moment waves were crashing into the boat, the next instant, they were floating on a glassy sea
 - Interestingly, Mark records Jesus asking His question a second time after the storm ceased
 - He says again, "Why are you afraid?"
 - I wonder how much more that question meant, coming after the storm was completely gone?
 - Because the answer is certainly obvious...they had no reason to be afraid
 - Having witnessed the miracle, the disciples were amazed
 - Mark said they were fearful, but in the sense of awestruck
 - They ask one another, even the wind and sea obey Him?
- As I said earlier, they clearly didn't expect this to happen
 - But they asked Jesus to save them, and He did
 - Do you see why you can remain at peace with trials?
 - Because the Lord can stop the trial in an instant, as soon as He desires
 - So every second it continues is a second of purpose
 - Make the most of that time to develop your spiritual maturity
 - And then, when the Lord is ready to bring it to an end, He can do it instantly

- In fact, He can do it far better than you even dared to ask
- Like the disciples who asked to be saved, and the entire lake became still
- When you ask for relief, and the Lord is ready to grant it, you can be sure His peace will come with the same power that brought the trial
- As Paul says:

Eph. 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,
Eph. 3:21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

- It's finally time we finish Chapter 8, and as we do, we're looking at one of the most fascinating and most misunderstood subjects of the New Testament – demonic possession
 - But before we get there, let's do a brief recap of where we are in Matthew's Gospel
 - Jesus is in the Galilee, teaching and performing various miracles to validate His testimony as the Messiah
 - In Chapters 8 and 9, Matthew presents a series of ten of Jesus' miracles to illustrate Jesus' power and authority
 - He organizes the miracles into three groups that span the full range of Jesus' supernatural power
 - And he separates the three groups with two scenes that illustrate Jesus' authority over all men
 - Currently, we're in the second group of miracles, emphasizing Jesus' unlimited power
 - And tonight, as we reach the end of Chapter 8, we're looking at Jesus' second miracle in the second group
 - This miracle shows us Jesus' power over the intersection of the natural and spiritual realms

Matt. 8:28 When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way.

Matt. 8:29 And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

Matt. 8:30 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them.

Matt. 8:31 The demons began to entreat Him, saying, "If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine."

Matt. 8:32 And He said to them, "Go!" And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters.

Matt. 8:33 The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs.

Matt. 8:34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

- You'll remember last week, during our study, that Jesus and His disciples were on the move by sea
 - They were traveling by boat across the northern tip of the Galilee to a place called Garasa, on the eastern side of the lake
 - The names used in the Gospels for the eastern side of the lake can be a source of confusion to Bible students

- Sometimes the area is called the land of the Garasenes, and other times, the Gadarenes
- To clear up that confusion, the entire eastern side of the lake was called the region of Gadara
 - And there was also a town in the region called Gadara
 - If that wasn't confusing enough, there was also a town named Garasa, in the region of Gadara
 - So the names can be used interchangeably, to some degree, to describe the area east of the Sea of Galilee
- This entire region is a Gentile area of the Galilee
 - It wasn't free of Jews entirely, but Jews typically kept their distance from Gentile settlements
 - So as Gentile settlements spread out in Gadara, they naturally pushed Jews away
 - So that by this time, Gentile settlements dominated three quarters of the Galilee lakefront from Bethsaida to Tiberias
- As Jesus and the disciples land the boat in the region of Gadara, they are met by two men coming out of the tombs
 - Matthew says the bodies of these men were possessed, or occupied, by demonic spirits
 - As a result, they were extremely violent men
 - They routinely attacked any who might pass by their way, Matthew says
 - So the locals had learned to steer clear of the tombs and of these men
 - Luke and Mark, who also record this miracle, include considerable additional detail beyond what we have here in Matthew
 - Yet both Mark and Luke chose to mention only one of these men
 - So although Matthew abbreviated his account, he kept both men in his telling, probably because he wrote to Jews
 - And Jews would have been more persuaded by an account based on two witnesses
- But as these men come upon Jesus, they cry out, asking Him two peculiar questions
 - By the nature of the questions and of what follows, we can tell that the demonic spirits, not the men themselves, were posing the questions
 - First, they ask Jesus, "What business do we have with one another, Son of God?"
 - In literal Greek, they simply said, "What to us and to you, Jesus, Son of God?"
 - Their questions are one part inquiry, one part shock and surprise
 - First, they are caught off guard to see Jesus in this way
 - So they are questioning why He has come to them

- Secondly, they are surprised by His timing
 - They ask “Have You come here to torment us before the time?”
 - They assume Jesus’ purpose in arriving in Gadara was to initiate a time of judgment
 - But they seem to think that the proper time for judgment was some time away
- Before Jesus can answer, the demons point out a herd of swine feeding a distance away and ask a third question
 - They ask Jesus if He intended to send them out, could He send them into those swine?
 - Remember, this was the Gentile region of the lake, so herds of pigs were not uncommon
- So the encounter ends with Jesus agreeing to their request, at which point, Jesus orders the spirits out of the men with the command, “Go!”
 - And as they leave the men, they enter into the pigs as agreed
 - At which point, the demons drive their new hosts to run down the steep hillside of the Galilee and straight into the water
 - And as the pigs enter the water, they drown en masse
 - They commit suicide
- Now as we try to make sense of all this, let’s take note of each detail in the story
 - And our first point should be obvious: demons are real
 - Demons are the Bible’s name for angels that followed after Satan when he fell into sin (you can read about Satan’s fall in Ezekiel 28)
 - Revelation says that as Satan (the dragon) rebelled against God, he persuaded a third of the angelic realm to follow him

Rev. 12:7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,

Rev. 12:8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

Rev. 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

- Notice that those who followed after Satan were originally angels
 - But because these angels sinned, they became evil adversaries of God, known forevermore as demons
 - So if you believe the Bible when it says God created angels, then you must also believe there are evil angels called demons
 - And if you believe the Bible when it says angels were created by God to be

ministering spirits rendering service to the elect...

- Then you must also believe that the demons serve Satan by attacking the saints to disrupt God's purpose in our lives
- The Bible (and this scene in particular) also makes plain that demons have the power to take up residence in the body of a human being
 - This principle is present throughout the Gospels, and Jesus' interaction with these spirits is a hallmark of Jesus' earthly ministry
 - And the principle of demons interacting with physical bodies extends all the way back to Genesis
 - We see Satan inhabiting the body of a serpent in the Garden in Genesis 3
 - And we see demons mating with women shortly before the flood in Genesis 6
 - Furthermore, we have an even more dramatic example of spirit in union with human bodies in the New Testament
 - The Spirit of God inhabits the body of every believer
 - So if we can accept that the Spirit of God lives inside us, then we must also accept the reality that demons can inhabit a person
- But Scripture is also clear that these possessions are mutually exclusive
 - As the Spirit of God comes to live in a believer in Jesus Christ, He sets up a permanent residence
 - He will never leave us nor forsake us, Hebrews says
 - And because the Spirit of God is living in us permanently, there is a "no Vacancy" sign on our bodies
 - The in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit makes demon possession impossible
 - Our God is a jealous God, and the Bible says He will not share us with demons

2 Cor. 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2 Cor. 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

**2 Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,
"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

2 Cor. 6:17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.

**"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR;
And I will welcome you.**

**2 Cor. 6:18 "And I will be a father to you,
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"
Says the Lord Almighty.**

- Furthermore, John reminds us that the Lord, Who dwells in us, is stronger than the enemy who is in the world
 - So once the Lord has placed His seal on us, His faithfulness and His power ensure that we can never belong to the enemy
 - Simply put, a Christian cannot be possessed by a demon
 - Later, in Chapter 12, Jesus teaches a story of a house swept clean that will prove this point again
- Having said that, we should not underestimate their power to affect us in various ways
 - They might not indwell us, but they can tempt us, torment us and disrupt our plans
 - In those moments, we aren't to stand up to them, foolishly thinking we have power against them
 - They will run all over us
 - The Bible says we are to resist the devil's efforts to tempt us, and if we resist, He will flee

James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

- So the real answer to defeating the enemy and his demons, is to submit to the Lord
- When the devil sees a believer's heart is submitted to the Lord's will, he knows he stands no chance for the moment and he flees
- So demons may possess the bodies of unbelievers, and as they do, they have dramatic effects on the person, as this story also illustrates
 - They can substitute their own thoughts, actions and even voices for those of their hosts
 - In this case, these demons spoke through the mouths of these men
 - The men didn't speak...the demons did
 - In Mark and Luke, we learn that these demons also drove the men to act in bizarre ways, including going naked in public, attacking people and wandering into the desert
 - Furthermore, demons can also greatly magnify a person's abilities beyond what would be possible otherwise
 - As a result of the possession, these men gained supernatural physical strength
 - Mark and Luke report they had the power to break the iron chains that the townspeople used in a futile effort to bind them
 - It's likely that the stories of ancient mythology of superhuman characters may be based on cases of demon possession
- So as demons possess a body, the person may act in bizarre, evil, uncontrollable and powerful ways
 - Demon possession is a tactic the enemy uses as part of his efforts to steal, kill and

destroy

- And obviously, making people act in crazy, violent, seemingly unexplainable ways, furthers that purpose
 - So many of the great tragedies of our day are often the product of people experiencing demon possession
- Take note how often mass shootings, violence against children, sexual crimes and the like, follow a similar pattern
 - You're not looking at different people committing copy-cat crimes
 - You're looking at the same demons moving from person to person, driving them to commit similar acts
- In fact, watch news stories surrounding such events carefully, and you'll begin to notice a pattern of how demons work
 - And at the same time, take note of how incapable the unbelieving world is in explaining the cause of such things
 - They simply have no answers, because they limit their investigation to the natural...they won't consider supernatural causes
 - They call such behavior mental illness, rather than spiritual illness, because the unbelieving world denies that there is anything beyond the physical
- So just as the Spirit of the Lord enters a believer's body to equip us for godly work, so can demons inhabit unbelievers' bodies to prompt ungodliness
 - But I believe the consequences of demon possession extend beyond producing mayhem
 - Besides granting extreme strength, demons may also grant a person special knowledge and abilities that the normal person would not otherwise possess
 - Demons can bolster human intellect, charm, charisma and talent in ways that encourage a great following
 - It wouldn't surprise me to learn that many of the achievements of the geniuses of history (especially of our current times) were prompted by demonic influence
 - Extraordinary athletes, prescient inventors, transcendent artists or musical savants may owe their success in some cases to powerful spiritual agents that occupy their bodies
 - After all, this is exactly how the enemy will equip the Antichrist to accomplish great things during Tribulation
 - Remember, the enemy works to kill, steal and destroy, and he will use a variety of methods
 - His ultimate purpose is to draw our attention and worship away from God and toward him
 - And he can accomplish that either by instilling terror and fear, or by enticing humanity away with entertainment and spectacle
 - A man or woman who displays rare insight, or can perform mysterious feats or drive great accomplishments will command a great following

- And that following may then be led away from the Lord and His Word
- So the Word of God tells us that the spiritual realm is a real and powerful and important realm...in many ways, more so than our physical world
 - It's the one that controls what we see in the physical realm
 - And the enemy is only too pleased that the world remains ignorant of his role in the events that rock their world
 - But we have the Word, so we don't share in their ignorance
 - Still, I feel it's important to remember C.S. Lewis' words concerning demons:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight. – Screwtape Letters

- We must recognize that demons are real and they have real power
- But we must also refrain from the temptation to see devils lurking behind every corner
- Moving on, the next thing we notice from our story is that these demons recognize the power and authority of true deity
 - These demons immediately knew Who Jesus was, and they addressed Him as the Son of God
 - That's interesting when we remember demons rebelled against God and were cast down from Heaven *before* Jesus was incarnate
 - So presumably, they've never seen the man, Jesus, yet they recognize Him immediately anyway
 - Which tells us that demons, like all spirits, can perceive a spiritual dimension that human beings cannot see
 - So even though Jesus and His disciples were just walking by, like countless townspeople had probably done before them
 - Nevertheless, the demons perceived Jesus to be something much more than His outward appearance indicated
 - And what's more, they also readily acknowledged Jesus' authority over them, despite having already rejected that authority in Heaven
 - This pattern is so different from the way human beings think and act toward God
 - A person who rejects the authority of God lives in defiance of God, committed to never acknowledging Him
 - But they can only do that for a while, and only because they've never encountered God face to face in a spiritual context
 - One day, all unbelievers will stand before Jesus in a spiritual form, and in that

moment, they will act just like these demons did

- For the first time, they will obtain the spiritual insight to know Who Jesus truly is, and they will respond with recognition
- But more than that, they will acknowledge His power and authority to judge them
- But that acknowledgement will come too late to save them
- As Paul testifies:

Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

Phil. 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- That's what these demons assumed was happening in this moment
 - They assumed Jesus came to act on His promise to judge all unrighteousness
 - They cannot help but confess Jesus as their Judge, despite having set their hearts against His rule
 - Yet they also sense this wasn't the right time for the judgment
 - This gives us our next insight...demons possess a general understanding of God's plan
 - But they lack the spiritual insight to appreciate the specifics
 - The devil and his forces can't understand Scripture, because just like unbelievers, they lack the Spirit of God to explain it
 - So though they know that an end is coming, they don't know the exact timing of events, and they can't see things in advance
 - They only know they face judgment for their rebellion, so they fight to stop it
 - We see this clearly during Jesus' crucifixion
 - The devil knew that the Son of God was coming to defeat him, but the devil didn't understand how God would accomplish the plan exactly
 - So Satan has tried time and again to stop the plan
 - He prompted Herod to kill the baby Jesus, and later, he drove the Pharisees to conspire against Jesus and Judas to betray Jesus
 - But in doing so, Satan merely played into God's hand by furthering the plan to put Jesus on the cross
 - This is why much of Scripture is written in ways that obscure its meaning, using parable and prophecy
 - As Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 13 concerning His use of parables,

believers are appointed to know these things, but the world is not appointed to know

- Obscuring Scripture in this way prevents the devil, and the unbelieving world in general, from interfering in God's plan
- So we've learned demons are real, they can possess human bodies, giving them great abilities, and they use these pawns in their war against God's plan
 - They possess people to sow seeds of fear, confusion, and hopelessness
 - They also possess people to create great spectacles and awesome power to draw humanity away from following the living God
 - They possess spiritual insight enough to know Who their real enemy is, and they know they will be judged by Him
 - But they do not know the Bible, so they cannot understand God's plans in detail
 - Therefore, they must always remain on the attack, seeking to disrupt God's plans in any way they can
 - But now, we still have the end of the story to consider
 - Why do the demons ask to enter the swine and why does Jesus allow it?
 - And why do they kill the pigs in the end?
- Our answers come from what we've already learned in this story
 - First, the demons thought Jesus had come for them, yet they also knew that their ultimate judgment day wasn't supposed to happen just yet
 - They probably understood that there were numerous events foretold in God's plan that were yet to happen
 - So they assumed Jesus had come to send them to the temporary place of holding for demons
 - The Bible tells us that God holds disobedient spirits in confinement in the center of the earth awaiting their judgment day
 - When unbelievers die, their spirits enter a holding place called Hades, which the Bible says is located in the depths of the earth
 - Unbelievers wait in Hades until their final judgment in the future
 - Now demons don't die, but on occasion, God will confine demons to a prison in the center of the earth called the Abyss
 - Demons are confined only until their final judgment too
 - For example, the demons who mated with women before the flood have been confined to the Abyss, according to Peter
 - In Luke's account of this moment, we read this:

Luke 8:31 They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss.

- Therefore, these demons knew it wasn't time for their final judgment, so they assumed Jesus came to confine them to the Abyss for their bad behavior
 - So they quickly try to negotiate with Jesus, thinking they can work a better deal
 - They suggest He could cast them into swine instead
 - The demons knew that swine were unclean animals to Jews, so they hoped Jesus would view such a fate as equally bad punishment
 - They thought they were putting one over on Jesus, because they knew if He agreed, they could escape from their pig prison easily enough
 - This story teaches us one additional, important detail concerning demons' possession
 - Once a demon decides to set up residence in a person's body, they cannot leave that body by their own volition
 - And throughout the Gospels, we find stories of people possessed by demons seeking a way to set the body free
 - But it's not just the person who is trapped in this condition...the demons themselves are trapped in the body
 - Only the Lord has the power and authority to remove a demon from a body
 - Notice that these demons only leave the two men after Jesus orders them to go
- Apart from God's power to remove demons, the only other way they escape a body after having entered it, is when that body dies
 - We see biblical evidence of that here
 - As soon as the demons enter the swine, they compel the swine to kill themselves
 - By killing their hosts, the demons were freeing themselves to roam again and potentially inhabit another body in the future
 - You may also remember that after Satan entered Judas and compelled him to betray Jesus, Judas took his own life the same day
 - Satan had no intention of remaining inside Judas for longer than necessary
 - You can also see this pattern working in the world today
 - Notice how often those who perpetrate the most extreme and bizarre crimes in our day, often take their own lives at the end
 - Presumably, a demon has compelled the person to commit the crime
 - And when the killing spree is complete, the demon persuades the person to commit suicide, so the demon is freed
 - The demon doesn't want to wait for the person to die in prison after decades
 - He wants to leave the body quickly to roam the earth again and find his next victim
 - And if that person fails to take their own life, the demon will continue to torment them in prison, pressing them to find a way to die

- That was the trick these demons thought they were playing on Jesus...they knew they couldn't escape from the Abyss
 - But they could escape a pig prison easily enough by causing them to die
 - So why did Jesus let them get away with it?
 - Simply put, Jesus didn't care about punishing these demons, at least not at this moment
 - He had come to set these men free
 - His focus was on saving, not judging, and so He didn't care where these demons went
 - Remember, Jesus didn't initiate the conversation about the Abyss or judgment
 - The demons had made bad assumptions and proposed their own solution to a problem that didn't actually exist
 - Yes, one day they will be judged, and Jesus was content to wait for that day
 - In the meantime, Jesus just wanted to free the men from their influence, and the pigs would just be collateral damage
 - Ironically, because of their ignorance, the demons played into God's hand again
 - They intended to trick Jesus and prolong their rebellion
 - But in reality, they testified to His authority and identity, and they gave opportunity for Jesus to display His power over them
- So what do we do with this knowledge?
 - Well, in short, we live in fear of God, not in fear of the enemy
 - But we live with a respect for the reality and power of the enemy
 - And we obey Scripture when it tells us to submit to God, so that we might resist the devil and he will flee
 - If and when you encounter demon-possessed people in this world, be wary
 - They aren't behind every corner, but they are around
 - Steer clear of them and do not presume you have power over them
 - Only the Lord can free a demon-possessed person
 - So unless the Lord grants you the spiritual power to do so, you are not their equal (read about the sons of Sceva in Acts 19)
- Finally, don't allow the enemy's tactics in bringing death and mayhem in the world prompt fear or despair in your heart
 - Notice in vs.33-34 that as these men reported the outcome, it resulted in fear among the people, so that then they asked Jesus to leave
 - That's the effect the demons wanted
 - It's another irony in this story...that even though the demons weren't able to outsmart Jesus, nevertheless, they did accomplish their mission to a degree
 - By inhabiting these men, and then later the swine, the demons generated fear

and that fear drove people away from Jesus

- Remember, He Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world, so do not fear the enemy
 - This world belongs to him for a while, but the world is passing and so is he
 - And you have overcome this world by your faith in Jesus Christ

- After six weeks, we're finally transitioning into Chapter 9, but we're still looking at the various miracles Matthew records in the Galilee
 - Today, we finish the second section of miracles Matthew selected, and this section emphasizes Jesus' power to do things only God can do
 - Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus controlling the forces of nature with just a word... that certainly showed the power of God
 - Last week, we studied Jesus' power over the judgment of demons...another role that only God can play
 - And this week, we find Jesus demonstrating power and authority that is quintessentially God's alone: forgiving sin
 - So let's revisit the scene
 - Previously, Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee at night to escape the crowds
 - And as He landed in Gadara, He confronted the demon-possessed men and healed them
 - And in the aftermath of that miracle, the Gentile townspeople were so frightened by Jesus, they begged Him to leave the area
 - So we pick up at that point in Chapter 9

Matt. 9:1 Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city.

Matt. 9:2 And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven."

Matt. 9:3 And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes."

- After the townspeople demanded that Jesus depart, He respected their wishes and crossed back to the other side of the lake to His "own city"
 - That city was Capernaum, which was Jesus' home base for ministry in the Galilee
 - Earlier in the Gospel, we learned that Jesus moved with His mother and siblings to Capernaum from Nazareth
 - The move made strategic sense
 - Nazareth was located off the beaten track and located in difficult-to-reach hills
 - While Capernaum sat near major roads and on the Galilee, which meant it was well-positioned to support Jesus' itinerant ministry
 - So Jesus returns to His newly adopted home with His disciples, and Luke says Jesus was teaching in the inner courtyard of a home
 - And on this day, Jesus has collected a considerable crowd of religious leaders

Luke 5:17 One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform

healing.

- Jewish religious officials from around Israel have descended upon Jesus
- Some had even traveled the 60 miles or so from Jerusalem
- Mark says there were so many scribes present, that there was no space left in the room and they spilled outside the door
- You may remember earlier in this section of miracles, Jesus healed a man of leprosy
 - When we studied that miracle, we learned that for the very first time in Israel's history, Jesus had invoked the requirements of Leviticus 14
 - Leviticus 14 gives specific instructions to Israel for how to respond to a person cured of leprosy
 - The healed leper was to show himself to the priests, who would verify the cleansing and declare the man officially restored
 - Yet since that law was given to Israel, no leper had ever been healed
 - So the instructions found in Leviticus 14 had never been put into force
 - That curious fact led rabbis in Israel to conclude that if and when a leper was healed, the healer must be uniquely anointed by God
 - In other words, that man would be the Messiah
 - So as Jesus healed the Jewish leper, He told the man to present himself to the priests as Leviticus 14 required
 - Naturally, when that leper arrived at the temple and presented himself for inspection, the priests verified the healing
 - And the news of the leper's healing traveled quickly among the Jewish authorities in Israel
 - They would have understood the meaning of that sign, and as a result, they would have come to investigate whether Jesus is the Messiah
 - Whenever a self-proclaimed savior arrived, the religious authorities would always inspect the claims and make a determination
 - If these authorities "approved" a person's claims to being Messiah, then the nation would be told to follow him
 - If they rejected the claim, the people were told to ignore the person, and he would be charged with blasphemy
 - To this point, no Messiah had ever been confirmed, so the nation still awaited a Deliverer
 - So after Jesus healed the leper, He found Himself under their microscope – and in their sights
 - Perhaps some scribes conducted their investigation with an open mind and honest intentions
 - But even if so, they all quickly set themselves against Jesus, largely because of

scenes like the one we're studying now

- Because as Jesus meets this man, He declares the man to be forgiven of His sins, which leads the leaders to gasp in horror and declare it to be blasphemy
 - To understand all that's happening here, let's get a better sense of the scene
 - First, we have the man's unique entry into the room
 - He is paralyzed, so he's brought before Jesus, lying on his bed by friends who carry him
 - But the scribes were so numerous, Luke says they blocked these men from reaching Jesus
 - Apparently, none of those pompous, self-important scribes were willing to yield their place to this needy man and his friends
 - So the men looked for another way to reach Jesus
 - Luke tells us they lowered the man down through an opening in the roof of the house, directly in front of Jesus
 - The religious leaders had made themselves a barrier to reaching Jesus
 - They formed a physical barrier in that room, but in time, they also became a spiritual barrier to the people
 - They denied Jesus' claims as Messiah and told the people that He was a fraud unworthy of their attention
 - In that way, the scribes put themselves between the people and salvation, leading Jesus to call them stumbling blocks
 - This happens today too...false religious leaders and religious movements tell their followers that only they can grant access to God
 - They claim to hold the secret to forgiveness and salvation when in reality, such people are actually standing in your way
 - Their lies and false claims that are not supported by Scripture are stumbling blocks
 - You can be sure that when someone claims to be a gateway to accessing God, they are actually a wall blocking the way
 - But those who are being drawn by the Spirit to Jesus will come to Him regardless of obstacles
 - Notice, Matthew says Jesus takes note of their faith
 - That pronoun is plural, which means all these men were working from a common belief that Jesus could heal the man
 - So faith finds a way, and nobody has the power to prevent God's children from reaching Him
- Next, take note that Jesus says your *sins* are forgiven
 - The verb tense Matthew uses in Greek reflects instantaneous action
 - The man's sins were forgiven at that very moment

- Notice, Jesus doesn't name a particular sin that was forgiven...He was declaring *all* the man's sins were forgiven
 - Jesus was saying that this man was completely clean before God
- Furthermore, the man's forgiveness was based entirely on his faith in Jesus
 - So Jesus put no burdens on the man
 - The man did not have to accomplish works of restitution or penance or anything
 - Only his faith in Jesus was necessary to receive God's forgiveness of his sins, and that forgiveness covered all the man's sins
- Jesus' statement posed two concerns for the scribes in the room
 - First, these men would have objected to the idea that any person could be exonerated of all sins merely on the basis of faith
 - Pharisaic Judaism didn't understand salvation in that way
 - In the first century, Jewish religious leaders taught that being born a Jew was sufficient to receive salvation
 - Elsewhere in the Gospels, the Pharisees defend themselves to Jesus, saying they were born children of God

John 8:37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

John 8:38 "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father."

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

- Furthermore, scribes believed that part of being Jewish and receiving the benefits thereof involved careful observance of the Law
 - So they believed that God "saved" the Jewish people merely on the basis of their family ties to Abraham
 - But forgiveness of sin was accomplished through the Law
- That's why we find Paul working so hard in his letters to show that forgiveness of sin is never through works of Law
 - In fact, keeping the Law was not a means of receiving God's forgiveness, either for Israel or for the Church
 - But many Jewish believers in Paul's day continued to carry that Pharisaic mindset

into their relationship with Jesus

- So as these men heard Jesus declaring the man forgiven of all sin based on faith alone, they objected
 - Now we might ask, why would they object to that truth?
 - Wouldn't it be good news to learn you don't have to earn God's forgiveness?
 - Yes it is...unless your heart is set on other things
 - And in this case, their hearts were set on maintaining their power over the people...on being gateways to God
 - And as long as the people believed that access to God's forgiveness depended on works of Law, these men stayed in power over the people
 - They decided when a person had sinned
 - And they decided when that person had done enough work to receive forgiveness
 - They did the very thing that they objected to about Jesus
 - They placed themselves in the place of deciding whether someone received God's forgiveness
 - And that brings us to their second objection
 - They objected to the very idea that Jesus had the power to forgive sin
 - And their concern was actually reasonable, because no man has the power to forgive sins – period
- Sin isn't just a Bible-ly word for doing something evil or making a mistake
 - Sin is a technical term
 - Sin is an offense against God...it's disobeying the Creator
 - And that's fundamentally different than just making a mistake
 - For example, when I hurt another person, if I speak a false word against a person, I offend that person
 - If he should forgive me for my offense, all is well between us
 - But that's not the end of the matter, because by my behavior, I also offended God
 - I've broken His standard for righteousness...and that's sin
 - And as a result, I have incurred a debt before God – a penalty I must pay for my offense, the Bible says
 - Now God, in His mercy and grace, can forgive me of my offense against Him
 - But only God Himself may extend forgiveness for sin, because He was the One offended by it
 - So no person has the authority to offer God's forgiveness to another person
 - Like in the case of my example...the person I insulted may choose to forgive me for my offense against *him*

- But no matter how forgiving or understanding that person is, he *cannot* grant me God's forgiveness
- Only God can do that
- Therefore, unless and until the Lord is willing to forgive me, my sin of slander continues to convict me
- And one day, I will face the penalty for that sin, unless and until the Lord forgives me for it
- So the religious leaders objected to Jesus' words, both because Jesus was changing their rules, and because He put Himself in the place of God
 - Matthew said that some scribes thought to themselves, "This man blasphemes"
 - Blaspheming is profaning the holiness of God
 - We blaspheme when we presume to put ourselves in God's place or when we misrepresent God's Word or character
 - These men concluded Jesus had committed this offense because He took the place of God and altered their view of God's Word
 - In reality, Jesus hadn't changed God's Word at all
 - Rather, it was the scribes who had misrepresented what God's Word said about forgiveness and salvation
 - The prophets told the truth

**Hab. 2:4 "Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith."**

- And Moses said the same:

Deut. 30:11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach."

Deut. 30:12 "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'"

Deut. 30:13 "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'"

Deut. 30:14 "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."

- Jesus was just setting the record straight, teaching that eternal life comes by a confession of faith, not by works of the Law
- And furthermore, Jesus' claim to have the power to forgive sins was not blasphemy, because it was true

- He is the Son of God, so He possesses God's power to grant forgiveness for sins
- Hebrews says:

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- So Jesus did not blaspheme, but these men didn't recognize Jesus' authority, which is why Jesus takes the next step to validate His claims

Matt. 9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?"

Matt. 9:5 "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'?"

Matt. 9:6 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home."

Matt. 9:7 And he got up and went home.

Matt. 9:8 But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

- Jesus knew their thoughts, Matthew says, and so Jesus responds by asking, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"
 - That was the first step to demonstrating Jesus was God...He could know their thoughts
 - I would have loved to see their faces in that moment
 - They probably tried to put on an innocent look, denying it was them entertaining evil thoughts
 - But they've been caught, so then Jesus turns next to offering them proof of His claims
 - He uses a technique of rabbinical logic called *kal v'chomer*, which means "from difficult to easy"
 - The idea is that if I can demonstrate the power to accomplish a more difficult thing, then I am also capable of the easier thing
 - For example, if I claim I can lift a 500 lb. block of stone, but you don't believe me, I could prove my claim by lifting a 1,000 lb. stone
 - Because anyone who can lift a 1,000 lb. stone, is obviously capable of lifting 500 lbs.
 - So in this case, Jesus claimed to have the power to forgive sins, and that is a very

easy thing to claim

- Because God's forgiveness can't be proven
- No one on earth can prove one way or another if that statement is true...there is no visible sign
- Which makes saying those words very easy
- On the other hand, saying to a paralyzed man, "Get up and walk", is a very hard thing to do
 - Because instantly, your words will be shown to be true or false
 - If the man does not get up, your deception will be exposed
- Yet both these statements share one thing in common
 - Only God can declare your sins forgiven...
 - And only the Creator can heal the physical body by His Word alone
 - So if Jesus can heal a man by His Word, then He is proving Himself to be God
 - And if Jesus is God, then He can also declare a man's sins be forgiven
- So Jesus commands the man to get up, which he does immediately
 - And as he does, the room of scribes and all the people waiting outside witness this miracle
 - And they were awestruck, causing them to glorify God for having given such authority, such power to men
 - Which is exactly the kind of proof these men needed to verify Jesus' claims to being Messiah...or it *should* have been enough
 - But these men had evil in their hearts, as Jesus said
 - That's why I think Jesus began this moment as He did, declaring the man to be forgiven of sin, rather than declaring him healed
 - At other times when sick people have come to Jesus, He simply granted them physical healing without a word
 - But this time, Jesus grants spiritual healing initially, not physical healing
 - Only later, after the Pharisees refused to believe that Jesus had done as He said, did Jesus move to physical healing
 - I think He did so because He knew He was under inspection for His claims to be Messiah
 - So in this moment, Jesus constructs a test for all mankind to use in determining who to believe about God and forgiveness and salvation
 - And the test is simply this: when deciding who you believe speaks for God, you should trust the One Who can back up His words with power
 - In this moment, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness first, and accepting those words was a matter of faith
 - They couldn't be proven...they could only be accepted by faith

- The man and his friends had faith in Jesus, which is why they received God's forgiveness
- The scribes, on the other hand, lacked faith in Jesus, which is why they did not believe His words nor did they receive His forgiveness
- But then to prove His claims, Jesus performed a work of power that no one but God may do
 - By that miracle, Jesus proved God was working through Him
 - And God doesn't grant His power to a fraud or liar
 - Unfortunately, the scribes were too hard-hearted to receive that truth, despite Jesus' power
 - As a result, this moment is just the first of many accusations of blasphemy that eventually lead to Jesus' trial and death
- Before we finish, I wonder what this paralyzed man thought when he heard Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven"
 - Was he a little disappointed by what he heard?
 - This man probably spent most or perhaps all of his life as a paralytic, and in that day, paralysis was a hard way to live
 - There were no social services, no handicap parking permits, and no sympathy
 - Society typically viewed such people as cursed by God
 - So we know this man was desperate to receive physical healing
 - And when his moment before the Great Healer comes, he hears Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven"
 - I wonder if he looked up at Jesus and said, "And, and....?"
- When I was young, I wanted a Hot Wheels toy car race track for Christmas...I saw it advertised on a Saturday morning TV show, and I was hooked
 - It's the only thing I asked my parents for that year
 - And when Christmas Day came, I was sure my parents had given me what I wanted
 - But after all the presents were opened, my car race track was nowhere to be found, and I was so confused
 - Then my parents revealed I wasn't getting the race track, because they had a better idea for my Christmas gift
 - So they took me outside to show me a basketball hoop ready to be assembled and set up in the ground at the end of our driveway
 - They were so pleased with their choice of gift, but I could barely hold back my disappointment
 - They tried to explain that a basketball goal would last far longer than a toy race track
 - And that as I grew older, I would appreciate playing basketball long after I had

lost interest in toys

- Of course, they were right...I spent countless hours playing basketball on that goal until I graduated high school
 - And it gave me a love for the sport that continues to this day
 - Even still, it took a while for me to recognize the wisdom of my parents' decision
 - I had to shift my perspective from immediate gratification to the future benefits of a meaningful gift
 - You might say I needed to mature into having a perspective on the future...or as we say here, having eyes for eternity
- I'm guessing this man was a little disappointed when Jesus didn't act to heal him at first
 - Surely, any disappointment he felt turned to relief when Jesus told him to get up
 - But I also wonder which of those healings mattered more to the man as time went along
 - As the end of his life approached, and his body began to fail again, as it does for all of us, where did he find his hope?
 - I bet he wasn't hoping for another physical healing
 - I'm sure he found hope knowing that when he died, he would stand before Christ loved, forgiven, saved
 - Perhaps that's why the Lord opened the conversation with "be of good courage"
 - Be encouraged that salvation is possible by faith alone
 - Be encouraged that God is willing to heal your soul
 - Be encouraged you have eternal life
- Friends, we need to be encouraged today by that same truth
 - Jesus Christ proved His claims to be God over and over again
 - He healed the body, controlled the forces of nature and put the demons in their place
 - Then He died on a cross to satisfy the penalty you owed God for your sin
 - And He rose from the grave to prove to you that He has the power over life and death
 - And he pronounced forgiveness of sins for those who place their faith in Him
 - That has to be the basis of our encouragement too
 - Christians certainly have other needs too...needs for healing, equipping, provision, comfort, restoration and the like
 - But even if God answers these prayers, as He will from time to time, these earthly things fade in time anyway
 - So if we place our hope in these things, we will be disappointed
 - We have to remind ourselves daily that our hope comes from the certain knowledge that we are forgiven by God

- And that's enough to sustain us through trials, through deprivation, through sickness, and through discomfort
- Because those things are passing...but God's forgiveness is forever
 - And if the gift of Heaven doesn't seem as important to you sometimes as those others things do
 - I assure you that as you see the end of your life upon you, having God's forgiveness for your sin will be far more precious to you than anything in this world
- So where have you placed your trust for your eternal future? Are you sure God has forgiven you?
 - Did someone promise God's forgiveness? Did that someone prove they have the power to speak for God?
 - Jesus proved He does
 - And Jesus stands ready to receive you, to forgive you, if you would just trust Him

- Back to Matthew 9 tonight, where we've reached the second anecdote Matthew uses to separate the groups of miracles in Chapters 8 & 9
 - You'll remember that Matthew has arranged the miracles in these two chapters into three groups of three
 - We just finished the second group of three miracles last week, looking at Jesus declaring the paralytic forgiven of his sin
 - So that means we're poised to move into Matthew's third and final group of miracles
 - But before we do, we need to examine a scene that takes place between Jesus and His disciples, and the disciples of John
 - Back in Chapter 8, we studied the first scene Matthew recorded between the first and second group of miracles
 - That scene centered on certain disciples, those who had believed in Jesus, yet refused to put a priority on following Him
 - By Jesus' response, we learned that He has full authority over His followers, including having high expectations for our obedience
 - Today, we study a 2-part scene that explains the power Jesus wields over those in covenant with God
 - This full scene runs from vs.9-17, and tonight, we look at the first part of that scene from vs.9-13
 - This first part involves Jesus and His disciples and the Pharisees
 - The scene begins with an eponymous reference

Matt. 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

- To introduce the scene that follows, Matthew tells us how he came to be one of Jesus' disciples
 - First, he says Jesus left Capernaum to resume His travels in the Galilee
 - Earlier in the city, Jesus had been confronted by a large crowd of Pharisees or scribes
 - Those men traveled to investigate whether Jesus might be the Messiah, and their investigation takes two phases
 - First, the leaders conducted a passive investigation
 - They just observed what Jesus said and did to see if it supported or disqualified His claims
 - That's the period we're in now
 - If the passive investigation seems to support Jesus' claims to be Messiah, then the religious leaders will move to an active phase

- They will begin to interrogate Jesus, asking Him questions to poke holes in His claims
- So Jesus left the house in Capernaum and began walking on the major road that passed by the city
 - As He went along, He was being followed by a large crowd of people, which now included those religious leaders
 - As He travels, He comes upon a tax collection booth
 - And in that booth, sat a Jewish man named Matthew
 - In Jesus' day, the empire of Rome stretched from Great Britain to India
 - Across that tremendous expanse, Rome maintained a vast infrastructure
 - They had military posts, roads and bridges, government buildings, ships and, of course, palaces
 - Constructing and maintaining all that infrastructure required vast amounts of money
 - So naturally, Rome levied heavy taxes on its subjects, especially on conquered territories, like Judea
 - Taxes came in various forms, including income taxes and custom taxes
 - For conquered territories like Judea, the customs tax was the chief means of raising revenue
 - Customs officials, called publicans, were positioned at borders and ports of entry to collect tax on goods passing by
 - The road going by Capernaum was a major caravan route, connecting Egypt with the East, and many goods traveled on it
 - Furthermore, the road crossed the border between the territories held by Philip and Herod Antipas, sons of Herod the Great
 - They inherited rule over different areas of Judea after their father died
 - So Rome placed a tax collection booth on that road near the border to tax the goods flowing between these territories
- Publicans were generally not paid directly by Rome for their services
 - Instead, the Romans allowed these officials to keep anything they collected above and beyond their tax quota
 - So, the Roman authorities would assign each publican a certain quota of tax per day they must collect and turn in to Rome
 - If too little tax was collected, the publicans might be beaten or imprisoned
 - If the publican collected more than required, he could keep the difference
 - And Romans didn't use their own citizens to perform this role
 - Instead, Romans enlisted locals to collect taxes on their behalf, probably because a local would know the people and the language better
 - In Judea, tax collectors were typically Jews like Levi (Matthew)

- Of course, any Jews who agreed to serve Rome in this way were considered traitors by the rest of the Jewish people
 - They were seen as supporting the Roman government in its campaign to oppress and rob the Jewish people
 - Pharisees so despised publicans that rabbinical writings of the day used the publican to represent the greatest law breaker possible in Israel
 - No Jew could be more sinful than a publican in the rabbis' eyes
- As a result, the Pharisees established special rules to punish publicans
 - Publicans were ostracized from the Jewish community
 - No Jew other than publicans and prostitutes could lawfully associate with a publican
 - In fact, the word “sinner” in Israel became another way of referring to a tax collector or prostitute
 - Publicans could not testify in court or be a witness in any matter of law
 - And the Pharisees even taught that it was not possible for a tax collector to repent or receive forgiveness
 - So publicans were in a no-win situation, because they had no friends among Jews or Romans
 - The Romans had no regard for Jews whatsoever, while their own countrymen considered them pariahs and unredeemable
 - If they even tried to win favor with their Jewish brethren by collecting less tax, it would have been fruitless
 - The Jews weren't going to be persuaded, so they only risked going hungry or being beaten by the Roman taskmasters
 - Therefore, the only sensible course for a publican, was to look out for #1 by collecting as much tax as possible
 - Publicans were generally ruthless extortionists
 - They pressured their fellow Jews for every last penny of tax, while Romans soldiers stood by to enforce their demands
 - After all, if a Jew was going to be a pariah in his own country, at least he could be a rich pariah
- But on this day, Jesus calls out to one of these pariahs sitting in his tax booth, saying to Matthew, “follow me”
 - The other Synoptic Gospels give this man's name as Levi, which indicates he was from the tribe of Levi
 - But here, the author gives himself the name Matthew, which is *Mattai* in Hebrew, meaning “gift of Yahweh”
 - Matthew's having two different names reflects a tradition within the Church in his day
 - In that day, when a person became Christian, the person often took on a new

name reflecting his or her new identity in Christ

- So Levi changed his name to Matthew after his conversion and that's the name he preferred to use for himself in his Gospel
- This tradition still exists in some places today
 - For example, you may meet believers in Africa or Asia who have traditional surnames with Biblical first names (e.g., Moses Goswami or Barnabas Okonjo)
 - In those cultures, believers still change their given name to testify to their new birth in Christ
- Western Church culture doesn't follow this tradition, but personally, I think it's a great idea
 - I came to faith as an adult in my late twenties, so I can see clearly how much difference Christ has made in who I am
 - I marvel at how much Christ has remade me into His likeness
 - But when I look back on my life before Christ – on the way I conducted myself in my relationships and the way I lived my life – I'm not proud of who I was
 - I wasn't a terrible person, but still the person I was and the way I thought and acted were a far cry from the life I know now in Christ
- So when I run into someone from my past, I wish I had a quick way to demonstrate to them how much my faith has changed me for the better
 - I want them to know I'm not the same person they knew before, but how do I communicate that quickly in a chance meeting?
 - What if I told them my name has changed...that's certain to spark a conversation
 - And it effectively testifies that I'm a new person, and it reminds me to live up to my new identity in Christ
- Consequently, I've decided to adopt a new first name as a testimony of my new life in Christ
 - I've chosen to adopt the name of an important biblical character
 - The name I selected comes from Chapter 7 of Acts, chosen in honor of the first martyr recorded in the Bible
 - His name in Greek is *Stephanos*...or Stephen, to us
- So back to the text, as Matthew sits in his tax collector's booth, Jesus calls to Matthew and says, "follow me"
 - Jesus was saying something very specific...he was inviting Matthew to become His disciple, to leave his current life and begin a new life
 - If you had been standing next to Matthew at that moment, you could have pushed him over with a feather
 - He would have been speechless
 - It would have been unbelievable that a respectable Jew would even speak to him, much less welcome his company

- It's possible that Matthew hadn't spoken with another Jew, apart from other tax collectors and prostitutes, for years
- And more than that, Jesus wasn't just your ordinary rabbi...Jesus was the talk of the Galilee, the man some were saying could be the Messiah
 - So as Jesus approached with His crowd in tow, Matthew would have watched in fascination – and maybe even a little jealousy
 - What Matthew wouldn't give to have just a little of the attention and respect Jesus was receiving from the Jewish people?
 - But that was a crazy dream, Matthew thought
 - After all, he was an outcast and without a true friend in the world
- And then, a miracle happens...as Jesus passes by, He stops, turns, catches Matthew's widening eyes, and says, "follow me"
 - Matthew pinches himself to be sure he's not dreaming, but then almost immediately, he runs out of his booth to join Jesus
 - Luke adds that Matthew left everything behind
 - He left behind his booth, his money, his responsibilities to Rome, his protection by the Roman soldiers, his way of life
- And most of all, Mathew left behind his shame and guilt
 - While the Jewish people probably weren't so quick to forgive and forget what Matthew did
 - Gaining friends among the Jews would still have been tough for Matthew, but that didn't matter much to him now
 - When you're a friend of the King, you don't need other friends
- Immediately, Matthew invited Jesus to join in a celebration at Matthew's house
 - It's reminiscent of the story of the prodigal son, when the son returns home, the Father throws a party
 - That's where Matthew's account goes next in v.10

Matt. 9:10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

Matt. 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"

Matt. 9:12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

Matt. 9:13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- Jesus is reclining in Matthew's home

- In that day, people ate from tables on the floor, so they reclined on cushions positioned on the floor around the table
- So a meal in that day was typically an intimate and joyful affair
- So now, imagine Jesus in that environment surrounded by other tax collectors and “sinners,” Matthew says, which refers to prostitutes
 - Now that’s some party! Food, drink surrounded by rich bad guys and loose women of ill repute
 - We understand why Matthew keeps this kind of company...these were the only type of people who would accept him
 - But does it make you feel a little uncomfortable to think of Jesus sharing that company too?
 - Rubbing elbows (literally) with extortionists and prostitutes?
- That was certainly the Pharisees’ reaction
 - They see Jesus enter Matthew’s home, and they are beside themselves with disgust
 - A tax collector’s home was off-limits to any self-respecting Jew
 - In fact, none of the Pharisees themselves dared to enter the house and join the meal, of course
 - They stayed nearby, grouching and grumbling among themselves
 - In v.11, the Pharisees speak with Jesus’ disciples, asking why is your Teacher (rabbi) eating with these sinners?
 - These leaders were indicting Jesus’ character to Jesus’ disciples to suggest that they were following the wrong guy
 - The true Messiah wouldn’t sin this way by associating with such ungodly people
 - Jesus wasn’t actually sinning by associating with such people, because the Law of God never called it sin
 - Nevertheless, He was violating the Pharisees’ rules, which they considered equal to Scripture
- Then Jesus responds in v.12-13 with His well-known and often-quoted observation
 - He says healthy people don’t need a visit from the doctor; the sick need doctors
 - Luke also records Jesus’ saying:

Luke 5:32 “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

- Jesus says these people were the spiritually sick
- Now that’s something that both Jesus and the Pharisees could have agreed upon
- But the question they disagreed over was, “What is our spiritual obligation toward such people?”
 - The Pharisees had concluded that God had no mercy for such people

- They believed God showed mercy to those who were righteous, those who kept the Law of Moses and the oral law of the rabbis
- Naturally, the Pharisees saw themselves as perfect candidates for God's mercy, while tax collectors and prostitutes were beyond reach
- But Jesus reminds them that's not how doctors work
 - Jesus was acting like a doctor, bringing the medicine of God's mercy to those who needed forgiveness the most
 - That's why Jesus favored these sinners over the Pharisees
 - Jesus says He came to call the sinner to repentance, not the righteous
 - After all, why should God bring forgiveness to those who believed they had done nothing wrong?
- As obvious as that may sound to us now, it wasn't how Pharisees understood the mission of the Messiah
 - Pharisees saw themselves as the best example of God's standards and expectations for His people
 - And so when the Messiah finally arrived, they expected that man to affirm Pharisaic rabbinical culture
 - They assumed the Messiah would be like a super-Pharisee
 - He would be like a teacher who puts gold stars on the papers of the exceptional student
 - And they assumed they had a lot of those stars coming their way
 - Therefore, they never imagined they were sinners in need of a Savior to forgive them of sin
 - That's the chief conceit of self-righteousness
 - Self-righteousness is thinking ourselves worthy of God's approval on our own merits, conveniently forgetting how bad we truly are
 - It's a self-deception that overestimates our virtues, while underestimating our faults
 - The Pharisees could look down their noses at tax collectors and prostitutes, because they saw themselves as righteous
 - They could judge others, because they saw no need to judge themselves
 - But we know the Pharisees were not righteous, because the Bible says there are none who are righteous, no not one
 - Even one sin is enough to make a person a Law breaker, a sinner
 - And nothing that person does from that point forward can erase that one mistake
 - Only God can erase it, which is why Jesus came to earth...to erase our sins
 - But since these men said they had no sin, they were left in their sins to their eternal condemnation

- While the so-called sinners in the house with Jesus were the ones receiving God's forgiveness by their faith
- Pride is an ugly thing...it brought the first man to sin and it stood in the way of these men finding forgiveness
- To these self-righteous men, Jesus says in v.13, "go and learn what this means"
 - That is a rabbinical technique of teaching disciples...it's like a homework assignment
 - ` Then Jesus quotes from the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament
 - So Jesus reacts to his disciples' misplaced concerns by assigning them some homework
 - So let's do their homework and see what we learn
 - Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6 where we read:

**Hos. 6:6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

**Hos. 6:7 But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant;
There they have dealt treacherously against Me.**

- Hosea says the Lord delights in loyalty, rather than sacrifice
- In Hebrew, the word for "loyalty" is better translated, "lovingkindness"
- "Lovingkindness" is a covenant term, describing the self-sacrificial devotion and service one party shows to another in a covenant
 - In a covenant, you place the other party's needs above your own
 - In a covenant, you are expected to remain loyal to the other person's interests, regardless of what that person does
 - That's what we have in our covenant with Jesus
 - Jesus showed us lovingkindness when He died in our place on the cross
 - And when we show Jesus' love to the forgotten and rejected sinner of our world, we're showing lovingkindness to Jesus
- God delights in these things, rather than in sacrifices
 - But we remember that sacrifices were also a part of God's covenant relationship with Israel
 - Sacrifice was required under the Law, as a response to sin
 - So in what sense did the Lord not prefer sacrifice?
- The answer comes in the next line...He desires knowing Him over burnt offerings
 - In other words, the prophet is contrasting a covenant of faith in God with a covenant of Law
 - Both covenants had good purpose for God

- But one was preferred over the other because one was internal, while the other was external
- Knowing the Lord through faith in His son is a covenant based on lovingkindness, it's an internal relationship with God
- It's a covenant of the heart, based on faith
- While the covenant of Law was an external relationship with God
 - It took place at a distance, through outward actions of sacrifice
 - It lacked the power to save, because it did not operate on the basis of faith
 - So if you were to choose one of these ways to please God, He says rely on the covenant of faith over the one of sacrifice
- But that wasn't the way the Pharisees saw their relationship with God
 - The Pharisees believed the Lord delighted in their sacrifices,
 - Whether animal sacrifice in the temple, or the many personal sacrifices they made, these were the things they thought united them to God's mercy
- But sacrifice is an act of atonement and restitution required for those who have sinned
 - If you're sacrificing, it means you're still a sinner
 - It had a purpose in the Law, but that purpose was not saving a person
 - The endless repetition of the Law's sacrifices reminded a person they needed something greater to obtain eternal forgiveness
- The Pharisees were relying on self-righteousness under the Law, and self-righteousness doesn't breed compassion...it results in judgment
 - That's what allowed them to stand in judgment over those who didn't measure up to their efforts
 - Notice the next line in Hosea 6... like Adam, they too had transgressed the covenant, they were sinners too
 - They had dealt treacherously with the Lord
 - They obeyed the outward requirements of the Law, while violating the Law continually in their hearts
- Now surely, those who know and follow Jesus know better than to think like this?
 - We remember we were once the sick, in need of Jesus' healing too
 - So of course, that means we long to see the worst of society receiving Jesus too, don't we?
 - And especially now, while Jesus is gone from the earth, we're all ready to take His place by visiting the worst sinners of our day, right?
 - Well, I think if we're honest with ourselves, we would admit that's a tougher assignment than it should be
 - Ask yourself, would you have walked into that house with Jesus?

- What if it was a crack house? What if it was a brothel or a homosexual bar?
- I'm not saying we must go everywhere or foolishly throw ourselves in harm's way
- But self-righteousness is seductive and you can fall for it before you know it
 - In the beginning, we all come to Jesus repentant
 - We readily acknowledge we're a sinner in need of a Savior, the spiritually sick patient in need of a doctor to grant healing
- But then once we receive forgiveness, we can be tempted to turn into a Pharisee
 - We can start to think Jesus saved us because we were the spiritual all-star
 - And you'll know when you've taken that turn, because you'll forget the lesson of Hosea 6
 - We will lose sight of compassion and we'll start trusting in our sacrifices
 - The way we sacrifice time for God at church, or our sacrifices of money or the way we police our behavior
- From there it's only a small step to looking down our noses at those dirty sinners everywhere
 - You know the types...the ones with tattoos
 - The ones with a checkered past, the ones who watch R-rated movies, the ones who vote Democrat
- Want proof how easy this can happen today? Then let me ask you some questions:
 - If the gay married couple living next door asked you to dinner, would you accept their invitation?
 - Would you invite them to your house for dinner?
 - If a prostitute walked in that door tonight (wearing scandalous attire) and sat a couple of seats away in your row, would you move closer to introduce yourself or move away?
 - If a Mormon invited you to a church meeting in their home, would you attend?
 - The question is, do you see yourself as a doctor ready to meet the sick wherever they happen to be?
 - Or are you the Pharisee waiting for the sick to heal themselves before you're willing to reward them with your approval?
 - Do you think people need to clean themselves up before they come to Jesus, forgetting that you came to Him a filthy sinner?
- Look, I know we have to be careful and discerning about these things, and there will be times and places that aren't suitable for our company
 - But in my experience, those situations are few and far between
 - Meanwhile, there are many times you will pass by someone like Levi
 - Men and women who sit by the side of the road, so to speak, living under a cloud of shame and rejection

- They watch the privileged of the world passing by them every day
- And they never dream that they too could be called a child of the King
- If only someone would stop long enough to take note of them and call them to follow Jesus, they're so ready to leave everything behind
 - The guilt, the shame, the hopelessness, the deprivation, the rejection and the pain
 - They're ready to celebrate finding purpose and hope in Jesus, and they'll be the first to invite their friends to follow
- Remember, the Lord expects our lovingkindness to Him in this covenant we have by our faith
 - And lovingkindness requires we represent Christ's interests to the world, just as Jesus did Himself
- But if we're going to be useful to God in reaching these sinners, then we have to be willing to rub elbows with them
 - We have to remember we were once just like them
 - We may not have shared their lifestyle, but we were no more righteous than they were
 - And we certainly shared their eternal fate were it not for the grace of God
 - Only by His grace were we made a child of God, by the same Gospel you can bring them
 - Go and learn this: Compassion is what God is asking us to demonstrate – the compassion He showed us first

- Welcome to the weekend of Thanksgiving
 - I bet your turkey wasn't the only thing that got stuffed over this holiday
 - Thanksgiving is the one day of the year when it's socially acceptable to eat far more than you should
 - I know many of us are still chowing down on leftovers
 - And I'm sure at least a few of us are feeling our pants fitting a little tighter already
 - It's OK...that's what New Year's resolutions are for
 - But if you're lamenting your growing waistline tonight, the Lord has heard your cries, and has responded by scheduling the perfect topic for my Thanksgiving weekend preaching
 - That's right...the topic waiting for us tonight in Chapter 9 of Matthew is *fasting*
 - Today, we will study the second half of a moment that took place between Jesus and His disciples in Chapter 9
 - This scene separates the second and third groups of miracles Matthew presents in Chapters 8 and 9
 - In this scene, Matthew is showing us Jesus' authority over those in covenant with the Lord
 - In particular, the focus is on Jesus' authority over those in the Old Covenant, that is, the unbelieving Pharisees
 - They were a part of the Old Covenant, just like all Israel
 - But the Pharisees had hijacked that Covenant and its Law to make it into something it wasn't
 - They added many, many new rules to the religious life of Israel
 - They called these new rules the oral law, in contrast to the written Law that God gave Moses
 - Eventually, they declared their oral law of manmade rules was equal to Scripture
 - They defended that conclusion by claiming that God gave Moses the oral law too, but it wasn't written down until centuries later
- So in this brief scene between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus denies and invalidates the Pharisaic additions to the Law of God
 - Last week, Jesus denied the Pharisees' expectations for the Messiah's ministry
 - He reminded the Pharisees that the chief purpose of the Messiah wasn't to reward those who had made sacrifices under the Law
 - Rather, Messiah would bring mercy to those who failed at the Law
 - So Jesus ate with sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes, just as a doctor goes to the sick
 - Jesus' behavior confused the Pharisees, because they believed God's Law and the

oral law were the means to pleasing God

- Those who kept the Law were going to be rewarded, those who didn't wouldn't
- So they stood in judgment over those who couldn't measure up, and they disapproved of Jesus showing mercy to such people
- That's self-righteousness, and self-righteousness naturally produces an attitude of judgment toward others
 - Therefore, Jesus told those men to go learn what it means when the Lord said, "I desire compassion not sacrifice"
 - The Lord desires we know Him so we may receive His compassion, rather than making ourselves acceptable by sacrifice
- Now moving to the second half of this exchange tonight, the scene continues with a question put to Jesus by the disciples of John the Baptist

Matt. 9:14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

- John's disciples throw a question about fasting at Jesus
 - And it seems to come out of nowhere
 - But that's an indication to us that we need to do some homework
 - We need to work to understand how this question relates to the prior moment
 - To do that, we need to pay careful attention to the context, both the context of Matthew and the context of Luke 5
- In both Gospels, we're told this question comes to Jesus during His meal at Levi's (Matthew's) house with the sinners and tax collectors
 - In Matthew, the disciples of John ask the question, but in Luke's Gospel, we're told that the question comes from the Pharisees

Luke 5:33 And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink."

- Notice that each mentions the other group in their question
- Which tells us that these two groups were asking Jesus the same question more or less in unison
- Whatever reason they had for asking about fasting, it must be commonly understood, because it's caught the attention of both groups
 - So why are the Pharisees and John's disciples so preoccupied with fasting at this very moment?
 - Well, if we look at the larger context of Luke's Gospel, we find a possible answer

- Luke's Gospel is generally presented in chronological order
- That's not the case in Matthew's account, because Matthew commonly moved events around to emphasize certain elements
- So looking at Luke's account, we learn that this dinner at Matthew's home happened a day or so before a weekly Sabbath
 - Which means this meal likely took place on a Thursday night
 - Which in turn, explains why these men were so preoccupied with Jesus's disciples eating instead of fasting
- By that day, rabbis taught their disciples that they must fast every week on Mondays and Thursdays
 - They observed this pattern in Spring between Passover and Pentecost, and again in Fall, between Tabernacles and The Feast of Dedication
 - Why Mondays and Thursdays? Because they said Moses went up to Mt. Sinai on a Thursday and came down on a Monday
- Of course, there was no biblical requirement to fast weekly, much less on these specific days
 - This is another example of the oral law imposing additional, unnecessary burdens on the people
 - The average Jew didn't observe this requirement, but the Pharisees and their disciples saw it as a command from God
 - For men dedicated to finding God through self-righteousness, rules like this gave them what they needed: a sacrifice
- So when Jesus and His disciples went into Matthew's home to eat with a bunch of outcasts, naturally, the Pharisees and John's disciples were confused
 - First, the judgmental Pharisees couldn't understand Jesus' willingness to show compassion to such people
 - And now, we learn that they were equally upset at Jesus' disciples abandoning the rules of the oral law
 - They were concerned that Jesus and His disciples were eating on a Thursday night, instead of fasting as was the tradition
 - It's easy enough to understand why the Pharisees objected, but we should ask, why are John's disciples concerned?
 - And for that matter, why are John's here and not following John?
 - For that matter, why are they still called John's disciples? Why haven't they left John to follow Jesus?
 - First, remember that John was a forerunner to Jesus
 - He was a prophet the Lord sent before the Messiah to prepare the hearts of Israel for His arrival
 - But once the Messiah appeared, John the Baptist told his disciples to follow Jesus instead of following him

- He said he must decrease so Jesus could increase
- Many of John's disciples left John to follow Jesus, just as John instructed them
 - But some of John's disciples, like these men, refused to leave John to follow Jesus
 - They continued calling themselves disciples of John
 - Why? The only possible answer is that not all of John's disciples were willing to recognize Jesus as the Messiah
- You probably assumed that every follower of John readily embraced Jesus at His appearing
 - But the reality was some people came into John's ministry for reasons other than a true repentant heart that sought the Messiah
 - Some of those who followed John the Baptist were stamped in the mold of the Pharisees
 - What attracted them was John's ascetic lifestyle and rigorous self-denial...in a word, it was the *sacrifice* that appealed to them
- So we can see why such men would align themselves so easily with the Pharisees in this moment...they were just like them
 - For these men, fasting twice a week was the perfect recipe for self-righteousness
 - But if they liked John's ministry so much, why are they here with Jesus?
 - Well, by this time, John the Baptist had been beheaded, so these men were disciples without a rabbi
 - They must have remembered that John held Jesus in high regard, so they likely came to see if Jesus could be their rabbi
 - But as they come to find Jesus eating with the worst of Jewish society, and doing it on a Thursday no less...this wasn't what they expected
 - So along with the Pharisees, these men wonder why Jesus didn't make His disciples fast according to the tradition of rabbis
 - We have two different, but related, groups asking the same question
 - Which explains why Jesus gives two different, but related, answers
- The first answer is directed to John's disciples

Matt. 9:15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

- Jesus uses a wedding metaphor to describe His coming to Israel
 - And this metaphor would have been very familiar to Jews
 - In several places in the Old Testament, including Psalms and Isaiah, you will find a wedding used to describe Messiah's arrival

- As well, Jewish tradition used the metaphor of a wedding feast to picture the banquet that opens the Messianic Kingdom
- And John the Baptist used the same metaphor when speaking to his own disciples about the Messiah's arrival

John 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

John 3:28 "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'

John 3:29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.

John 3:30 "He must increase, but I must decrease.

- The fact that Jesus chose this same metaphor to answer John's disciples tells us He was speaking specifically to them
- Jesus was connecting the dots for these men, explaining to them He is the Messiah, the bridegroom John told them to watch for
- But then Jesus extends the metaphor to address their concerns about fasting
 - He says that when the bridegroom does arrive, it's no time for mourning...it's a time of celebration
 - Weddings were particularly unique and festive occasions
 - They were moments of celebration unequalled in Jewish life
 - And the Bible chooses that moment to picture how God's people will feel when their Messiah comes for them
 - It should be an unequalled moment of incredible joy and celebration
 - It was for Jesus' disciples in that day and it will be for us in our day to come
 - On the other hand, the deprivation of fasting stands in stark contrast to the joy of a wedding celebration
 - Fasting denies the body joy for a time, and that's part of its spiritual benefit
 - But for that reason, it's impossible to experience the spiritual benefits of fasting while also engaged in a wedding celebration
 - Those two observances are mutually exclusive...
 - In fact, in Israel, religious fasting was suspended during a wedding celebration so the wedding party could celebrate
 - So Jesus is saying to John's disciples, "I'm the Messiah come for Israel, the One your rabbi told you to expect"
 - Therefore, Jesus' presence should be cause for great celebration, on a par with a wedding feast

- And such a celebration means fasting would be suspended for a time, so as long as Jesus is with them (a reference to Jesus' death and departure)
 - So asking Jesus' disciples to fast now, was like expecting wedding guests to skip the meal because the wedding fell on a Monday
- But these disciples of John's couldn't see Jesus as Messiah, because they couldn't reconcile a Messiah who wasn't willing to respect Pharisaic traditions
 - Remember, weekly fasting was a self-imposed requirement...it was part of the oral tradition of the Pharisees
 - The Lord never required fasting in this way
 - So Jesus' disciples had no obligation to fast weekly, regardless of the situation
 - But that was lost on these men, because they saw their traditions as God's instructions
 - And the great irony was, they were obeying those traditions in preparation for the Messiah's arrival
 - Yet when He arrived, they overlooked Jesus because He didn't care about their manmade rules
 - They carried themselves with a self-righteous mindset that caused them to reject the Messiah they said they awaited
 - And the best proof we have is that these men still call themselves disciples of John
 - They were trusting in their self-righteousness and personal sacrifice, clinging to John's austere lifestyle as an end in itself
 - They were so committed to that life that they stuck to John, even after Jesus appeared, and long after John the Baptist died
 - In fact, there are still groups operating in the world today that call themselves disciples of John the Baptist!
- So John's disciples preferred the sacrifices of the Pharisees' manmade rules over a personal relationship with God Himself
 - Which leads us to Jesus' second answer, spoken to the Pharisees

Matt. 9:16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.

Matt. 9:17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

- Jesus gave John's disciples a metaphor, and He answers the Pharisees with a parable
 - The wedding metaphor was easy to understand, but this parable probably left the Pharisees scratching their heads a bit
 - Parables are simple stories using well-understood principles to teach deeper spiritual truths

- And there are two parables here that work together to teach complimentary ideas
- First, Jesus describes mending torn clothing
 - That if you take a piece of new, unshrunk cloth and use it to patch an old garment, you'll make a mess of things
 - Because the first time you wash that patched item, the new patch will shrink, pulling at the old cloth in all directions
 - That causes the patch to tear away, and in the process ruins the garment
- Luke's version adds an additional detail

Luke 5:36 And He was also telling them a parable: “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.

- Luke adds that the new patch will also be ruined, and the two pieces won't match
- So putting the two together, the parable says mixing old and new things that don't match ruins both
- Looking at the second parable, Jesus says we likewise can't put new wine in old wineskins
 - This parable requires some knowledge of the culture of Jesus' day
 - A wineskin was a leather pouch used to hold and ferment wine
 - As the fermenting process progressed, it produced gasses that pushed against the wine skin, stretching it
 - As the fermentation completed, the wine skin would still be intact and could hold the wine for a time
 - (By the way, this is further proof that the wine mentioned in Jesus' day was true, fermented, alcoholic wine)
 - But after a wineskin was used to ferment wine, it couldn't be used again
 - If new wine were placed in that old skin, the fermentation pressure would again press against the skin
 - But because the skin had no more ability to stretch, it would simply tear, bursting open and wasting the wine
 - The principle of the second parable is closely connected to the first
 - The first parable taught that you can't combine old and new things that aren't compatible
 - While the second parable teaches that once something has fulfilled its purpose, it can't be pushed into new service again
 - Taking it beyond its useful purpose only brings ruin
- So now the question is, what spiritual truths was Jesus talking about? And as always,

our answer comes from the context of the passage

- Jesus and the Pharisees are disputing over Jesus' obligations to keep the oral law
 - The Pharisees believe Jesus should not eat with these sinners and He and His disciples should be fasting
 - Why? Because the oral law of the Pharisees required these things, and they expected all rabbis to abide by these rules
 - More importantly, they believed these rules came from God, so any man claiming to be Messiah would certainly keep them
- In response, Jesus uses these parables to expose the Pharisees' flawed logic
 - First, they were trying to patch old clothing with something new
 - The Pharisees had invented many rules in their Mishnah to "patch" holes they believed existed in God's law
- Pharisees believed God gave His Law to Israel to bring Israel to righteousness
 - But the Law could be vague at times, or leave room for accidental disobedience
 - So the scribes added new rules to the Law to patch any "holes" they discovered, and thereby prevent accidental sin
- By Jesus' day, these rules had come to be seen as equal to God's Law, in the way a patch becomes one with an old garment
 - Except, as Jesus points out, the two do not match
 - Their manmade rules couldn't equal the authority and validity of God's Law
 - In fact, adding anything to the Word of God only diminishes it, in the way that a patch ruins both itself and the original garment
- But in this case, it was even worse
 - Because over time, the Pharisees added so many patches to God's Law, that eventually the only thing Israel could see were the patches
 - The Pharisees' oral law completely overshadowed and obscured the true Law of God
 - And as a result, the oral law prevented Israel from recognizing Jesus as their Messiah when He came to them
 - The Law itself gave Israel picture after picture of Jesus
 - But Israel missed Him, because they were looking for a Messiah that resembled the patches, who looked like a Pharisee
 - So both the Law and the patches were ruined for that generation of Israel
 - Neither did the Law lead Israel to Jesus, nor did their patches make them righteous before God
 - Combining them just made a mess of everything
- Secondly, Jesus says these men were trying to pour new wine in old wineskins
 - That is, they were trying to repurpose the Old Covenant of Law by making it serve as

a means to righteousness

- The Old Covenant was intended to preserve Israel as a nation until the day Messiah arrived, as God promised
- Once the Messiah arrived, then the purpose of the Law regarding righteousness was fulfilled
- As Paul says

Gal. 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

Gal. 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Gal. 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Gal. 3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- When Jesus died on that cross, He brought the purpose of the Law to conclusion for all who place their faith in Him
 - Jesus was literally the wine in that old wineskin of the Old Covenant, being poured out for our sake
 - And now that Jesus has emptied the wineskin of the Old Covenant, He says we can't pour new things back into it
 - We can't repurpose the sacrifices and rules of the Old Covenant into a means for salvation, something it was never intended to be
- But the Pharisees preferred the old system over any new order that might do away with their system of rules and self-righteousness
 - And from what they could see, Jesus was proposing a new order
 - An order that cared nothing for their sacrifices or their rules
- In Luke's account, we hear Jesus saying this to these men

Luke 5:39 "And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'"

- Jesus says that once a man has a taste for the old wine, he will not be interested in the new wine
 - Wine generally tastes better after it has aged for a while
 - So once you've tried the old wine, the new wine will not please you
 - And Jesus was saying that once a person has become accustomed to seeking self-

righteousness, it's hard to desire any other way

- I told you last week, that self-righteousness is a seductive suitor
 - There's something about the trying to make yourself righteous that makes us feel good about ourselves
 - There's something about making sacrifices that satisfies us
- And you know what that something is? It's called pride
 - The Pharisees loved that prideful feeling of accomplishment they got every time they completed a fast
 - Every time they jumped through one of those countless hoops in their oral law, their pride checked another box in their heart
 - They found another reason to feel good about themselves, and they assumed God felt the same way too
- I think this explains why we have pious people who invest years in the sacrifices of a Christian life, yet never come to saving faith in Jesus
 - It's because along the way, they became content with the old wine of self-righteousness
 - They learned to love sacrificing...
 - Going to church, giving money, serving in various ways, doing penance, whatever was required to make themselves acceptable to God
 - So that even when someone explained the New Covenant to them...
 - That faith alone in Christ's sacrifice was the only way to receive forgiveness from God...
 - Still, they prefer to hold onto the old ways
 - To that person, Jesus says that's not how we become righteous or please God or receive His forgiveness
 - He says at the end v.17, we have to put new wine into fresh wineskins to preserve both
 - New wine is the New Covenant, the covenant God established in His Son, the one that offers salvation to all by faith in Jesus
 - And that new wineskin is a new heart of faith
 - It's a heart that does not trust in its own righteousness, for it knows that we have no righteousness before God
 - Even the best among us is still far from the standard of perfection required to enter Heaven
 - And knowing that, a new heart is ready to accept God's righteousness credited to us by our faith in Jesus Christ
- Those who have a new heart, filled by the love of Christ in the new covenant, are being preserved, Jesus says
 - That is, you have eternal life

- You will receive a new body, you will live for eternity with Jesus in the Kingdom, you are forgiven and saved
- But as we walk with Christ, engaging in activities like witnessing or praying or fasting, we need to check our heart each time
- Ask yourself, why are you doing these things? What are you hoping to gain by them?
 - Be careful that you do not slip back into seeking to justify yourself before God
 - Don't think you're patching up your salvation by adding your own good works on top of Christ's work...as if it's insurance
 - And don't try to put the old wine of legalism into the New Covenant wineskin to make yourself look better to God
- We need to always be on the watch for the pride that leads to self-righteousness
 - Self-righteous Christians aren't more saved than the rest of us
 - But they sure can be a lot less compassionate toward those in need of forgiveness

- Time to return to Matthew's description of Jesus' miracles in the Galilee
 - In Chapter 9, we're moving into the final grouping of miracles that Jesus performs
 - This group of miracles shows Jesus' power to restore
 - The specific miracles themselves are similar to others in the first and second groups (e.g., healing, demon possession)
 - But the final three miracles constitute a distinct group, because of two characteristics that all three miracles share
 - First, all three involve a form of bondage from which Jesus sets the person free
 - Secondly, in all three cases, Jesus makes faith a prerequisite to receive His healing
 - Prior to this moment in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus never made faith in Him a requirement to receive healing
 - So stepping back for a moment, as we look across the three groups of miracles in Chapters 8 & 9, we see a clear message
 - Jesus is the One Who heals, Jesus is the One with all power and authority, and Jesus is the One Who restores all things
 - In short, Jesus is the Messiah Who came in fulfillment of the covenants
 - And just to make sure we get the point, Matthew bookends his miracles with two "Messianic miracles"
 - We studied the first at the beginning of Chapter 8, and we find the second at the end of this chapter
- So tonight, we begin our examination of that third group
 - And as we do, we need to remember that Matthew chose to group certain miracles together to make his point about Jesus
 - And to create these groupings, Matthew stitched together events taken from different moments in time
 - So the events in Chapters 8 and 9 took place in generally the same period of Jesus' ministry
 - But they do not flow in a perfect chronological order
 - By comparing Matthew's gospel to the other three, we can see how his narrative jumps back and forth in time
 - We will see that clearly during our story of the final group of miracles
 - In fact, this detail becomes all-important to interpreting the events in the final group
- Let's begin with the first of these miracles...which Matthew records as a miracle within a miracle
 - Reviewing the scene again...
 - Jesus and His disciples were in conflict with the Pharisees over the rules of the Mishnah

- Jesus and His disciples were in trouble for eating with so-called sinners and failing to observe the Pharisees' twice-weekly fast
- Neither of these concerns are based on Scripture; they are found only in the rabbinical rules written in the Mishnah
 - Therefore, Jesus wasn't sinning
 - Rather, His behavior was a concern for the Pharisees because it violated the Mishnah, which they regarded as equal to Scripture
 - And out of that moment, a desperate father arrives to ask for Jesus' help

Matt. 9:18 While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

- Matthew tells us that a ruler comes to Jesus
 - In the context of a Jewish author writing to a Jewish audience, the word "ruler" has a specific meaning
 - Jews called those who ran the local synagogue a "ruler"
 - So this man is the local synagogue official for the synagogue in Capernaum
 - We get confirmation of this conclusion from Mark's Gospel, who tells us that this man was named Jairus and was a synagogue official
 - In Jesus' day, the role of teacher and synagogue official were separate
 - Scribes and rabbis taught the people, while the synagogue ruler was the administrative leader of the body
 - The synagogue official was personally responsible for ensuring the proper conduct of all religious activity in the synagogue
 - Barclay writes this about the position of a synagogue ruler

He was elected from among the elders. He was not a teaching or a preaching official; he had 'the care of the external order in public worship, and the supervision of the concerns of the synagogue in general.' He appointed those who were to read and to pray in the service, and invited those who were to preach. It was his duty to see that nothing unfitting took place within the synagogue; and the care of the synagogue buildings were in his oversight. The whole practical administration of the synagogue was in his hands.

- So this man's job was to enforce proper worship practices in the synagogue
- Which makes his behavior before Jesus all the more remarkable
- The man kneels before Jesus
 - Kneeling is an act of worship, not merely a show of respect for authority

- The Jews of Jesus' day were very sensitive to anything that seemed like blasphemy or idolatry
- For example, Jews would not handle Roman coins because they were stamped with the image of Caesar, who claimed to be a god
- For the same reason, Jews wouldn't kneel before another person in authority, not even before a prophet or the King of Israel
- Because that posture was reserved for worshipping God

**Psa. 95:6 Come, let us worship and bow down,
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.**

- So this man's posture before Jesus indicates he is worshipping Jesus, which in turn, tells us that the ruler truly believed Jesus was worthy of worship
 - And given his position in the synagogue, his act of kneeling before Jesus demonstrates supreme faith
 - Such a display of reverence before a human being would have been cause for a charge of blasphemy by the Pharisees
 - Though the man was probably not charged, he could have been sentenced to death for what he did
 - Yet the ruler seemed to understand that if he hoped to see Jesus heal his daughter, he couldn't hold back his worship
 - He had to be willing to put everything on the line to worship Jesus
 - His reputation, his occupation, his acceptance in the community, even his own life
 - He acted in faith toward Jesus because he was desperate to see his daughter restored
- Matthew records the man saying his daughter has died, but Luke and Mark record his words as she is "dying"
 - In all the Gospels, the girl is dead by the time Jesus makes His way to the house
 - So the man left his house before his daughter died, seeking Jesus to heal her
 - And therefore, Matthew apparently chose to condense his account to focus his readers' attention on the miracle itself
 - So Jairus makes his appeal of Jesus in a demonstration of faith, and Jesus responds by agreeing to follow the man back to his house
 - But as they go, another situation develops – this is our miracle within a miracle

Matt. 9:19 And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples.

Matt. 9:20 And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment,

Matt. 9:21 for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.”

Matt. 9:22 Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well.

- Matthew’s telling of Jairus’ miracle is interrupted by the account of this woman
 - Interestingly, Mark and Luke also record these two miracles intertwined
 - Which suggests that all three writers recognized that the two scenes were related to one another in some way
- And as they go, they are followed by a crowd clamoring to get to Jesus, seeking for healing or whatever else they’ve come for
 - Matthew says nothing about the crowd in his account
 - But Mark and Luke tell us that the crowd that followed Jesus was very dense
 - Luke describes the crowd using a Greek word meaning “to choke out”, meaning the crowds felt suffocating
 - It was like trying to move through a dense crowd at a concert or at the entrance of a football game
 - You can imagine the crowd is noisy and is shoving and pushing
 - So Jairus is cutting a path through the people, with Jesus following behind him, being jostled by the crowd
 - Meanwhile, His disciples surround Him, probably trying in vain to protect Jesus
- Then, from somewhere behind Jesus, up comes this woman, fighting her way through the crowd, determined to get to Him
 - All three Gospels say she had been hemorrhaging for 12 years
 - Though we don’t know for sure how she was bleeding
 - But most likely, it refers to her menstrual cycle running unabated for 144 months
 - By the way, Luke also mentions that Jairus’ daughter was 12 years old when she died
 - That curious similarity further suggests there’s a linkage between these two accounts
 - In the Law, Leviticus 15 gave strict rules for how Jewish society was to deal with individuals experiencing a fluid discharge from the body
 - First and foremost, as long as a person was in this condition, she was considered ritually unclean
 - And while a person is unclean, everything the person touched was unclean
 - And anyone who touched her or her bedsheets or garments would become unclean
 - The effect of being ritually unclean in Israel was to be a set apart from the community for a period of time

- Usually, that time period was relatively short...usually a day, or in some cases, a week
- It was enough time to make the spiritual point God wanted made, but not long enough to cause severe distress
- After an appointed time, the Law permitted the person to be restored into the community through a ritual of sacrifice
- But this woman's bleeding was continuous for 12 months
 - So for 12 years, she hasn't experienced normal life
 - Beyond the obvious discomfort and embarrassment, she's been forced to live in a constant state of separation
 - She's likely become estranged from her family and friends over the years
 - And in fact, it seems she moved away, living a lie by concealing her situation so she can still mix with Jewish society
 - So as the woman approaches Jesus, she doesn't announce herself, coming up to Him secretly, probably for two reasons
 - First, she knew rabbis generally wouldn't touch her or even speak with an unclean woman
 - Secondly, and more likely, she was afraid of making her situation known to the crowd
 - Given how tightly everyone was packed around Jesus, they would never have allowed her to rub shoulders with them
 - So she knew the only chance she had to get to Jesus was to keep her secret to herself
 - The other Gospels also tell us that this woman had searched for cures from every doctor she could find
 - But those doctors only made things worse for her
 - Mark said she spent all her money and had endured a lot of abuse at their hands
- But then she heard that the Messiah was at hand healing everyone
 - And in that moment, she remembers something she was taught from Scripture as a young girl growing up in the synagogue
 - And based on what she remembered, she knew immediately what she needed to do to be healed
 - So she gathers her courage, blends into the crowds, making her way to get close enough to touch Jesus
 - And in particular, she needs to touch the hem of Jesus' clothing
 - Notice in v.21, Matthew said she knew if she touched Jesus' hem, she would be healed
 - That sounds like superstition to us, so what's going on here?

- To understand the scene properly, we need to spend a little time understanding an obscure prophecy of the Old Testament – one that she had placed her faith in
 - Beginning with the clothing typically worn by a rabbi
 - Typically, men wore two garments: a light under tunic, almost like underwear, and an outer tunic or robe
 - Then over the robe, a man wore a long shawl called a *tallit*, sometimes called a prayer shawl today
 - The *tallit* was rectangular and was draped over the shoulders and extended down almost to the length of the robe
 - Off the four corners of the *tallit* hem, called wings, hung tassels of knotted thread call *tsitsityot*
 - The Lord instructed Israel to make these tassels in the Law

Num. 15:37 The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying,

Num. 15:38 “Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue.

Num. 15:39 “It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot,

Num. 15:40 so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.

- Traditionally, these cords were knotted five times to represent the 5 books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- Interwoven in the cord was a single blue thread to remind the nation of Israel that they were a kingdom of priests
- Over time, these tassels became a very important symbol in Jewish society
 - They came to represent the person’s reputation and authority
 - Ancient clay tablets have been found with the impression of a man’s tassels used as his signature on a document
 - A man could divorce a woman by cutting off the hem of her *tallit*
 - In fact, to remove the hem of a Jewish man’s garment was an act of humiliation
 - You may remember the moment in 1 Sam 24, when Saul is pursuing David in the wilderness and the two meet in a cave at En Gedi
 - Saul is indisposed in a cave, and David sneaks up from behind to quietly cut off the hem of Saul’s garment
 - David wasn’t merely showing Saul he got close enough to strike the king
 - He was also humiliating Saul by removing the hem of his garment, an act David later repented of

- Naturally, any symbol of importance and power attracted great interest among the Pharisees
 - Ordinary Jews typically wore their *tallit* only on special occasions,
 - But the Pharisees had taken to wearing them regularly, to attract more attention to themselves
 - And when that practice stopped gaining attention, the Pharisees invented a new tradition
- Some enterprising Pharisee had the idea to increase the length of his tassels ever so slightly beyond the customary length, so as to stand out
 - When his fellow Pharisees noticed his exaggerated self-importance, a competition soon developed for who had the longest tassel
 - Later in this Gospel, Jesus mocks the Pharisees for their false piety

Matt. 23:5 “But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

- So now, back to the woman in our story, she thought to herself that she only needed to touch one of Jesus’ tassels hanging from the corner of his *tallit*
 - She believed that Jesus’ authority and power could be accessed through the hem of his garment
 - Which at first sounds crazy to us, but in light of Jewish tradition and teaching, it was a natural thing to assume
 - But her confidence goes deeper than mere tradition
 - She believed touching Jesus in this way would result in healing, because of her faith in a Messianic prophecy found in Malachi

Mal. 4:2 “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

- The prophet says those who fear the name of the Lord will see Him bring healing for His people
- The prophet refers to the Messiah as the “sun of righteousness”
- The Hebrew word for sun (*shemesh*) means “the sun in the sky”, while the Hebrew word, *ben* means “a male offspring” or “son”
 - The fact that those words sound alike in English is just a happy coincidence
 - If you read this same verse translated into any other language, you wouldn’t find that to be the case
- Nevertheless, the context of the verse tells us Malachi was speaking about the Messiah, the Son of God

- The rising of the sun in the sky is being used symbolically to represent the glorious arrival of the Messiah
- And the dawning of the Kingdom of God
- And what this woman remembered most about Malachi 4, was the prophet's promise that when the Messiah came, He would have healing in His "wings"
 - Remember, "wings" is the name given to the four corners of the *tallit* where the tassels on a man's garment were attached
 - In fact, the word translated "corner" back in Numbers 15:38, is *kanaph*, which literally means "wing"
 - So like all Jews, this woman grew up hearing that their Messiah would possess power to heal in His wings, or corners of his shawl
 - So when she hears the Messiah is in the Galilee, in faith, she seeks Him out
 - Believing, as she says in v.21, that "if I touch his garment, I will get well"
 - And she does get well, instantly, as Matthew records in v.22
 - More than a physical healing, she was being restored to her community, returned to a useful life among friends and family
 - For 12 years she was unclean, now she is clean
- Matthew records in v.22, that Jesus turned and declared she was healed, but the other Gospels tell us that the woman was healed as she touched the garment
 - Mark says she could sense her body had been healed immediately and the flow of blood ceasing
 - Furthermore, Mark and Luke add that Jesus sensed power had gone out from Him at that moment, which is why He stopped
 - So Jesus wasn't consciously involved in healing the woman... *He learned about it after it happened*
 - In fact, Jesus didn't even know who had been healed at first
 - The other Gospels record a humorous moment, as Jesus turns around and asks who touched Him
 - The disciples are understandably confused by Jesus' question, because literally everyone was touching Him

Mark 5:31 And his disciples said to him, You see the people round you on every side, and you say, Who was touching me?

- But Jesus goes on to explain that He felt power leaving Him, so He wants to find that particular person
- That begs a question...who do we credit with the woman's healing?
 - Did Jesus heal her? Not overtly
 - He was surprised Himself, and He says it was her faith that made her well

- Now obviously, the woman didn't heal herself, so the power to heal her came from God
- But if Jesus wasn't the Actor, then another member of the Godhead must have been acting
- Remember, when the Second Person of the Godhead took the form of man, He took on certain limitations made necessary by that form
 - Jesus was no less God in terms of identity, but He voluntarily chose to empty Himself, becoming lower than angels for a time
 - During His time on earth, Jesus depended on the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His miraculous works
 - So, we conclude that the Holy Spirit did the healing work through Jesus in response to the faith of the woman
- So does that mean we credit the strength of the woman's faith for her healing?
 - Someone once said that it isn't the strength of our faith that brings us salvation, but having faith in a strong Savior
 - So the power to heal her was God's alone...but she received that power because she acted out of faith in the promises of God
 - Specifically, she believed the Bible's teaching about the Messiah, and she placed her faith in Jesus as that Messiah
- Finally, the other Gospels record that Jesus calls on the woman to confess to Him in the crowd

Mark 5:30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?"

- Jesus demands to know who touched Him
- Which is interesting, because Jesus could have kept walking, the healing was already complete
- Nevertheless, He calls for a public confession and, after a delay, the woman finally steps forward to confesses her deceit

Mark 5:32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this.

Mark 5:33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

- So what are we learning from this moment between Jesus and the woman?
 - First, the woman's healing forms a picture of salvation
 - She is unclean, excluded from the commonwealth of God's people, until she comes to Jesus in faith

- Her faith in the promises found in God's Word draws her to Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she receives power
- This happens on the basis of faith alone, even before she sees Jesus face to face
- And her healing comes accompanied by a public confession, which results in her being reconciled to the family of God
- Likewise, Scripture teaches us that a person comes to faith based on hearing the Good News contained in the Word of God
 - We come to Jesus to have our sins washed away, to be made clean, by His blood
 - By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are born again, cleansed and made new, though we have never seen Jesus face to face
 - But having come to Him in faith, we then confess Him publicly
 - And we are reconciled to God by our faith
- So the woman's experience is a departure from previous miracles, in that faith in Jesus takes center stage in her healing
 - That hasn't been a requirement up to this point, and the reason for that change becomes apparent in the events of Chapter 12
 - Which tells us these miracles involving faith happened after the events of Chapter 12
 - So we'll wait until then to understand the connection
- Meanwhile, what's the connection between the ruler and this woman?
 - The two stories are intertwined for some reason
 - And both involve a display of faith before a healing
 - And both include the curious detail of a "12" in the story
 - We need to wait until next week to get the full answer, but we have part of our answer today
- The Lord is using the woman's faith to prepare the father for his own test of faith
 - First, we know Jesus was setting off to heal the daughter, but because of his delay dealing with the woman, the girl dies before Jesus arrives
 - Which means when the father returns, he will face a dilemma
 - Will he still have faith in Jesus to heal her after she has died?
 - Or will he give up hope and tell Jesus not to bother now...it's too late
 - We often pray for healing – but we tend to give up praying when the person has died
 - Which is why the Lord arranged the earlier moment with the woman
 - The woman's healing becomes an opportunity for the father to learn a lesson of how faith works
 - That woman acted in complete confidence in the power of God's promises found in the Word

- And she had her life restored to her merely on the basis of her faith
 - No other circumstances could explain it...she didn't even speak a word to Jesus, and He didn't even know she was there
 - The power of Jesus went out to heal, simply to fulfill the Word of God
- Furthermore, notice how the Lord constructed the moment to strengthen the father's faith
 - The Lord ensured that the woman's healing would emphasize faith on the father's part
 - The woman's condition was not visible...no one could see that she was bleeding, so no one could prove she was healed
 - The father had to believe the woman's testimony, and if he did, his own faith in God could be strengthened
 - So when they arrive home to hear the girl has died, the father can draw on this lesson to strengthen his own faith against doubts and fear
 - And in that moment, I also wonder if the man's mind went back to that same passage in Malachi that had inspired the woman's faith
 - Because just three verses later in that same chapter of Scripture, the prophet promises something else

Mal. 4:5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."

Mal. 4:6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

- Now, we know Malachi was not specifically referring to the daughter's situation – nevertheless, I wonder if the father saw a connection in his case
 - Perhaps the father considered if God is willing to use a prophet to restore children to their fathers, will His Messiah not do the same and more?
 - All we can know for sure is, after this father arrived home to find his daughter dead, he remained confident Jesus could heal her
 - So from the woman, we learn the importance of faith to receiving the promises of God
 - And from the man, we see that God loves us so much, He works ahead of us preparing our hearts to have the faith required
 - The situation of both the woman and the ruler demonstrate something I've found to be true in my own life as a believer
 - That living-out your faith comes down to two essential behaviors
 - First, like the woman, we must live in complete trust that God is at work, keeping the promises found in His Word

- The how and when of God's promises are simply a matter of time and place
- But eventually, everything will come to pass, and so we live in expectation of these things...living with eyes for eternity
- Secondly, like the father, we strive to pay attention to every faith lesson the Lord shows us in the by-and-by of everyday life
 - We recognize that a sovereign God is constantly at work around us, bringing circumstances to pass in specific ways so we will grow in faith
 - We connect the dots...from what we read in the Bible, to what we see happening in our life, to what we know is coming in the future
- We understand that every trial and life disappointment is appointed by God
 - A sick daughter is an opportunity to become more dependent on the Lord
 - A delay in getting help is an opportunity to learn a faith lesson or develop patience
 - An impossible situation is the opportunity to display great confidence in the Lord
 - Life's tragedies are only tragic if we fail to learn the lessons God intended
- Reflect on this during the week...consider whether your life reflects this kind of faith?
 - Like the woman, do you act boldly based on what you know in God's Word?
 - And like the man, do you receive the faith lessons God brings you in everyday circumstances to grow your faith?

- We're nearing the end of our 4-month journey through the 10 miracles that Matthew recorded from Jesus' time in the Galilee
 - We've reached the final group of three miracles
 - These three miracles illustrate Jesus' restorative ministry...how Jesus came to restore all things
 - Circumstances that were once considered lost and beyond hope, become new again by faith in Jesus
 - Which reminds us of the important distinction we discovered last week in this final group of miracles
 - This final group of three miracles all share a characteristic that the prior two groups didn't: *faith*
 - For these miracles, Jesus makes faith in Him a prerequisite to receiving His mercy
 - In the past, Jesus healed everyone without regard for their faith, but now, He puts faith first
- By that change, we're seeing evidence of how Matthew has assembled together events that took place at different points in Jesus' ministry
 - Because there was a point in Jesus' ministry when everything changed
 - Something happened that caused Jesus to alter His entire approach to ministry
 - One of those changes was the requirement for faith
 - Where before, Jesus openly offered Himself to anyone and everyone in the crowds, suddenly Jesus made faith in Him a prerequisite
 - The event that prompted this change takes place in Chapter 12
 - In fact, as we'll see, Chapter 12 is the pivotal chapter in Matthew's gospel
 - When we get there, we'll study it carefully to understand its significance
 - But for now, we only need to understand how that moment impacted the various groups of miracles that Matthew included in Chapters 8 & 9
 - Faith was not required for the first two groups of miracles Matthew records
 - Which tells us these events took place during the months *prior* to the events of Chapter 12
 - On the other hand, the miracles in this third group prominently feature faith as part of the moment – and Jesus asked that these miracles be kept secret
 - Which tells us these miracles took place sometime *after* the events of Chapter 12
- So part of what we need to resolve tonight, is why Matthew wanted to end his treatment of Jesus' miracles with a group focused on faith
 - And then we had that puzzle from last week...the relationship between the first two miracles in this group...I called them a miracle within a miracle
 - Matthew's first miracle in this group involved Jairus, the synagogue official, who

requested Jesus come heal His daughter

- But before that story even got going, Jesus is interrupted by a woman who needed healing for constant bleeding
 - We studied Jesus' healing of that woman last week, which means we're moving back to Jairus' daughter this week
 - And as we do, we'll try to understand why these two situations were intertwined in this way
- And because they are so intertwined, let's re-read the part we covered last week, as we move into the second half of the story

Matt. 9:18 While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live."

Matt. 9:19 Jesus got up and began to follow him, and so did His disciples.

Matt. 9:20 And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak;

Matt. 9:21 for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well."

Matt. 9:22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." At once the woman was made well.

- Having looked at this section last week, we're familiar with what's going on
 - The man responsible for enforcing proper worship practices at the local synagogue kneels down to worship before Jesus
 - He's taken a huge risk by demonstrating his faith in Jesus in this way, and he does this to appeal to Jesus to heal his dying daughter
 - The text records the man said his girl had already died, but as we saw last week, Matthew condenses the events of the story
 - Mark told us that when the father left his daughter, she was still alive, though near death
 - So at the time he meets Jesus, the father believes there is still time to save his daughter from dying
 - But just as Jesus sets out, this other woman comes up behind Him to secretly touch the hem of His cloak, so she may be healed
 - She did this because she believed Jesus was Messiah
 - She knew from Malachi 4 that the Messiah was promised to have healing in His "wings"
 - "Wings" is a reference to the corners of a man's shawl
 - So in simple faith, the woman concluded she could be healed by touching the hem of his clothing

- Jesus immediately sensed His power leaving Him, which was the work of the Holy Spirit, and by that power, she has been healed
 - So Jesus turns around to learn who had been healed and as He sees her, Jesus confirms to her that her faith made her well
 - She acted in faith, believing the Word of God concerning the Messiah
 - And on the basis of that faith, the Holy Spirit healed the woman
 - Ironically, her faith in the promises of the Word of God gave fulfillment to the very Scripture that had inspired her to act in the first place
- As we ended last week, I suggested that the woman's experience was designed by God to prepare Jairus for the test of faith he would soon experience
 - And in fact, the first part of that test began immediately as the woman was healed
 - Once again, we don't see the action as clearly in Matthew's account, but in Mark, we read this:

Mark 5:34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction."

Mark 5:35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?"

- Jesus told the woman her faith had made her well and as a result, she should go in peace
 - Her faith bought her to peace with God, since her debt of sin was covered
 - Furthermore, she was also healed of her physical affliction, as testimony that God had also done a spiritual work
 - But as I said last week, no one in the crowd could have detected her healing, since her condition was not visible
- Now we have the ruler standing by, watching this entire scene, probably a little impatiently
 - Time was running out for his daughter, yet here's Jesus delaying over some woman
 - But then notice Jesus calls this woman "daughter", a comment that surely caught the ruler's attention
 - After all, a father distraught over his dying daughter couldn't help but notice how the Healer takes time to cure His daughter
 - But since the woman's healing came with no visible evidence...would this man accept her testimony by faith?
- But then, as Jesus was still speaking to the woman, messengers arrived from the ruler's home with the news he dreaded to hear
 - They report his daughter has died, so there was no need to trouble the Rabbi further

- After all, how can a healer help a person who has already died?
- Now imagine the ruler's state of mind in that moment
- Hearing that his daughter has died, he must have been instantly consumed with grief and despair
- And who among us would have enough faith in that moment to think about asking Jesus for resurrection?
- Nevertheless, the man had reason to press on, considering what he'd just witnessed...a woman healed by nothing more than touching Jesus
 - From that experience, his faith should be encouraged, and Jesus tells him so

Mark 5:36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe."

- Jesus tells the official to believe (or trust) in Him – don't go by sight, only by faith
- So the ruler passes this test, agreeing to let Jesus go to the house, rather than giving in to his fear
 - And as they arrive, they encounter a strange scene

Matt. 9:23 When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder,

Matt. 9:24 He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him.

Matt. 9:25 But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

Matt. 9:26 This news spread throughout all that land.

- Jesus comes to the house to find flute players and a noisy, disorderly crowd
- This scene may be bizarre to us, but it's in keeping with Jewish tradition
- Mourning death was an art form in Jewish culture
 - There would be loud, public lamenting by family and friends in the home, and even on the street, in honor of the deceased
 - In fact, family honor depended on the deceased receiving such lamentations from a sizable crowd
 - So, to help families ensure enough wailing for their deceased, mourning the dead became a professional occupation in Israel
 - Even the poorest Jewish family would pay for professional mourners to attend at the death of a loved one
- In time, these professional mourners became like Uber drivers waiting for a fare
 - They hung around homes of those in the community who were near death, ready to

- make themselves available for hire
 - So as this daughter died, the family did the usual thing, by hiring professional mourners who began serving immediately
 - So that by the time Jesus arrives, they were already at work, wailing loudly, tearing their clothing, and pulling at their hair in traditional Jewish signs of mourning
 - And some were even playing musical instruments, which was also a part of the mourning process in Jewish custom
- All of this combined to create the circus scene that Matthew says greeted Jesus as He arrived
 - This moment became the second test of the father's faith
 - Will he continue trusting in the woman's testimony of Jesus' power, or be overwhelmed by the mourning around him?
 - Will he believe that Jesus has the power of life over death, or will he be persuaded by the crowd that there was no hope?
 - This type of over-the-top lamenting touches on something Paul said to the church in Thessalonica
 - Specifically, Paul tells us in 1 Thess. 4:13, that we should not grieve over the believer who dies, as if we have no hope
 - Because their faith in Jesus means we know we will see them again very soon
 - So death is a temporary separation, like sending someone away to college or on a mission trip...we mourn the separation, but not a loss
 - This man could not let the crowd's hopeless wailing persuade him against believing in Jesus' power to resurrect
 - Yet we can see how different the world's mindset is regarding death, when Jesus told the mourners to leave
 - He said they're not needed anymore, because the girl isn't actually dead; she's just asleep
 - In fact, Mark says Jesus spoke it this way:

Mark 5:39 And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep."

- The text says the girl had died, but Jesus says she's asleep, so we might ask, "Is Jesus lying to the crowd?"
- Elsewhere in Scripture, you may know Paul uses the word "sleep" as a euphemism for death
 - We don't literally sleep when we die, but it's a convenient metaphor, reminding us that death is not the end for a believer
 - So the Bible euphemistically calls a believer's death "sleep", because we will rise to live again

- Interestingly, the Bible never refers to the death of *unbelievers* as sleep, only *believers*, because it's a reference to the resurrection
- Of course, the crowds don't understand the euphemism, because they didn't possess the hope of resurrection as Paul described
 - The mourners laugh at His comment, thinking Jesus was suggesting they had mistaken a sleeping girl for a dead girl
 - This detail also confirms that these were professional mourners with no personal investment in the situation
 - Had they been genuine mourners upset at the girl's passing, they would have been too distraught for such levity
 - But these were posers, who momentarily broke out of character to laugh at Jesus' ridiculous suggestion
 - And Jesus was content to allow the crowd to remain confused, because He wanted this miracle to remain secret, at least as much as possible
 - In Mark 5:37, we're told that as Jesus and Jairus departed for his house, Jesus told the accompanying crowd they couldn't follow
 - In fact, Jesus only allowed three disciples, Peter, John and James, to join Him into the ruler's home to witness this miracle
 - Furthermore, after the miracle is complete, Mark reports Jesus instructs the family not to tell anyone about what happened
 - Jesus wanted to conceal the miracle, and His desire for secrecy is also connected to the events of Chapter 12
 - Because of events we'll study later in that chapter, Jesus stopped performing miracles to gain public attention
 - He only healed the faithful and tried to keep His work secret
 - Again, the answer for why awaits us in Chapter 12
- So after the crowds were gone, Jesus gets to work in the home with only his three apostles, the girl's mother and her father present
 - Which leads to the father's third test of faith
 - As the father entered that room with Jesus, he set his eyes on his daughter's dead body for the first time
 - Imagine the emotions running through his mind and heart
 - How he must have wanted to drop down at her side, embrace her and wail – not like the professional mourners – but like someone who's truly lost somebody
 - But Jesus had just declared this girl was merely sleeping, that death wasn't the end of her story
 - So once again, he had to choose between trusting in Jesus' promises, or trusting in what he sees?
 - Would he act in faith, entering the room as a father who enters to wake a sleeping child?

- Or would he break down in mourning, giving in to fear and doubt?
- As we see, the father passes his final test as he stands quietly by, while Jesus takes the child's hand, as if to help her out of bed
 - Mark tells us Jesus also spoke to the girl, telling her to get up
 - And instantly, she opens her eyes, gets out of bed and begins to walk about the room, as if she had merely been asleep
 - Mark says that the people in the room were so astonished that Jesus had to remind them to feed the girl
 - The room's surprise confirms they believed they witnessed a miracle, a dead child brought back to life
- The story of these two miracles is complete, so let's step back to consider how they relate to one another and what they teach us
 - First, we have a father who comes to the Messiah in faith, seeking to have his daughter of 12 years restored from sickness
 - Secondly, a daughter of her Father in Heaven comes to the Messiah in faith, seeking to be restored from 12 years of sickness
 - That woman had been unclean for 12 years, because of her bleeding, which barred her from participating in normal life
 - She was unclean under the Law, so anything she touched was unclean, and anyone who touched her was unclean
 - And likewise, the 12-year-old girl became unclean as she died, for dead bodies are also unclean under the Law
 - Both of these daughters were unclean and neither had reason for hope that they could be restored
 - The woman had tried everything under the sun to stop her bleeding, but nothing worked
 - And the young girl...well, dead is dead
 - So their only hope was to be restored by God
 - Therefore, with faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the woman dared to touch Him, knowing she would be healed by God's power
 - She did so quietly, knowing that under the Law if she touched Him, she would make Him unclean too
 - So to spare Jesus that humiliation, she concluded she must come to Him secretly without announcing herself
 - On the basis of her faith, Her Father in Heaven restored her by healing her through the Person of Jesus Christ
 - Instantly, she became clean before God and men
 - And at the same time, Jesus gladly took her shame
 - Nevertheless, He didn't react in anger, as she expected, but called her "daughter" and said her faith had healed her

- Similarly, that 12-year-old girl needed God...she was dead, so certainly, she was helpless apart from the Lord raising her
 - Like the woman, she couldn't approach Jesus or make an appeal for her own sake
 - She too depended on a father to save her through the power of Jesus
 - And once more, by a touch, Jesus healed her and became unclean for her sake, taking the curse for her
- Then pulling these two even closer together, we have that number...12
 - The number 12 has a symbolic meaning in Scripture...it's always used in conjunction with the government of God on earth
 - We see the number's meaning evident in details like the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles in the early Church
 - So these two women are connected by the number that represents God's government or Kingdom
 - And this fits one of Matthew's central themes of Jesus as the King over the promised Kingdom to come
 - So Matthew has recognized that these two women – and the father who bridges their two stories – form a unique picture of the Kingdom
 - Together, they picture how we all enter the Kingdom
 - To see that picture, let's go back to the woman's story
- Last week, I mentioned that the woman's experience with Jesus forms a picture of our own salvation moment
 - In a sense, we all encounter Jesus the way this woman did
 - We come to Him unclean, estranged from God, under condemnation for a condition we cannot cure
 - Her condition was bleeding, which made her unclean, but our condition is the impurity of our soul...our sin makes us unclean
 - Like the woman, we come to know Him first by trusting the promises found in the Word of God
 - And as we approach Him in confidence, he will heal us spiritually if only we reach out to Him
 - By the power of the Spirit, we receive healing, and then we confess publicly what God has done in our hearts
 - By our faith, we become a son or daughter of The Living God, the Bible says, and we have peace with God
 - By our faith, we also become a citizen of the future Kingdom, of Christ's government, which will rule the earth in peace
 - But since the Kingdom hasn't arrived yet, we first must spend some time here, living in faith
 - Which brings us to the father's story

- The father's story picks up immediately after the woman is healed, and carries us into the rest of the account
 - His circumstances form a picture of the second part of our salvation story...our walk of sanctification
 - As a child of God, we live by faith – not by sight, the Bible says
 - Like that father, we have bowed our knee to Jesus, we've acknowledged He is our King
 - From that point, we have a journey to make with Him as He leads us toward our resurrection
 - We yearn for that journey to end, so we may receive our new life, just as that father was seeking new life for his daughter
 - But that journey will test our faith along the way
 - Jesus will give us moments along our walk where we must resolve to trust in Him so we can learn what's possible by faith
 - And in each moment, we face the same choice the father faced
 - Will we follow after the world's ways, relying on what we can see, or will we live with eyes for eternity?
 - Do we trust in the Word of Christ, or become distracted and discouraged by the noise of the world?
 - Running the race set before us, means passing these tests
 - And as we move through each one, the Lord is working to build our faith
 - He speaks to us in quiet moments, in His Word and in our prayer life, or in a Godly friend, encouraging us to trust Him
 - As Jesus said to the father, do not be afraid any longer, only believe
 - Finally, the father's journey brought him to his daughter lying on her bed, awaiting resurrection
 - And our walk with Jesus will deliver us to our greatest hope: resurrection from death
 - That 12-year-old girl serves as a picture of the final state of our faith
 - For as the government of Christ comes to earth, His saints will join Him in resurrected bodies, as Jesus calls us up from the grave
 - Just as that girl was raised, so we too will be raised by the Father because of our faith in Jesus Christ
- Paul sums it up best in Romans

Rom. 6:22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

- In that one verse, we find all three steps of our faith-life, as represented by the

characters in Matthew's story

- Paul says by our faith, we are freed from sin – from our separation, our uncleanness under Law – *just like the woman*
- As a result, we derive the benefit of sanctification – our walking with Jesus that grows our faith – *just like that father*
- Which leads to the outcome, eternal life – which we receive at our resurrection – *just like the girl*
- The number 12 in the two stories acts as bookends, reminding us that Jesus' earthly ministry was focused on His promised Kingdom
 - Of how we become a daughter or son of the King by faith alone
 - And of how we will enter the Kingdom one day when Christ arrives to raise us up
- And there is one, final detail in Matthew's account that I especially love...for it's another reminder of what we look forward to in the Kingdom
 - The first thing that Jesus does for the girl after she's raised back to life is give her something to eat
 - Which reminds us that the very first event of the Kingdom for all saints will be the marriage supper of the Lamb
 - Jesus will feed us all with a great feast that inaugurates the Kingdom
 - As Jesus promises in Luke

Luke 13:29 “And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

- How are you doing on your journey with Christ?
 - Have you begun your life with Christ in faith, like that woman?
 - Are you facing tests by resting in God's promises like that father?
 - Are you eagerly anticipating your resurrection and your eternal life like the young girl?
 - Or maybe you're like those professional mourners
 - You're going through the motions, putting on a show
 - And you're ready to break out of your Christian character anytime you hear Jesus promising of impossible things to come
 - The Word of God is calling you to learn from these examples, and I hope you will

- As we come to the end of our year, it's appropriate that we also reach the end of Matthew's two-chapter section on the miracles of Jesus in the Galilee
 - We're at the end of Chapter 9, at Matthew's final group of three miracles, which center on Jesus' power to restore
 - In fact, we can sum up all of Jesus' ministry as a mission of restoration, or we could say, reconciliation
 - Paul puts it this way

Col. 1:19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, Col. 1:20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

- Through His atoning death on the cross, Jesus reconciles or restores everything back to the state where it was meant to be, apart from the devastating effects of sin
 - He reconciles fallen humanity to fellowship with God
 - He restores peace to the eternal realm by defeating the enemy
 - And He returns the fallen earth back to a perfect, created state
- So Matthew demonstrates Jesus' divinity by showing us Jesus' power to restore or reconcile all things through three situations
 - We've already studied Jesus' first and second miracles in this group, which were intertwined into a single story
 - Jesus restored normal life to a woman to who had been ostracized from Jewish society because of constant bleeding
 - And then He restored life to a young girl who had died
- As you stand back and look at those first two examples, you find a pattern emerging across the three miracles in this final group
 - The final group of miracles illustrates Jesus' restoring and reconciling His Creation from the damage done by sin
 - The Bible says that sin produced three major consequences for mankind
 - Sin separated humanity from fellowship with God, it put all humanity under a sentence of death, and it blinded us to understanding spiritual truth
 - Since everyone descends from Adam, we enter the world in a state of sin, which means we all begin life suffering these three conditions
 - But by faith in Jesus Christ, these conditions can be reversed or restored
 - And the three miracles in this last group illustrate Jesus' power to rectify each consequence by His atoning death
 - Like the woman who was ostracized from Jewish life, Jesus puts an end to our separation from God, making us clean and restoring fellowship

- And like the young girl, our faith in Jesus removes the curse of death, so that we may be resurrected into eternal life
- And as we will see today, Jesus corrects our spiritual blindness, granting us spiritual knowledge
- And today, we move to the final miracle in this group, one that demonstrates how Jesus restores our spiritual insight
- And what better way to illustrate that power than through a healing of blind men
- But to understand this final example, we need to do some mental juggling tonight
 - As you've heard me explain in the past, the events of this final group take place later in time than the earlier groups of miracles
 - Specifically, these three miracles happened soon after the events of Chapter 12
 - We know this, because all three of these miracles follow a pattern that isn't present for the previous miracles
 - First, in all three cases, Jesus only agrees to grant a miracle after the person demonstrates faith in Him
 - Faith in Him had become a prerequisite for receiving His mercy, which is something Jesus never required before
 - Secondly, Jesus directs those He heals to keep His work secret, which is the exact opposite of what Jesus has said in the past
 - These changes in Jesus' ministry were a response to certain events that take place in Chapter 12
 - When we get to Chapter 12, we'll gain a full understanding of this change and its significance to Jesus' ministry
 - In the meantime, we need to keep in mind that the miracles in Matthew's final group all happened after the moment in Chapter 12
 - Knowing this will be particularly important today
- For now, we're ready to dive into the final miracle of Matthew's three groups

Matt. 9:27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Matt. 9:28 When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."

Matt. 9:29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "It shall be done to you according to your faith."

Matt. 9:30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: "See that no one knows about this!"

Matt. 9:31 But they went out and spread the news about Him throughout all that land.

- As Jesus went along, two blind men followed Him, crying out for healing
 - Now interestingly, Jesus doesn't respond to their request immediately
 - Jesus doesn't talk to the men until v.28, when Jesus eventually enters a house
 - So Jesus continued walking to His destination for some time, as the men pursued Him, yelling for mercy
 - Given that they were blind, it must have been a challenge for them to keep up with Jesus
 - Perhaps they followed the noise of the crowd or, in desperation, they clung to those at the edge of the moving gaggle
 - But then finally, as Jesus reaches the home (probably to eat a meal), the blind men catch up with Him and eventually receive what they wanted
 - Jesus consents to healing them, but only after they confess faith in Him
 - But this outcome begs a question...why did Jesus ignore the blind men's requests as they walked, only to heal them later?
 - If Jesus was inclined to heal them, why make them wait to receive it?
 - And why did He make faith a prerequisite for Him to heal them?
 - The answer is connected, again, to the events of Chapter 12
 - The short answer is, Jesus needed to understand if they were following Him in faith before He performed the miracle
 - But understanding how these men came to that understanding is the real issue in this story
 - In fact, it's impossible to understand this situation fully, without knowing what these men had experienced prior to this moment
- So we need to look at another moment in Mathew's gospel, and this is where the mental juggling I mentioned earlier comes in
 - We're going to piece together several scenes to fully understand what's happening here
 - Beginning with a quick visit to Chapter 12:22

Matt. 12:22 Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw.

Matt. 12:23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

- At a point in Chapter 12, Jesus casts out a demon from a man who had been made mute by the demon's presence
- This healing in Chapter 12 takes place immediately *before* the one we're studying now in Chapter 9
- As Jesus performs this miracle, the crowd who witnessed this event wondered aloud

whether Jesus was the Son of David

- “The Son of David” is a term from the Old Testament that means the Messiah
- The Bible tells us that the Messiah, when He came, would descend from the family line of David
- So Jews began referring to the coming Messiah as the Son of David
- So the crowd began using a Messianic term to describe Jesus, which means something they saw caused them to consider that Jesus might be the Messiah
 - It was the miracle of casting out a mute demon that led them to that realization
 - But at the same time, Jesus’ unassuming appearance left them in some doubt about their conclusion
 - So they ask their religious leaders...this can’t be the Son of David, can it?
- Now what was it about that miracle that persuaded the crowd to consider that Jesus could be the Messiah?
 - Well, think about to the beginning of Chapter 8, to the first miracle in that chapter, the miracle of healing a leper...
 - I told you then, that in all Israel’s history since the giving of the Law, there was no record a Jew having been healed of leprosy
 - Yet curiously, Leviticus 13 gives Israel instructions on how to deal with a leper who is healed
 - So the Law anticipated the healing of leper, yet no Jewish leper had ever been healed, which led rabbis in Israel to seek an explanation
 - Eventually, the rabbis determined that the Lord must have reserved certain miracles for His Messiah to perform when He comes
 - Remember, miracles in general were not unprecedented in Israel
 - Men like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha had been anointed by God to perform miraculous signs, including raising dead bodies to life
 - But when Messiah came, He would possess even greater powers, abilities God had never given to any other person
 - Their observations lead us to the concept of Messianic miracles...unique miracles God reserved exclusively for the Messiah to perform
 - These special miracles, called Messianic miracles, would serve to validate His claim to being Messiah, since they would be unprecedented
 - One of these miracles was healing a leper, and another would be casting out a mute demon
 - Now at this point, you’re probably naturally wondering why healing a mute demon was considered a Messianic miracle
 - And the answer to that question awaits us in Chapter 12
 - For now, just focus on the crowd’s reaction to Jesus’ miracle
 - It’s clear they understand the significance of Jesus casting out a mute demon

- They immediately begin asking their religious authorities if Jesus was truly the Messiah, as the miracle would suggest
- This same event happened a second time with similar results, which we can see if we jump to the final miracle at the end of Chapter 9

Matt. 9:32 As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him.

Matt. 9:33 After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.”

Matt. 9:34 But the Pharisees were saying, “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.”

- We’re still coming back to the healing of the two blind men
 - But I need us to do a little more mental juggling, so we can understand the situation of these blind men
 - In this final example in Chapter 9, we find Jesus casting out a mute demon again
 - This is the same type of miracle Jesus performs in Chapter 12, but it’s a different moment than the one in Chapter 12
 - This is a second example of Jesus casting out a mute demon, and this one happened *after* the one in Chapter 12, chronologically
 - In fact, this miracle is technically not part of Matthew’s final group of miracles
 - In Chapters 8 & 9, Matthew gave us three groups of three miracles
 - And on either side of those groups, Matthew adds a Messianic miracle: the healing of a leper at the beginning and the healing of a mute demon at the end
 - These two Messianic miracles serve as bookends, reinforcing Matthew’s main point, that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah
 - So as we saw in Chapter 12, as Jesus performs this Messianic miracle, the crowd realizes it’s seen something special
 - And in response, in v.33, the crowd exclaims that nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel
 - Once again, they acknowledge the unique importance of this miracle and they come to the unavoidable conclusion: Jesus is the Messiah
 - This was the proof their rabbis had told them to expect
 - Yet ironically, those same rabbi’s opposed Jesus’ claims to being Messiah
 - Jesus had denied the authority of their Mishnah rule book, so they have set their hearts against Him
 - But now, Jesus has performed a Messianic miracle, and the crowd is ready to accept Jesus’ claims
 - So the Pharisees found themselves in a corner, needing a way to explain away a miracle that proves Jesus was the Messiah

- In v.34, they tell the crowd that Jesus was operating with Satan's power
 - They couldn't deny the miracle happened...everyone saw it...so they dismissed it as Satan's sorcery, rather than a work of God
 - The Pharisees offer the same excuse in Chapter 12, and we'll explore the significance of their response when we get there
- But for now, here's what we've learned
 - Jesus performed an important sign, a Messianic miracle, and the crowds who were present recognized it
 - The first time He performs it, the crowds respond by wondering aloud, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"
 - The second time He performs the miracle, the crowd testifies that such a thing had never been done before in Israel
 - In both cases, the crowds testify Jesus is the Messiah, yet the religious leaders deny it, declaring that Jesus was empowered by Satan
 - And in at least one of those crowds, stood these two blind men
 - They couldn't see what's happening, of course, so they didn't witness Jesus' miracle first-hand
 - But they hear the mute man speaking for the first time
 - And they hear the crowd murmuring to one another, asking whether the Messiah has finally come?
 - And they hear the Pharisees answering the crowd by denying the meaning of the sign
 - And in the midst of it all, they heard that one phrase, "the Son of David"
 - Now like all Jews of that day, these men knew that phrase was a title for the Messiah
 - And instantly, they saw everything clearly
 - So they seize upon the title and begin using it to call out to Jesus
 - In v.27, we're told that as they go along, they call out to Jesus, saying "Son of David, Son of David", trying to get His attention
 - What did these blind men see that the seeing crowd didn't?
 - Why did they embrace Jesus as Messiah, when the rest of the crowd wouldn't?
- The answer is, their blindness gave them the advantage
 - The Bible says faith is a conviction in things not seen, which is particularly appropriate in the case of these two men
 - There are two ways to find truth: by sight or by faith
 - Sight is the Bible's way of referring to our intellect, our knowledge gained by study, investigation and evaluation of facts and circumstances
 - It's doesn't just refer to what we see, but to everything a human being can know through firsthand experience

- The second way to know something is by faith
 - Faith is an assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen
 - It means accepting as true something we cannot know by firsthand experience, but must accept on the basis of testimony
 - So we receive as true, a testimony that we did not experience personally
 - And in the matter of salvation, faith means accepting as true, the testimony of the Bible when it declares Jesus is the Messiah
- Because of their blindness, these two men had no choice but to evaluate truth on the basis of faith, rather than by sight
 - Consider how difficult that must have been for them...they couldn't see the miracles Jesus was performing
 - All they had was the testimony of the crowd, balanced against the testimony of the Pharisees
 - Yet somehow, on the basis of that testimony, these men came to place their faith in Jesus
- Once again, how did these men arrive at an understanding that eluded the rest of the crowd?
 - The answer is, they had heard another testimony as well...the testimony of the Word of God
 - We know this, because as they enter the home with Jesus, He asks them one question: do you believe I am able to do this?
 - Notice, Jesus doesn't ask if they believe He is the Messiah, nor does He ask if they believe God can heal them
 - He asks, "Do you believe I can do this?", meaning do you believe I have the power of God to heal
 - Obviously, Jesus is asking whether they believe He is the Messiah, but His question is alluding to a prophecy concerning the Messiah
 - He's asking if they agree with the testimony of Scripture, with a prophecy in Isaiah, related to His earlier miracle of healing the mute man
- In Isaiah, we read this concerning the coming Messiah

Is. 29:19 The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the LORD,
And the needy of mankind will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Is. 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

Is. 35:6 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.
For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the Arabah.

- The Word of God declared to Israel that the coming of the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah, would be accompanied by miraculous healings
 - Deaf ears would be unstopped, blind eyes would be opened
 - And notice, Isaiah also says that the mute would be made to shout for joy
- So these two blind men couldn't see Jesus, nor the miracles He was performing, but they had working ears
 - And those ears heard two things that testified to them that Jesus was the Messiah
 - First, they heard the Word of God taught in the synagogues
 - They heard the prophecies of the Messiah and they took them to heart
 - Secondly, they heard the mouth of that mute man begin to speak after Jesus performed the Messianic miracle
- And they placed their faith in these two testimonies
 - They believed in the Word of God when it testified the Messiah would make mute men speak and would give sight to the blind
 - And they believed the testimony of the man who declared Jesus had removed a demon and restored his voice
 - What they couldn't know by sight, they accepted by faith, and so they called out to Jesus as the Son of David
- So when Jesus asks them His question, "Do you believe I am able to do this?", He's asking, "Do you believe in the Word of God concerning the Messiah?"
 - You heard I cast out the mute demon, and you know what the Word says about such things, so do you believe I can also make the blind see also?
 - It was the quintessential test of faith...to accept the testimony of the Word of God, without relying on sight
 - And to that question, the blind men respond "yes", and so Jesus touches their eyes, saying it shall be done according to your faith
 - Meaning that because they believed the Word when it says the Messiah will open eyes, He would do so for them
 - These men saw what the crowd couldn't see, but it wasn't a matter of eyesight...it came down to spiritual insight, granted by God
 - Jesus gave these men the ability to see spiritual truths that the crowd couldn't see
 - The crowd could witness Jesus' miracles clearly, but they rejected the meaning of the sign, because they didn't perceive the truth of God's Word
 - Meanwhile, two blind men who couldn't see what Jesus did, nevertheless recognized its significance, because they accepted the Word of God by faith
 - In their example, we find the third and final illustration of Jesus' ministry to restore the effects of sin
 - Humanity's sin nature robs us of the capacity to receive and understand spiritual truth

- When Adam disobeyed the Word of God, his spiritual nature became corrupt and he lost the ability to perceive spiritual truth
- That same defect has been passed down to all humanity, so that we all begin life ignorant of God and without hope to find Him on our own
- The Bible describes this defect as a spiritual blindness

2 Cor. 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 2 Cor. 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- The truth of the Gospel, that is of Jesus as Messiah, is a truth that cannot be accepted by humanity in our natural state, Paul says
 - Because our very nature is a barrier to receiving that truth...we are spiritually blind at birth
 - Furthermore, we are separated from God by our sin, so we cannot learn of God by "sight", that is, a firsthand knowledge of Him
- Therefore, we can only come to understand God by accepting the testimony of Him given in the Word of God
 - The Bible says that this understanding is given to us by God's Spirit, Who is the One teaching us the truth of God

1 Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 1 Cor. 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

- Paul says spiritual truth can only be spiritually appraised
- He's saying that if you want to learn about things of this world, you can rely on physical sight
- But if you want to learn about eternal things, you must rely on spiritual sight
- And that insight comes only from God's Word, taught by the Spirit
- That was the difference between that crowd and those two blind men
 - Because of their blindness, they had no choice but to rely on the testimony of God's Word, because they had nothing else to draw upon
 - Like the crowd, these men recognized the meaning of Jesus' miracle; but unlike the crowd, they didn't evaluate Jesus' appearance
 - And they didn't see a lowly carpenter's son, a man without stature and accomplishment in Israel, a man despised by the religious leaders

- These men had to rely on what they heard
- Their sight did not get in the way of seeing God's truth
- In a sense, we could say the crowd's ability to see with their eyes prevented them from seeing with spiritual insight
 - What they could see didn't impress them very much
 - Which is why they phrase their response in the form of a question, "This cannot be the Son of David, can he?"
 - What they saw with their eyes didn't agree with what they perceived in the spirit, and in the end, they went with their eyes
- Signs and wonders are certainly captivating, and God uses them from time to time to get our attention
 - But they cannot replace a knowledge of Him by faith in the testimony of His Word
 - And in many cases, signs can lead us away from the truth, especially when we are determined to walk by sight
 - Certainly, this is the pattern for the unbelieving world who, like this crowd, refuse to accept the testimony of the Word, preferring to believe in only what they see
- But this same problem can persist in the life of believers, who though they have accepted Jesus by faith in the Word of God, nevertheless try to follow Christ by sight
 - Classically, this problem takes two forms: seeking experiences over truth, and placing greater trust in this world over the next
 - In the first case, we're talking about believers who gravitate toward groups and individuals who offer spectacle and power
 - Sometimes, it's (supposed) miracles or it's church services with carefully orchestrated pageantry or individuals with powerful personas: these things captivate the believer and become their truth
 - They aren't searching the scriptures for truth...they're relying on sight and emotion...and the enemy easily manipulates these things to pull believers away from the truth
 - In the second case, we're talking about centering our life goals on achievements in this world, rather than on positioning ourselves for the next
 - When we walk by sight, this world is the only thing real to us, because our eyes tell us it's real
 - And certainly, it's real for a time...but the Word of God says it won't last forever
 - But walking by faith means devoting ourselves to the cause of the Kingdom
 - The Kingdom can't be seen yet, but Scripture testifies that it is real and coming very soon
 - So, living by faith means placing greater emphasis on the reality of the world we cannot see, rather than the one we can

- When you place your faith in Jesus, He restores your ability to perceive these spiritual truths, and He empowers you to live according to them
 - But we can only gain the benefit of these truths if we apply them
 - And applying them is a process of denying ourselves and yielding to the Spirit
- That's what Jesus asked of these men...that they believe in the Word of God
 - And that's why this church was started, barely 11 months ago
 - Because we want to be a place where the people of God encounter the Word of God in a consistent and meaningful way
 - So that in time, as we're exposed to spiritual truths that are often overlooked in other churches, we might grow in our walk of faith
 - And as we grow in faith, we are being prepared for a Kingdom to come
 - As we enter a new year, would you give some time to reflecting on how you're walking through life?
 - Are you walking by faith, trusting in the testimony of God's Word, or by sight, distracted by this world?
 - Perhaps you find a walk of faith difficult or impossible...
 - Maybe it's because you don't know the Jesus of the Bible
 - Or perhaps you know Jesus as Savior, but you don't know much about His Word
 - In either case, if that's you, then you've come to the right place...because in this place, we will teach you about Jesus and we will teach you His Word
 - Walk with us as we walk by faith with Jesus, and let's all get ready for the Kingdom together

- Over the past few months, we've studied through Jesus' miracles in the Galilee
 - And last week, we ended that study by looking at a complex connection linking the final three miracles of Chapter 9 with events in Chapter 12
 - In order to understand the final miracle of Chapter 9, we had to reconstruct a timeline from the events of Chapter 12
 - It may have been a bit confusing at moments, but things will become increasingly clear as we move toward Chapter 12
 - And that's one of the benefits of verse-by-verse study of Scripture...as we move steadily, our questions get answered
 - As we studied that connection, I told you that in Chapter 12, something happens to change Jesus' approach to ministry
 - Something big, something pivotal, disrupts everything Jesus was doing and it set His earthly ministry in a new direction
 - What is that big "something?" It is Israel rejecting Jesus' claims to be their Messiah
 - Once Israel had turned down Jesus' offer of the Kingdom, everything Jesus did and said changed from that point forward
 - The full story of how and why Israel rejected Jesus awaits us in Chapter 12
 - But even before it took place, that moment cast a shadow over the events of Chapters 10 & 11
 - Jesus knew beforehand that He would be rejected by His people and He knew it would force Him to change His style of ministry
 - So as He approached that moment, He began preparing His disciples and the crowds for what would follow
 - That process of preparation is the subject of Matthew's 10th and 11th chapters, which is our next area of study
 - It actually begins at the end of Chapter 9, where we ended our study last week
 - So let's pick up in v.35 of Chapter 9, as Jesus starts His course of preparation of His disciples to encounter His own rejection

Matt. 9:35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matt. 9:36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

- Matthew summarizes Jesus' time in the Galilee in v.35, saying Jesus moved around the 240-odd cities and towns in the area, proclaiming the Gospel and healing
 - The point is, that Jesus was opening up, sharing the truth of His identity and His purpose for coming to Earth

- And He backed His claims with displays of power that could only mean one thing
- Jesus was the promised Messiah, sent with the authority and power of God Himself
- You may remember that shortly after Jesus called His first disciples in Chapter 4, Matthew summarized Jesus' Galilean ministry in a similar way

Matt. 4:23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

- Now we see Matthew repeating virtually the same thought, word-for-word, as we leave Chapter 9
- Back in Chapter 4, Matthew used that statement to introduce his record of Jesus' miracles and teaching in the Galilee
- And now he repeats it again, to indicate the conclusion of this section of His gospel
- So these statements serve as bookends, marking the beginning and end of Matthew's record of Jesus' time in the Galilee
 - Of course, Jesus said and did many more things than those Matthew chose to record, some of which, we find recorded in the other Gospels
 - And as John says at the end of his Gospel, there aren't enough books in the world to record all Jesus did in His earthly ministry
 - Therefore, like all the Gospels, Matthew's account is a representative sample of Jesus' work, and now, that record has come to an end
- So at this point in his narrative, Matthew begins to chronicle Jesus' shifting priorities in view of His approaching rejection by the leaders and people
 - Beginning in v.36, where Matthew says Jesus looked upon the crowds with compassion, or in Greek, the word could be translated "pity"
 - Thousands of people had been drawn to Jesus' ministry in the Galilee, and His heart feels pity for them
 - But Jesus wasn't feeling pity because they were sick or needy
 - Matthew says Jesus pitied them because they were distressed and dispirited
 - This is a profound statement, and one worth some attention this evening
 - "Distressed" means "troubled" or "worried", which is an odd thing under these circumstances
 - That's not the response we would expect to see, is it?
 - After at least a year or more of Jesus' teaching and healing, you would expect the opposite response, wouldn't we?
 - We expect the people to be overjoyed at the arrival of their Messiah, the Good Shepherd, and the coming of the Kingdom

- Yet Matthew says Jesus observed that the people remained troubled and discouraged...why?
- We get our answer in the comparison Matthew offers at the end of the verse
 - Matthew compares their distress to that of a sheep being without a shepherd
 - Shepherding is common biblical metaphor for pastoral care
 - Because shepherding is an excellent illustration of the relationship between church leadership and those they lead
 - We remember Jesus told Peter feed and tend My sheep, which was Jesus' way of reminding Peter how to care for those in the Church
- Now when we talk about shepherds, obviously, Jesus is THE Shepherd of God's people, the Good Shepherd
 - But we also know the Lord raises up leaders over the congregation of His people
 - And these leaders are also called shepherds (or under-shepherds)
 - Which means we are the sheep
 - But unfortunately, the metaphor isn't necessarily complimentary, because sheep are notoriously dim-witted
 - They move about with their eyes down, blindly focused on satisfying their hunger and oblivious to where they are going
 - Which means sheep are prone to wandering away
 - They inevitably get separated and lost, ending up in dangerous situations before they know it
 - And sheep are virtually defenseless when left to themselves
 - So sheep need the watchful care of a shepherd to guide them
 - With the emphasis on "guiding", because sheep cannot be driven from behind like cattle...they must be led from the front
 - So sheep instinctively look to a shepherd
 - They expect to be led, and they trust the shepherd to point out danger and lead them to good pastures
 - But if sheep are without a shepherd, they quickly become distressed
 - They can get confused and begin to feel vulnerable
 - They may begin to follow other animals, or their own shadow
 - They may panic and stampede or the flock simply scatters
- Matthew compares the situation Jesus witnessed in Israel to that of sheep left without proper supervision and care
 - The people were distressed, they were wandering away, unsure of where to go
 - Yet their religious leaders were all about, directing their every move
 - And even more puzzling, their Good Shepherd stood in their midst

- So how can it be that the sheep of Israel are distressed, being without a shepherd?
- To understand what Matthew means, consider that the effects of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee were impossible to ignore
 - A Jew could either love Jesus or hate Jesus for what He was saying and doing, but he certainly couldn't ignore Jesus
 - His words were too provocative, and His powers were too impressive to overlook
 - So everyone had to come to some decision about the meaning of Jesus' ministry...His impressive work demanded a verdict
- And there were several verdicts being debated among the people
 - Later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus asks His disciples to tell Him what explanations the people were offering to explain Jesus' power

Matt. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Matt. 16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

- The disciples say various explanations were floating around
- But notice that the disciples didn't offer the most obvious explanation...that Jesus was the Messiah
- So even after a year or more of Jesus openly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and that He was the Messiah, the people didn't believe it, despite His powers
 - Most of the "sheep" were confused, and the reason for that confusion was the influence of the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees
 - The people looked to these so-called shepherds, asking them to render a verdict concerning Jesus
 - And these corrupt men told the people that Jesus *wasn't* the Messiah
 - As we saw last week, they told the people Jesus wasn't the Son of David...He was merely working with the power of Satan
 - Naturally, those lies left the people distressed and troubled
 - The crowds must have been so disappointed to hear that what they so desperately wanted to be true was just a facade
 - For a moment, their hearts leapt in anticipation of seeing the long-awaited Kingdom arrive, but then their dreams were dashed
 - And if it was true that Satan could mimic the powers of the Messiah, then how could Israel ever know for sure who the Messiah was?
 - How could they avoid being misled by such power?
 - Which led to the second outcome...they were dispirited

- “Dispirited” means to be downcast, discouraged, spiritually
 - Israel was discouraged, thinking they had come so close to having their Messiah, only to be duped by the enemy once more
 - They felt like the villagers fooled by the boy who cried wolf...
 - After too many false alarms, you just stop listening and give up caring
- So when Matthew says the people were without a shepherd, he means it in a two-fold sense
 - First, they were without a shepherd, in the sense that the people didn’t embrace their Good Shepherd, though He was standing in their midst
 - Israel longed for their Messiah, and to get so close only to fall short (or so they thought) was incredibly discouraging to the nation
- Secondly, Israel missed their Messiah because they were also without earthly shepherds, who would lead them properly in spiritual matters
 - In fact, their evil religious leaders were stumbling blocks who steered the nation *away* from their Messiah,
 - Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus says this about these men:

Matt. 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

- When sheep lack a caring shepherd, they are in a world of hurt, and that is just as true today as it was in Jesus’ day
 - The influence of corrupt leaders, especially those who engage in false teaching, will cause believers to adopt wrong thinking and behavior
 - The consequences of that wrong thinking and behavior eventually come to rest on the believer, causing distress
 - And over time, the believer becomes dispirited, discouraged, or cynical
 - To the point that the person comes to view the pursuit of Christ and His Word to be a waste of time
 - Over time, the person gives up on church or discipleship altogether
 - And at worst, we conclude that even God’s Word itself is useless or irrelevant
 - And when we give up on the Word of God, where else can we turn to know the truth about God?
 - If we turn away from Jesus and His Church and His Word, all we have left is the wisdom of the world
 - And what good are all books of wisdom in the world? Can they tell us about a God Who can only be known by what He chooses to reveal to us?
 - Does the Internet understand God? Does Dr. Phil? Judge Judy?

- The Lord appoints shepherds over His flock for good reason
 - Because leaders are crucial to keeping the Lord's sheep together, in safety and nourished by the Word of God
 - But for the same reason, bad shepherds have the potential to completely sabotage our spiritual journey
 - Like Israel, mistreated believers are like sheep wandering without a shepherd
 - They are lost, starving for lack of spiritual nourishment, and in danger of various threats
 - We need to submit to the leaders over us: obey our leaders and submit to them, as Hebrews 13:17 commands
 - But at the same time, we must remain discerning for who leads us and who teaches us
 - And when our leaders reveal themselves to be ungodly or unable to discern the Scriptures rightly, we need to look elsewhere
 - Because if we remain under such men, we are like sheep without a shepherd, and we're headed for trouble
 - But here's the good news: even when we lack good shepherds in our congregations, our Good Shepherd in Heaven never forsakes His sheep
 - The Spirit of God living inside every believer continues to minister to our hearts even when no one else will
 - So when a child of God comes under the influence false teaching and evil leaders, the Spirit will alert him or her to the dangers
 - The believer will sense a growing dissatisfaction, a sense that something is missing, something isn't right
 - And the Spirit will drive that person to seek for better pasture
- That's what's happening here...the Lord was moved to compassion for the people of Israel because they were without shepherds
 - He felt pity for them, knowing they were being misled by the very leaders appointed to steer them toward the truth
 - And naturally, He wanted to solve the problem by giving His flock proper, godly leadership who would bring people to Christ
 - And then, having brought them to know their Good Shepherd, these leaders would guide and feed and guard the flock
 - So the Lord's compassion for His people, displayed in v.36, leads us into the next phase of Matthew's Gospel
 - In this new section, Jesus begins to prepare His disciples for Israel's coming rejection of Him and the Kingdom
 - He works to instill in their hearts an awareness that they must become a new generation of leaders over God's flock
 - That after Jesus departs the earth, these men and those they train must assume

the shepherding duties for the people of God

- And as they assume these responsibilities, they must not look to the Pharisees as their models for how to lead the people
 - Jesus must establish an entirely different example
 - Beginning with the very notion that there is work to do in recruiting leaders to lead the flock

Matt. 9:37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Matt. 9:38 “Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

- Everyone has probably heard this passage repeated at some point
 - The metaphor of a harvest is well-understood in the Church
 - The world is the field, and grain represent hearts of the lost in the world
 - The Lord does the hard work of preparing those hearts by His Word and through the Spirit
 - And He calls His Church to go out and seek the lost
 - But if you can, step back from what you know in this regard, and try to think like a first-century disciple in Jesus’ day
 - To that audience, Jesus’ words are revolutionary
 - First, Jesus said that there is a harvest to be sought
 - Again, we take this for granted, but that was not conventional thought in that day
 - Israel was God’s people, and there were no others to seek
 - But Jesus is saying the Kingdom citizens must be sought
 - There is no automatic membership...you won’t enter the Kingdom simply because you’re born a Jew
 - Furthermore, those who will enter the Kingdom must be recruited by workers who are specifically seeking to recruit these citizens
 - This is a program of preparation for the Kingdom that no one in Israel had ever considered before
 - And truly, the Lord had never asked this of Israel before, but in light of Jesus’ coming rejection, this would now become God’s program
 - In centuries prior, Israel waited for their Messiah to appear with the Kingdom, as God’s Word promised would happen
 - But now that this promise was being fulfilled, and yet the people rejected their Messiah, the Lord’s program was about to change
 - There would now be a program of Kingdom work, where God’s people would

work for Him, seeking for more disciples in the field

- This is something entirely new, something radical, and it would require that Jesus' disciples cultivate within themselves an attitude that was radically different than that of Israel's current leaders
 - Where the Pharisees were self-serving, self-righteous and self-satisfied, now God's workers, His shepherds must be humble
 - They must be self-sacrificing, focused on Jesus' priorities with a heart for the flock
 - And these kinds of leaders were not common in Jesus' day, and they are still relatively rare today
 - Which is why the Lord advised His disciples, the future leaders of the early Church, to beseech (or we could say beg) the Lord for help
 - Anyone called to shepherd God's people knows what Jesus is talking about
 - The kind of humble heart I just described doesn't come naturally...people aren't naturally inclined to think and act in those ways
 - Yet that is the kind of heart you need to seek for lost sheep, to feed them properly and to guide them into spiritual maturity
 - All around the disciples, were examples of men who loved power and money and the praise of people
 - The impact of such leadership for the people was distress and discouragement
 - And ultimately, it resulted in that generation of Israel losing the Kingdom – which is the ultimate price anyone could pay
 - But that wasn't the model Jesus wanted for His first disciples, and it can't be our model today
 - We should ask, beg, the Lord to raise up men and women who will work on His behalf with the right heart
 - It's not just a matter of needing help...it's needing the right kind of help
 - Because the wrong kind of shepherd will do more harm for a body of believers than no leader at all
- Having said that, there is an obvious corollary to this command, one we can't ignore
 - While we're praying for the Lord to raise workers to assume the work of building God's Kingdom, we need to consider whether the Lord is preparing our heart to do that work
 - Everyone is supposed to make this request as part of their prayer life, especially those who are already at work and in need of help
 - But if everyone in the Church is called to pray for workers, then obviously, whoever answers that call was themselves praying for it
 - Maybe that someone is you?
 - One of the major reasons we pray about anything, is to allow the Lord to work on our own heart in regard to that prayer request

- We may pray for the Lord to give us something or to take something away
- And as we pray, the Lord works through our prayers to help our understanding
- So that over time, our desires will align with the Lord's will
- To the end that no matter how those situations turn out, we gain an understanding and peace about why it was the best thing for us
- Similarly, as we obey this command to pray for workers to accomplish the work of leading God's people, we may find our hearts encouraged to take up that work
 - In time, we begin to see ourselves as the worker, and the Lord opens doors to allow us to answer that call
 - Jesus saw His people wandering, confused, deceived and defenseless, so He told the new generation of leaders to get ready...it's your turn to lead My people
 - And that process of preparation began with those very men praying for workers
- Remember, these are the future apostles and leaders of the first century Church
 - And Jesus begins their preparation for leading by calling them to pray for leaders
 - Little did they know they were praying for themselves
 - I wonder if those men, as they struggled to manage the fast-growing first century Church, looked back to this moment and chuckled
- The Church always needs more workers, more leaders, because there are always more sheep to shepherd
 - Pray for those future leaders, because they will make the difference in your own spiritual growth
 - And don't overlook the possibility that the Lord is using your prayers to prepare your own heart to assume that role

- Tonight we begin a two-chapter section in Matthew's Gospel on how Jesus prepared His disciples for their ministries
 - As I explained last week, Jesus has been ministering in the Galilee for some time, drawing crowds with His teaching and miracles
 - And during that time, He openly declared that He is the Messiah
 - And He invited Israel to receive their Kingdom, if only they would receive Jesus as their King
 - But as Matthew said last week, the people were distressed and discouraged, like sheep without a shepherd
 - The religious leaders of Israel deceived the people, causing them to reject Jesus and His offer
 - We will learn about that climactic moment in Matthew 12, when that generation of Israel irrevocably rejected their Messiah
 - That moment will set Israel on a disastrous course, and it sets Jesus on a new direction in His ministry
 - But even now, as we enter Chapter 10, we find Jesus beginning to prepare His disciples for that coming change
 - In Chapters 10 and 11, Jesus will start that preparation process, but it continues even after Chapter 12 – all the way to the cross
 - In fact, Jesus will still be preparing His disciples, even after His resurrection, in the days leading up to His ascension
- So beginning today, we will study how Jesus took twelve untrained men and prepared them to assume leadership positions in the early Church
 - And Jesus' job is incredibly difficult, because these men have no appreciation of what's coming, nor did they sign up for the job
 - As you've read the Gospels in the past, you may have noticed how often Jesus' disciples seemed clueless about what's going on around them
 - And that's because they started in their positions with no appreciation of what was coming
 - They didn't realize that Jesus would be rejected, that the Kingdom would not be set up in their day
 - And they never anticipated that Jesus will die on a cross or that He must leave the earth for a time and wouldn't return until thousands of years later
 - And even after Jesus died, they assumed His movement had completely failed
 - But most of all, these Jewish men could not possibly have appreciated how they would become leaders of an entirely new movement of God's people
 - Of how they would shepherd a worldwide Church in Jesus' name
 - And even more incredible, that new entity would be comprised primarily of Gentiles, instead of Jews
 - They had no appreciation for these plans, so it took them a while to understand

what Jesus was trying to teach them

- But in time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it all began to make sense, and it rocked their world
- So these guys have no idea where this story is taking them, but like Jesus, we do know where this story is going
 - So it's entertaining to watch how Jesus works with these men in preparing them
 - Russell Nelson once said that the decision to serve in a mission will shape the spiritual destiny of that missionary
 - And the *desire* to serve is a natural outcome of one's preparation
 - So if you want a spiritual legacy of serving Jesus, then you have to watch for how Jesus is at work preparing you for that service
 - Because Jesus does the hard work of preparing men and women to serve Him
 - He chooses His candidates, He gives us our marching orders, He designs our training curriculum and He approves us along each step
 - Of course, we have a role too, which is to engage with Jesus in the training process...to gain the value of each experience He offers
 - We have to acknowledge the calling He places on our life
 - We have to pay attention to His instructions, we have to follow His orders, and we have to persevere through the trials
 - Most of all, we have to make this process a priority over everything else in our life so that we win the prize, as Paul says
- In Matthew's narrative, we're going to see Jesus working these men through each of these stages of preparation
 - And we'll also watch the disciples responding in various ways (good and bad)
 - The story begins with the first step, Jesus choosing and commissioning His core group of leaders

Matt. 10:1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

- As Matthew often does, he opens a new section with a summary statement
 - He says Jesus summoned His "twelve", and gave them authority to do miraculous things, and sent them out
 - This is Matthew's summary of what we will be hearing more about in the next couple of chapters
 - Before we dive in, notice that Matthew says Jesus focuses on "twelve"
 - This is the first time Matthew tells us that there was an "elite" group of twelve men taken from among all of Jesus' disciples

- In fact, as we'll see later, Jesus established at least three levels of leadership among those who followed Him
- First there were the disciples of Jesus, which included all who believed in Him as Messiah and followed Him – there were hundreds, if not thousands, who fit in that category
- Among His disciples, Jesus designated twelve men to become the leaders of the early Church
- Later, Jesus will single out just three men from among the twelve for an even more intimate relationship with Him
- Among these divisions, Jesus assigns different levels of authority and responsibility
 - For example, all of Jesus' disciples received authority to declare the Kingdom and to minister in His name to the world
 - Then, the twelve received additional authority and responsibility to lead and teach the rest of the disciples in the Church
 - Finally, the three received even greater authority and responsibility to lead the twelve
- Speaking of groups, let's look at the first major division: the twelve

Matt. 10:2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

Matt. 10:3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

Matt. 10:4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

- Matthew lists these men briefly and then moves on to describe the power and authority they received from Jesus
 - We know more about some of these men than others, and it will be helpful to our future studies to get to know something about them, especially the top guys
 - Beginning with the simple observation that these men were chosen by Jesus
 - They didn't sign up or apply to be elevated in this way
 - In fact, Jesus never really asked them if they wanted to be chosen...He simply told them they were promoted
 - In Luke's Gospel, we learn that Jesus' selection of these men was preceded by an all-night prayer vigil
 - So Jesus appealed to the Father for clear direction on who should be selected for this special assignment
 - And in the end, the Father made a decision, which is how every calling in ministry works
 - We like to use the word "invite" a lot, but a more biblical word would be

“commanded” or “burdened”

- When God places a call on someone’s life, it isn’t an invitation, it’s a command (and often a burden) we can’t ignore
 - If we respond to God’s call, we are obeying the Lord, not accepting His invitation
 - When we decline the calling of God, we are not exercising our options...we’re sinning
- In Mark 3:14, we learn that as Jesus elevated these twelve men, He did so for two purposes
 - First, these twelve men were to accompany Jesus at all times
 - Although other disciples in the larger group could come and go at times, not these guys
 - The twelve would now be with Jesus at all times, everywhere Jesus went, until Jesus departed the earth
 - Jesus knew that His rejection was coming and that His time on earth was short, so He wanted to maximize His opportunity to prepare these guys
 - And more than maximizing the amount of time together, Jesus also wanted to maximize the quality of that time
 - Jesus didn’t just spend time teaching these men, as He has done for the crowds, but Jesus also wanted to experience daily life with them
 - Because by experiencing life together, the twelve could internalize Jesus’ priorities and sensibilities
 - They needed to see how Jesus lived, how He treated other people, how He prayed, how He gave thanks
 - How He responded to both the needy and to the haughty
 - That kind of intimate fellowship gave them far more insight into Jesus’ character and approach to ministry than merely hearing Jesus’ words
 - It’s like the difference between reading the sheet music for Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony vs. hearing the symphony performed
- So after the night of prayer, Jesus calls all His disciples together, and then in front of everyone, He selects the twelve men that Matthew lists
 - It’s important to note that Jesus does this publicly
 - The larger community of His disciples are supposed to recognize that these men have been given special authority
 - Jesus has made these twelve leaders among equals
 - Which reminds us that every organization that desires to function effectively must have leadership
 - And the Church is no different...from the very beginnings of the Church, the Lord appointed leaders for the good of the whole
 - Those leaders ruled under the authority of Christ and they were appointed

- publicly, so that everyone would respect their role
- But these men were leaders among equals, and that's also true today
 - Those who lead in the Church are not more holy, more worthy, more righteous
 - We aren't necessarily smarter or stronger, though we do tend to be better looking (joke)
 - Nor are we all-powerful or without accountability
 - Leaders are simply men and women called into service over God's flock and appointed to lead according to His will
 - And of course, the Bible also has a lot to say to the leaders about how they should serve God's people
 - Leaders must serve in humility, demonstrating upright character and self-sacrifice, without lording over the people
 - But likewise, we are called to respect our leaders' authority and submit to their leadership as an act of obedience to Christ
 - Just as the writer of Hebrews tells the Church

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- So Matthew says Jesus designated twelve men to shepherd the early Church, and Matthew's list of names is one of four such lists in the Bible
 - The other three lists are found in Luke and Mark and Acts, and all four give the same 12 names, naturally
 - The order of the names varies slightly between the lists, but we always find certain things to be consistent across all four
 - The higher a name in the list, the more prominent or the more authority that individual had in the group
 - For example, Peter is always at the top of every list, while Judas Iscariot is always at the bottom of every list
 - But the second, third and fourth names in every list are always some combination of James, John and Andrew
 - These consistencies tell us that Jesus established a pecking order within His group of twelve that all Gospel writers recognized
 - Peter was the undisputed leader of the group, while Judas was the traitor and therefore, the least among them
 - After Peter, Jesus designated three men to serve as Peter's key lieutenants over the Church
 - Jesus' choice reflects a good leadership principle:

- Leadership should always be divested among multiple leaders, serving at different levels
- In his list, Matthew calls these twelve men Jesus' apostles
 - This is the first use of the term "apostle" in Matthew's gospel and it has an important meaning we need to understand
 - The word in Greek is *apostolos*, which comes from the Greek verb *apostello*, meaning "to send"
 - Therefore, we could define the term *apostle* as "one who is sent out"
- So based on this new name, Jesus is indicating He's going to send these twelve men out in a unique way
 - They are a select group, uniquely empowered and uniquely commissioned for service in the early Church
 - And not only these men...but later in Acts, and in the epistles, we learn that other men were also assigned the title of apostle
 - Paul, Barnabas, and James, the brother of Jesus, are also called apostles in Scripture, yet those men were not among the 12
- Nevertheless, all apostles received their office in the same way: they were personally selected and appointed by Jesus Himself
 - Obviously, we see that happening here, as Jesus appoints these twelve
 - But it also happened to Paul as described in Scripture
 - Acts tells us Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and personally appointed him to be the apostle to the Gentiles
 - Paul also testifies in his letters that he was personally appointed to be an apostle by an appearing of Jesus
 - While we don't have the testimony of Barnabas or James, we know that Scripture declares they were apostles too
 - So perhaps Jesus met with these men at some point during His earthly ministry
 - Or perhaps Jesus appeared to them during the days He walked the earth following His resurrection
 - However it happened, the Bible is clear that the position of apostle cannot be assumed or assigned by anyone other than Jesus
 - After the first century, there are no more credible reports of Jesus appearing and appointing apostles
 - So, we conclude that apostles served an important and necessary role in the establishment of the early Church
 - But once that need was over, so was the need for men to fill that office
- The office of apostle came with unique abilities, powers that no one else in the Church possessed, as we'll see later in this study
 - But their powers weren't merely for show...the apostles were given miraculous powers to validate their claims to speak for the Lord

- The apostles were the New Testament prophets
- All Scripture in the New Testament was authored or sourced by apostles
- Which is why the 27 books were chosen to join the canon of Scripture...they were the books known to be sourced from apostles
- And that's why it was necessary for these men to have miraculous powers
 - Remember, that for many decades, the early Church had no written Scripture other than the Old Testament
 - During that early time, the Lord spoke to the Church through the apostles
 - But believers in this time needed some way to distinguish between true prophets and the false teachers
- So the Lord equipped His true spokesmen, the true apostles, with miraculous powers that could not be counterfeited
 - In that way, when someone claimed to have the authority to speak on behalf of the Lord, the Church could test the person's claims
 - Since supernatural powers only come from God, anyone who demonstrated apostolic powers was showing God was on their side
 - But if that man could not perform the miracles commonly done by apostles, then his claims of authority were rejected
 - He was exposed to be a fraud and the Church was protected
- Paul gives us an example of this principle at work in one of his letters to the Corinthians

1 Cor. 4:18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

1 Cor. 4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.

1 Cor. 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.

- In the Corinthian church, there were false teachers arrogantly claiming to have apostolic authority so they could mislead the people
 - These men were contradicting Paul's teaching and confusing the church, so Paul wrote to the church rebuking these fakes
 - Paul said words are cheap, but God's Kingdom came to earth with real power (referring to Jesus' miraculous power)
 - So just as Jesus backed His words up with power, so Paul would do the same, since he was a true apostle
 - And Paul said when he returned to Corinth, he would gladly see what power these so-called apostles had
- As Paul's situation illustrates, the Lord equipped the apostles with special powers so believers could recognize the true spokesmen of God
 - But once the Church was established and the canon of Scripture had closed, the

need for apostles ended

- So the Lord stopped appointing men to this position
- When the last apostle, John, died sometime during the final decade of the first century, the age of apostles came to an end
- It's no coincidence that John wrote the last book in the canon, and he wrote it chronologically as the last book to be written
- From that point onward, the Church went forward without apostles
 - But, we forevermore benefit from their inspired teaching, preserved in Scripture
 - And we continue to follow their leadership example
- So let's take a look at each of these men, beginning with Peter
 - Peter was the first leader of the Church, and he's also known for having three names from three different languages
 - His given name in Hebrew was *Shimon*, or as we would say, Simon
 - In Jesus' day, Jews also commonly spoke Aramaic, which they brought back with them from captivity in Babylonian
 - So in Aramaic, Peter's name was *Keifa*, which we pronounce *Cephas*
 - Finally, Jesus calls Peter by the Greek name *Petros*, which we pronounce as "Peter"
 - All three of these names have a meaning of "rock" or "stone"
 - Peter will be the leader of the apostles and the first leader of the Church
 - So in that sense, his name "rock" is prophetic of his position as a cornerstone of leadership for the early Church
 - Obviously, Jesus is THE cornerstone of the Church, and Peter's name wasn't intended to overshadow or compete with Jesus
 - It simply indicated that Peter was appointed to lead the other apostles at the beginning, when leadership was most crucial
 - Remember, Peter was named at birth, which clearly reflects the sovereignty of God
 - The Lord marked Peter out to be the leader of the Church while he was still in diapers, and truly even before he was born
 - And then the Lord moved his parents to assign Peter the name, "rock"
 - And as we'll see in our study of Peter in the Gospel, I think the Lord was also indicating that Peter would be hard-headed
 - Peter was persecuted by the Jews, along with James, and eventually fled Jerusalem for Antioch
 - According to Church tradition, he was later crucified by Nero in Rome
 - As you know, the Catholic religion has created its own myths concerning Peter
 - Namely, they claim Peter was the first ruler in a dynasty of omnipotent Church

leaders called “popes”

- The Catholics claim these men rule with authority directly from Jesus, because they succeeded Peter in his role as leader
- But Scripture never teaches that Jesus intended Peter’s role as leader to be inherited or passed down to later men
 - On the contrary, once Peter disappears from the record of Scripture in Acts 15, nothing is said about any successor
 - Instead, the Church continues to operate under a plurality of local leaders operating more-or-less independently thereafter
 - We’ll come back to the subject of Peter’s authority in Chapter 16
- The second man in our list is Andrew, who was Peter’s brother
 - John’s Gospel tells us that Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus
 - In fact, Andrew has the distinction of being the very first man Jesus called to be His disciple
 - He came from Bethesda and operated a fishing business with Peter on the Sea of Galilee
 - At the time Jesus called him, he was living in Capernaum near a synagogue still standing today
 - Andrew is remembered for being the one to suggest a solution for the problem of feeding the five thousand
 - He noticed the young boy selling five loaves of bread and two fish
 - We don’t know why Andrew thought that might be a workable solution, but it proved to be successful in the end
 - According to Church legend, Andrew is said to have travelled to Asia Minor and the Black Sea to evangelize that region
 - He traveled as far as Hungary or Russia and to the banks of the Oder in Poland
 - In Greece, he supposedly forced his way through a forest inhabited by wolves, bears and tigers
 - He died the death of a martyr, given the choice of being offered as a sacrifice to the gods or being scourged and crucified
 - By his own request, he was crucified on a diagonal cross because like his brother Peter, he felt unworthy to be crucified on the upright cross of Christ
 - Supposedly, his bones are buried in Scotland
- Third, we have James, the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle John
 - James should not be confused with the second apostle named James, nor with Jesus’ earthly brother, James, who wrote the letter in Scripture
 - His name in Hebrew is *Yaakov*, which is usually translated “Jacob”, but can also be translated “James”
 - The Church chooses to refer to this apostle as “James” to avoid confusion with

the Old Testament figure, Jacob

- Along with Peter and John, James is among an inner circle of apostles that Jesus gave special attention and preparation for ministry
 - For example, James was included in the small group present with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration
 - But, he was also one of the disciples who proposed calling fire down on the Samaritans, not one of his better moments
- Notably, James is the first of the apostles to die as a martyr when Herod Agrippa kills him to please the Jews
 - In fact, James is the only apostle whose death is recorded in Scripture
 - The Armenian church claims that the place of James' death is located in their quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, and his head is buried under an altar in a church located there
- Fourth, we have the apostle John, whose name means “Yahweh is gracious”
 - He was James' younger brother, the “sons of thunder”, Jesus called them
 - This is the same John who wrote the fourth Gospel, the three epistles by his name, and the book of Revelation
 - He too, was a fisherman and the youngest of all the apostles
 - He was the longest living apostle and the only apostle who, according to Church tradition, died naturally rather than as a martyr
 - Little is known about the end of John's life
 - Second century Church writers claimed John was boiled alive in oil, but miraculously, was unharmed
 - He's said to be buried in Ephesus, which was the Church where he ministered after release from exile in Patmos
 - The rest of the list is comprised of men who have little or no mention in Scripture, apart from their names appearing in the list of the twelve
 - Philip was the first to evangelize in Samaria, which took great courage for a Jew
 - Nathaniel, also called Bartholomew, was called by Jesus while under the fig tree
 - Thomas is famous for doubting that Jesus had resurrected
 - Then we have Matthew, the author of this Gospel
 - The fact that Matthew places himself lower in the list is evidence to us that we can trust his record of events
 - Because if he invented this account, he would likely have placed his own name higher in the list to appear more important
 - But as it is, he places himself near the bottom of the list, reflecting that he was not among the top leaders of the twelve
 - Having said that, Matthew was one of only four apostles to produce a Gospel account of Jesus

- Finally, you have the second James in the list, called James the Lessor in Mark's Gospel, because the other James was a leader
 - This James is notable mainly because his mother, Mary, was one of the women who attended to the body of Jesus
 - Hippolytus, an early Church father, claimed that James was stoned at the temple, similar to James, the brother of Jesus
- So that's the list of twelve, which doesn't mean much to us yet, except perhaps for one observation...these were twelve ordinary guys
 - Fishermen, a tax collector, sons of ordinary Jewish homes
 - They had no formal training in religious matters
 - They were scoffed at by the religious elite, mocked by their own families
 - When it came to serving Jesus, they were usually naive, often confused about things Jesus said, unsure of what Jesus wanted
 - Occasionally, they were prone to rash ideas, prideful self-centeredness, and jealousy
 - In at least one case, they suggest Jesus murder innocent people in the name of God and religion, using fire from Heaven
 - That's not what we would call an "all-star" team
 - If this was a kickball team Jesus selected, we would say Jesus picked last... every time!
 - To lead the worldwide Church of Christ, Jesus selected a group of below average, blue-collar Jewish boys to change the world
 - And that should be a great encouragement to all of us
 - Because when you consider what God accomplished through these ordinary men, you realize that He could use us too
 - The only thing holding us back from experiencing great things in service to Christ are our own doubts, fears and distractions
 - As we move ahead into a study of how Jesus prepares these men, keep that in mind
 - These were nobodies that Jesus prepared to become the heroes of the faith
 - Yet they didn't even know that's what was happening, not at first
 - So perhaps ask yourself, what is the Lord preparing you for right now? Perhaps for something you don't even know is coming?
 - How will the Lord glorify Himself by using ordinary people like us to accomplish extraordinary things for His glory?
 - We only have to look around and join Him in what we see Him doing, and we'll have the answer to our question

- Last week we were introduced to the future leaders of the New Testament church
 - Knowing He would be rejected by Israel and must leave the earth, Jesus called and commissioned twelve men to serve Him in leading the church
 - These men would be uniquely gifted with power and authority and insight
 - And by their leadership, a new entity – the Church – would be established
 - But as I observed last week, these guys are thoroughly unqualified for their positions
 - None of them have ever received formal theological training
 - None of them were even seeking for such a position
 - And certainly none of them have any clue what lies ahead
 - But despite their lack of qualifications – or perhaps because these men were unqualified – Jesus called them to serve Him
 - Because in their weakness, the Lord's strength would shine through
 - And in the end they would be equal to the challenge, because those who the Lord calls He also equips
 - These men received teaching and training in the years they spent with Jesus, and even after
 - And they received spiritual gifts that validated their ministry
- The apostles occupied a unique place in church history, nevertheless we too share their mission – at least to a degree
 - And like those twelve men, we're unqualified and inadequate in ourselves to do anything useful to serve the Living God
 - Yet we too are being equipped in both natural and supernatural ways to meet that impossible challenge
 - We receive training in the word of God, written by those apostles
 - And though we don't possess apostolic powers, nevertheless we do possess powerful spiritual gifts
 - And by putting our spiritual gift to work in obedience to Christ's call, we can accomplish remarkable things for the Kingdom
 - So tonight we return to studying how Jesus prepared apostles to assume their responsibilities in the church
 - And as we do, recognize we too are being prepared for our mission by what we learn
 - So keep that in mind...this isn't just a study of how they served Christ
 - This is a study of how you will serve Him in your own mission
- The next passage is particularly important in that regard
 - We're going to study through it in parts over the next several weeks

Matt. 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the

way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;

Matt. 10:6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matt. 10:7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Matt. 10:8 “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

Freely you received, freely give.

Matt. 10:9 “Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts,

Matt. 10:10 or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

Matt. 10:11 “And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city.

Matt. 10:12 “As you enter the house, give it your greeting.

Matt. 10:13 “If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace.

Matt. 10:14 “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.

Matt. 10:15 “Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Matt. 10:16 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

Matt. 10:17 “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;

Matt. 10:18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

Matt. 10:19 “But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.

Matt. 10:20 “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

- This passage in Matthew (and a companion passage in Luke 10) contains perhaps the most practical teaching Jesus offers on the Kingdom program
 - So as we dive into this passage, let’s be sure we all understand what I mean when I say “Kingdom”
 - The Kingdom is a concept that develops across Scripture in four stages
 - Ultimately, the term Kingdom refers to a future age, a future period of history on earth which will be very different from our present age
 - The Bible teaches that the Kingdom age will begin at the Lord’s Second Coming and continues for 1,000 years
 - In that new age, the Bible says Jesus will rule the entire earth and everyone in it as King of this Kingdom
 - He rules in perfect wisdom and grace, and under His rule, the world experiences a glorious period...it’s the “heaven” the Bible talks about

- And if you really want to know the details of what that time will be like for us, come to the Tuesday night Ezekiel study
- But even before that literal place of the Kingdom arrives, the Bible speaks of earlier phases of the Kingdom
 - The Kingdom begins as a promise to Abraham in the covenants the Lord gave to that man and his descendants
 - Those covenants promise that the Messiah would bring Israel a Kingdom one day
 - Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham looked forward to the day that promise would be fulfilled
- Then when the Messiah arrived for Israel, which is the story we're studying in Matthew, He declared the Kingdom was at hand
 - At that point, the Kingdom transitions from a promise to a proposal
 - Jesus proposed to set up the Kingdom for Israel's sake if they would only receive Him as their King
- But as we will see in Chapter 12, that generation of Israel rejected Jesus' proposal
 - Which prompted Jesus to move to the third stage of the Kingdom concept, which I call the Kingdom program
 - The program of the Kingdom is what Jesus is training the apostles to accomplish in this chapter
 - In short, it's the work of recruiting men and women to become Kingdom citizens who are ready to walking into that future age
 - Promise —> Proposal —> Program —> Place
- So for now, the Kingdom consists of the program of work Jesus is explaining in this chapter
 - And as you can tell, Jesus gives us a list of instructions
 - Some of them are familiar to us
 - But some may sound a little strange, at least in comparison to the way we think of evangelism today
 - To make sense of all this we need to break down the passage carefully
 - So let's start with an outline for Jesus' instructions
 - The Objective - vs.5-6
 - The Message - v.7
 - The Method - vs.8-12
 - The Result - vs.13-15
 - The Mindset - vs.16
 - The Cost - vs.17-31
 - This is our guide for how we serve as ambassadors of Christ, fulfilling the Kingdom

program He gave to His church

- We aren't apostles and we may not be called to live vocationally as missionaries or evangelists or pastors
- Nevertheless, we are all disciples, and all disciples are called to participate in the Kingdom program in one way or another
- So let's begin with the first part of this outline, the Objective of the Kingdom Program
 - In vs. 5-6 Jesus tells disciples that their objection is to recruit fellow Jews into becoming citizens of the Kingdom
 - Now for a Jew in Jesus' day, the notion of inviting fellow Jews to be part of the Kingdom would have sounded ridiculous
 - Jews were taught that every Jew was assured entry into the Kingdom simply by being born of Abraham
 - For the same reason, they also believed that no Gentile could enter the Kingdom since they were not of Abraham's family
 - Of course, Israel was working under a false understanding created by their religious leaders
 - The Old Testament never teaches that being Jewish is automatic ticket into the Kingdom
 - Similarly, the Bible doesn't teach that being Gentile or Samaritan excluded you from the Kingdom
 - So before Jesus could teach these men *how* to reach the world with message of the Kingdom, he had to explain that God *wanted* to reach the world
 - Salvation wasn't just for the Jewish people
 - And in fact, it wasn't even guaranteed to Jews
 - The Kingdom was an opportunity for glory, but no one had an automatic ticket
 - Therefore Jesus gives the disciples the objective of seeking people, of being evangelists for Christ
 - Furthermore, the Bible says that entry to the Kingdom comes as a matter of faith; by pledging faith in the Jewish King of that Kingdom
 - Therefore, the objective of the Kingdom program is seeking people who will place their faith in the King – Jesus
 - And by faith a person may trade-in their passport for this world, and in exchange they receive a passport for the Kingdom to come
 - They become citizens of Heaven serving a King Who will return soon to claim His Kingdom
- But notice how Jesus defines that objective for His apostles in v.5
 - Jesus tells them to focus exclusively on their Jewish brethren, not Gentiles or Samaritans, at least not for now
 - In the Bible, humanity is divided into three groups, generally speaking

- First, there are God's chosen people; Israel
 - These are the literal, physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they are a distinct group of people on the earth
- Secondly, we have Gentiles, which are by definition, all non-Jewish peoples on earth
- Finally, the Bible recognizes a third group called Samaritans
 - We could say Samaritans are Gentiles, since they are not technically Jews
 - But Samaritans descended from Jews, and they claimed to be legitimate Jews
 - Therefore, the true Jews saw Samaritans as a distinct category of people, separate from Jew and from Gentile
 - Which is why at times you'll see the New Testament making a distinction between Gentiles and Samaritans, as it does here
- More importantly, why does Jesus limit the disciples' initial efforts at evangelism to reaching just the Jews?
 - Two reasons: First the Kingdom was promised to Israel, and therefore it's only through the Jewish people that the promise can be fulfilled
 - God's covenants, including the promise to bring a Kingdom, were given to the Jews
 - There is no covenant in the Bible between God and the Gentiles
 - There are covenants given to all mankind prior to the existence of Jews/Gentiles, but none given specifically to Gentiles
 - Therefore, when it came time to fulfill His promise to bring a Kingdom, the Lord went to His people first
 - The Jews would have opportunity to receive what they were promised
 - But the Lord also promised to Abraham that through Abraham's seed, the Lord would bring salvation to all nations

**Gen. 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."**

- Notice the Lord said it would be "in you" meaning in Abraham's family line that the Lord would make blessing available to all peoples on earth
 - In other words, God selected Abraham and worked through his family to bring a plan of redemption into being
 - Through what God did in that man's family line, all nations on earth have an opportunity to be included in God's plan of redemption
- And so by its nature, God's plan places Israel in a place of prominence
 - Everything we have in the promises of God exists because of Israel

- As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, salvation is of the Jews but it comes to everyone through them
- Paul puts it this way when talking about his desire to see Israel saved

Rom. 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

Rom. 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,

Rom. 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

- The covenants and promises that come in Christ “belong” to Israel
 - God made promises to Israel and then allowed Gentiles to enjoy those blessings by faith
 - But because God’s work of redemption began with Israel, He has determined that every step of the process will also begin with Israel
 - As Paul puts it:

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- Secondly, Jesus sends the apostles to Israel alone at this point because Israel has yet to make a decision concerning Jesus’ proposal
 - Remember, I told you that Jesus’ proposal will ultimately be rejected, which is why Jesus departed the earth for a time
 - Theoretically, had Israel embraced Jesus as their King and accepted His proposal, then Jesus would have established His Kingdom at His first coming
 - Our present age would have ended at that moment, and the Kingdom age would have begun
 - Of course, had that happened, you and I and every Gentile in the church would have been excluded from that Kingdom
 - But prior to their rejection, this possibility existed and the Lord was going to be true to His word in making the Kingdom available to Israel
 - So for now at least, the offer still stands and therefore the apostles are instructed not to seek for Gentiles and Samaritans
 - In fact, had these men disobeyed Jesus and tried to reach those groups, their message would have fallen on deaf ears
 - Because the Spirit of God was not yet at work to bring Gentiles to faith in Jesus...the work was focused on Israel

- Only after the question of Israel's acceptance or rejection was decided would the Gospel move to those other audiences
- Again, Paul says it this way:

Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

- Israel's stumbling over Jesus wasn't a permanent fall for that nation
- But it does become the means by which God brings the offer of the Kingdom to the Gentiles
- But since we're still a few chapters away from the rejection moment, the objective for now will be the Jewish nation
- The next thing to notice is the way Jesus refers to those we seek: He calls them the lost sheep of Israel
 - Earlier, at the end of Chapter 9 we talked about shepherding as a picture of pastoral ministry
 - And we remember that Matthew said the people of Israel were troubled, like sheep without a shepherd
 - And now we hear Jesus saying He wants to reach the lost sheep of Israel
 - Which gives us another opportunity to extend our understanding of this metaphor
 - You probably know that sheep are a metaphor in the Bible for the children of God, those who by grace are saved through faith in Jesus
 - Both the Old Testament saints in Israel and the New Testament believer in the Church are called sheep
 - And you probably also remember that unbelievers are commonly compared to goats
 - We see this contrast at work clearly in Matthew 25, when Jesus teaches about what transpires immediately after His Second Coming

Matt. 25:31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Matt. 25:32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;
Matt. 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

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

Matt. 25:41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

- Notice that the sheep on Jesus’ right are ushered into the Kingdom
- While the goats on Jesus’ left are going where the devil and angels go
- I mention all this because when you look at the objective Jesus gave to His disciples, we find Him using the metaphor in a curious fashion
 - Jesus said their objective is to go to the lost “sheep” of Israel
 - Well, we know the word “lost” refers to the unsaved, those who have not believed or received the King yet
 - But when the Bible uses metaphoric language to describe the lost, it calls them goats, not sheep
 - Sheep are God’s children, the believers who have joined the family of God by faith
 - So why didn’t Jesus tell these men to go to the lost goats of Israel and invite them to become sheep?
 - Wouldn’t that be a more consistent use of the Biblical metaphor?
 - And the answer is no...that’s never how the Bible views the objective of the Kingdom program
 - Our objective is not to turn goats into sheep, because we couldn’t do that even if we tried
 - No, our objective is to find the lost sheep, whether the lost sheep of Israel or the lost sheep among the Gentiles
 - Jesus is the One Who saves
 - The Bible says Jesus is the Author and Perfector of our salvation
 - He authors our salvation through faith and He brings our salvation to perfection in the day we are resurrected
- None of us have the power to bring faith to anyone...our best arguments are inadequate
 - The Bible says that faith in Jesus is a process of being born again by the Spirit of God
 - Jesus uses the picture of birth, of being born physically, to help us understand what it means to be saved by faith
 - It’s a process of being born spiritually
 - And when you think about who to credit with your physical birth, you typically credit your earthly parents
 - Physically speaking, the union of a man and a woman results in a new human being coming into existence
 - But if you think about that process for a moment, how much credit can our parents really take for bringing us to life?
 - My dad couldn’t change a light bulb without help...I don’t think he gets much

credit for giving me life

- My point is that even though we see the process in human terms, it doesn't take much thought to realize that the real work is being done behind the scenes
 - God forms the person and gives that person the breath of life
 - And He chooses to use human procreation as the means to bring us into existence
 - But crediting our parents with giving us life is like crediting Shakespeare's quill for writing MacBeth
- Which is why Jesus compares coming to faith with being born
 - Only Jesus calls it being born again because our spiritual birth takes place after our physical birth
 - We were born first by water (referring to the fluids of the body), and we are born again by Spirit, referring to how we come to faith
 - Just like physical birth, being born again involves both an earthly process and a spiritual process
 - As in the case of physical birth, being born again usually depends on human beings taking certain actions
 - Like in the case of these apostles, we go out into the world to fulfill an objective...we teach, witness, preach, baptize, etc.
 - But behind the scenes, the real work is going on...the Lord is moving hearts by His Spirit
 - He's preparing men and women to receive our message so that as we encounter them, salvation results
 - When we see that moment, we shouldn't tell ourselves that we just turned a goat into a sheep, because that's not what happened
 - What happened is we found a lost sheep
 - That's how salvation works, and the entire Kingdom program depends on understanding that God is doing the real work
 - You remember when Jesus told the disciples this:

Mark 10:25 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Mark 10:26 They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?"

Mark 10:27 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

- Jesus remarked that rich people have so little incentive to receive the Gospel
- Their security and pleasure in this world makes the offer of the Kingdom seem unattractive by comparison

- So Jesus used hyperbole of a camel and a needle to explain how rich people cannot find their own way into the Kingdom
- The disciples say if that's true, then how can anyone be saved?
 - If simply loving riches is enough to keep someone out of Heaven, who could make it?
 - Because certainly we all love riches?
- To which Jesus says, you're right...if getting to Heaven depended on us, we would remain hopeless
 - But praise the Lord it doesn't work that way
 - What's impossible for us is possible with God, and that's how every single soul gets to heaven, rich or poor
 - God does the impossible work of preparing our hearts to receive the foolish message
 - So that when that message comes to us on a certain day, we will receive it gladly having been born again by the Spirit
- The evangelist who delivers that message didn't turn a goat into a sheep, he or she simply found the lost sheep that God had prepared to be found
 - And understanding that this is our objective – going out to find lost sheep – changes everything in why and how we fulfill our calling
 - If you begin your work in evangelism thinking that you are responsible for turning goats into sheep, you're likely to be overwhelmed
 - Immediately you're wondering, do I have skill and knowledge to bring something to the point of faith?
 - Can I refute the arguments? Can I answer all the questions?
 - And then perhaps you start to worry, what if I mess this up? What if someone goes to Hell because I wasn't good enough to save them?
 - Who can handle that pressure? Who could measure up to that standard?
 - Not me! Not you...not even the apostle Paul
 - Listen to what Paul said about his objective as an evangelist

1Cor. 2:1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

1Cor. 2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

1Cor. 2:3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

1Cor. 2:4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

1Cor. 2:5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- Paul said he intentionally didn't focus on sharing the Gospel with a bunch of persuasive words of wisdom
 - As if he were trying to convince goats to trade in their horns for a coat of sheep's wool
 - Instead, Paul says he came in weakness, fear and trembling...is that your impression of Paul? It should be
- And notice he said that he embraced this objective because when someone came to faith, he didn't want their faith to rest on his power of persuasion
 - If someone says they believe merely because you convinced them to your side of an argument, that's not saving faith
 - Not unless it's accompanied by the power of God through the work of His Spirit in the heart of that person
 - Unless a person is born again by the Spirit, they are not God's
 - Unless God makes the person one of His sheep, we can do nothing in our power to bring them into the Kingdom
- My favorite picture of this process is that of a child being asked by His father to hunt for eggs on Easter
 - Think of those eggs as the lost sheep that our Father in Heaven has asked us to seek for the sake of the Kingdom
 - The child hunting those eggs isn't producing the eggs by their search effort... the eggs are already there waiting, the child is simply trying to find them
 - So they search eagerly, fully expecting to find one around the next corner
 - The child is eager and excited to look, because she knows her father has placed the eggs in the yard to be found
 - There is no doubt the eggs are already there...the challenge is locating them
 - Likewise, we know our Father delights to bring all people to know Him, and He is at work by His Spirit preparing hearts to respond to the Gospel
 - These hearts are everywhere around us, like eggs hidden in our garden
 - And so like a child, we should be excited to search, to seek for the lost sheep knowing if we look long enough we will find them
 - And even better, you don't have to be especially talented in the search process... you just have to be persistent
 - As I say, serving God in the Kingdom program isn't a matter of ability...it's a matter of availability
 - And when you understand and embrace the biblical objective of evangelism – seeking lost sheep – you get a whole lot more excited about doing it
 - If you tell me I have to turn goats into sheep, I'm immediately discouraged because I'm forever aware of my spiritual limitations
 - But tell me I only have to locate the sheep that God has already prepared to receive the Gospel, then suddenly I'm saying, "I got this!"

- Not because I feel any more competent than I did before, but because I suddenly realize that this impossible task didn't depend on me
- God was already doing the impossible for me...He's just inviting me to join in His work so I can be blessed to watch Him saving souls
- Will you join the Father in His work?
 - Will you seek for the lost sheep of Israel?
 - Will you make yourself available for the hunt?

- We're in Chapter 10 and we're learning how Jesus wants His disciples to serve Him in the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus has begun preparing His twelve apostles to assume responsibility for leading the church following His departure
 - Those 12 men and the other apostles who joined them later didn't realize the magnitude of the mission they would inherit
 - They had no experience, and they had never trained for something like this
 - But in a few short years, the reality will hit them...and as it does, they'll fall back on this training and the leading of the Spirit
 - For us, it's fun to be a fly on the wall watching how they learned, especially when we remember they eventually became our examples
 - When you read Peter, Paul, John or even this Gospel, you're learning from the same men who are getting their training wheels here
 - It's reassuring to know that everyone begins their walk with Jesus in a similar fashion... ignorant and needing basic instruction
 - But by the grace of God, we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - So let's return to studying how Jesus equipped these men to serve Him as ambassadors of the Kingdom Program
 - You remember I explained last week that in the Bible the concept of the Kingdom develops through four stages
 - The first time we hear about a Kingdom is in the story of Abraham, when God made a promise to him in a covenant
 - The Lord promised an inheritance for Abraham and his descendants in a Kingdom to come in the future
 - Over centuries, the Kingdom remained a promise to be fulfilled when the Messiah came to Israel
 - When Jesus did come to Israel, He preached that the Kingdom was at hand, meaning God was prepared to fulfill His promise
 - In that moment, the promise of the Kingdom became a proposal to Israel
 - But as we will see in Chapter 12, Israel ultimately rejected that proposal and refused to accept Jesus as their King
 - Since the proposal of the Kingdom was rejected, the concept of Kingdom changed again, from proposal to program
 - The Lord began preparing His disciples to serve Him in a program of recruiting people to become citizens of the Kingdom
 - In a future day, when the Kingdom comes to Earth, those citizens will be ready to walk into the Kingdom
- So the Kingdom concept in the Bible is a four part story:
 - Promise → Proposal → Program → Place

- Today, we are still in the third stage of the Kingdom, the program of recruiting citizens for the future Kingdom
- We have the same mission the apostles received, and therefore we have need for the same training they received
- We are supposed to recruit and train citizens for their life in the future Kingdom
- Today, we call it evangelizing and discipling believers – but it’s the same thing
- Last week I gave you an outline for how Jesus approaches His training in Chapter 10, and we will use this outline as we study through the chapter
 - The Objective - vs.5-6
 - The Message - v.7
 - The Method - vs.8-12
 - The Result - vs.13-15
 - The Mindset - vs.16
 - The Cost - vs.17-31
- Last week we studied the first part, the Objective of the Kingdom program
 - And as we learned, the Kingdom program objective is to find lost sheep
 - We’re supposed to go out on a rescue mission, seeking hearts that God has prepared to receive the Gospel
 - We can’t *make* someone accept Jesus...coming to faith in Jesus requires a person be born again spiritually
 - And only the Spirit of God can grant new spiritual life
- So knowing this, we approach our mission like an Easter egg hunt
 - We search for the person who the Spirit has already prepared to receive our message, and as we find them, we collect them
 - Like a shepherd picking up a lost sheep and bringing it back to the pen
- So let’s turn to the second part...the message we are called to bring to that lost sheep

Matt. 10:7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

- We can divide the Kingdom message into three components
 - There is the *circumstance* of the message
 - The *calling* of the message
 - And the *content* of the message
- First, Jesus explains the circumstances of our message: as you go
 - Notice what Jesus didn’t say...
 - He didn’t say *should* you go, or *if* you go, or when the mood strikes you to go...He says *as* you go

- In other words, the Kingdom program expects that we are sharing the message constantly, everywhere to whomever we meet
- Jesus didn't tell His apostles which towns to enter or which road to take
 - Because it didn't matter...there were lost sheep everywhere
 - As these men went along their way they would encounter people, and it's in those everyday moments that the Church accomplishes its mission
- I like to say that ministry is what we do while we're waiting for our next mission trip
 - That's my way of saying the Kingdom message isn't reserved just for special moments like a missions trip
 - And it's not intended just for certain people living in dark jungles or under bridges
 - It includes all people everywhere: the soccer mom standing next to you at practice
 - The cubicle mate at the office, the person sitting next to you on the plane, your neighbor
 - Furthermore, the Kingdom program doesn't keep office hours
 - There aren't certain times and places that we're "on duty" for Jesus
 - We don't just share Jesus on Sundays or at the soup kitchen
 - Our life mission is to share the news of the King and His coming Kingdom in every moment of our daily life...as we go
 - We are ambassadors for Christ, and we are supposed to be bold in sharing the Gospel with virtually anyone we meet
 - Jesus says "as you go" to remind us that the whole point of living in this world is to share the Gospel with that world
- Perhaps you're thinking, "Well, I know that's true, but it's hard for me to share the Gospel. I'm shy and afraid of rejection." (Toby)
 - Perhaps you are shy, but I bet there are some topics you willingly and boldly share with strangers
 - I've met Christians who are quicker to share a new herbal remedy or some business opportunity with a stranger than the Gospel
 - Why? Because we believe what we know will help someone else
 - It's that desire to want to help the other person that motivates us to press into their world a little and share our perspective
 - So why do we hesitate to share the Kingdom message as we go?
 - I think it's because we've lost sight of the objective...we're called to find lost sheep, not turn goats into sheep
 - Jesus does the saving, we don't, so we need not worry about the outcome
 - You know not everyone will want your herbal remedy or to invest in your business, and likewise we know not everyone will agree with the Gospel

- But here's the thing...you don't know who the lost sheep are before you talk to them
 - You can't see lost sheep coming...
 - It's not like they have halos over their head and a name tag that says, "Hello, I'm Steve, baaaaah"
 - So if we are going to find them, we have to be willing to share the good news *as we go* with everyone!
 - It's the Easter egg hunt analogy all over again
 - In an Easter egg hunt, kids go through the yard looking for eggs as they go *because* they know there are eggs already there
- Imagine if a child sat on the porch scanning the yard trying to guess where the eggs were before he or she even began searching
 - They probably wouldn't find many...if fact, what if that child said I'm afraid of failure, so I can't bear the thought of even looking?
 - How many eggs would they likely find that way?
 - The very reason kids search with such eagerness is because they know persistence at the task will bring a reward
- We should think more like a kid...the sheep are out there and the more places we look, the more we will find
 - And if you're worried about embarrassment when your conversations go poorly, then just remember who is responsible for the outcome
 - Declare the good news in the everyday circumstances of life, and leave the results to the Lord
- So Jesus says the circumstances of the Kingdom program message are "as we go", which leads to the second element of the message: our message's calling
 - Notice Jesus says we are to "preach" our message
 - Most of us don't think of ourselves as preachers because we don't stand behind a pulpit
 - And as a result, we might assume Jesus is only calling pastors or evangelists to deliver the Kingdom program message
 - And if so, then you probably assume your job is to bring unbelievers to church so the pastor can save that person
 - But that's not what Jesus meant when He said preach to His Church
 - The word preach in Greek could also be translated "to proclaim", and it doesn't refer to a certain activity at a church service
 - Preaching is proclaiming truth in direct manner that calls upon the audience to agree and take action
 - It's a style of speaking that can be done before a crowd in a public setting – or to a single person in a private moment
 - And you may not realize it, but you probably preach to people from time to time

- When you advocate for a particular political view around the dinner table, you're preaching
- When you extoll the virtues of a new diet to your best friend, you're preaching
- When you champion a social cause on social media, you're preaching
- In each case, you're stating a truth (as you see it) in a direct fashion hoping to win agreement and call someone into action
- I would add that *good* preaching is accompanied by a degree of passion and personal investment in the outcome
 - You're not dispassionately sharing information in an academic fashion
 - A good preacher cares about his or her topic and they believe that it's in the audience's best interests to agree
- We need to take note that Jesus chose the word "preach" rather than any of the other terms that the modern church has adopted instead
 - Preaching is out of favor these days, and instead our politically-correct culture prefers tolerance over passion and absolutism
 - We're told we shouldn't intrude into others' blissful ignorance
 - The world believes everyone has the right to hold to whatever "truth" they prefer and we must affirm them in their thinking
 - Which has led some in the Church to move away from preaching the truth and toward more subtle ways of sharing the Gospel
 - We try to make the Kingdom message more inclusive, palatable, and non-threatening
 - We soften the call to repentance, trying not to push too hard for agreement, hoping we won't alienate the person in the process
 - It's like we want to sneak up on them with the Gospel
 - But Jesus didn't say *offer* the Gospel or *discuss* the Gospel or *share* the Gospel or *invite* someone to come to church
 - He said *preach* the Gospel because He knew you can't sneak up on someone with the Gospel
 - Sooner or later – if you're going to give them the full truth – that truth will offend the person
 - Sooner or later, a person will realize that you're saying they are not OK with God
 - That they stand condemned before God because of their sin
 - And then you tell them that God has made a way for their sin to be forgiven if they receive the truth
 - There simply is no "polite" way to share that truth...you have to preach that truth – proclaim it – if it's going to be heard
 - Peter said it this way:

2Pet. 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

2Pet. 1:19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

- Peter said his job wasn't to devise a clever tale, to make the story of Jesus fun and whimsical
 - This isn't a sales job...we are making known the power and glory of the coming of Jesus Christ to the saving of souls
 - Peter said we would do well to pay attention to our calling to preach this word as a light in dark places
- So the Kingdom Program message is to be preached...
 - Not rudely, of course, and not without sensitivity, but with passion and an earnest concern for the person
 - Not merely conducted as a casual conversation to pass the time over coffee... but, like Paul, with passion

2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- Proclaim it boldly knowing you are entrusted with a message from God that comes with spiritual power to save souls
- And after you have preached it, call the person to respond affirmatively
 - As salesmen would say, at the end of the pitch, ask for the business
 - If we can be bold in preaching about politics or fad diets, we can certainly be bold in preaching about Jesus
- Thirdly, Jesus gave us the content of the Kingdom Program message: "the Kingdom is at hand"
 - Perhaps you were expecting something more than that? What about repenting or believing in Jesus or eternal life?
 - Well, that's included here too...Jesus is speaking in shorthand knowing His audience
 - Remember, we learned last week that Jesus directed His apostles in v.6 to go to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile later
 - So at this point in the Kingdom Program, the message is specifically targeting the Jew living in first-century Palestine
 - And the Jews of Jesus' day would have fully understood the phrase "the

Kingdom is at hand”

- Every Jew knew this statement meant the Messiah had come to Israel and was ready to set up the promised Kingdom
- So for the apostles, this was a simple way to express the Gospel
 - And of course, Jesus naturally anticipated that a conversation might follow from that point
 - Some Jews ignored the proclamation without even a response...they would be a goat, not a lost sheep
 - Others may have asked questions and discussed the matter further, and in those conversations the fullness of the message would have been shared
- The point is Jesus directed His apostles to issue a clear, unambiguous proclamation that the Messiah had come to save Israel
 - Today, we live in a different time and our audience is very different
 - So naturally our proclamation will be worded differently
 - We won't say the Kingdom of God is “at hand” because it's more accurate to say the Kingdom of God is coming soon
 - And in fact, we might not say anything about the Kingdom at first, since non-Jews are unlikely to know what we're talking about
 - So we word the proclamation in ways that are more familiar to you and to your audience
 - For example, we typically proclaim that Jesus is the Savior Who God sent to die in our place, to take the penalty for our sins
 - And then we might call the person to accept this good news by placing faith in Jesus, and He will welcome you into His Kingdom
 - On the other hand, if you're speaking with an unchurched person, your message might need to start farther back in Scripture in Genesis
 - You might proclaim the reality of sin and the need for atonement, to be forgiven by God before moving to the good news of Jesus
 - Or if you're speaking to a muslim or a Buddhist, you might take an entirely different approach
 - But in all cases, the content of your Kingdom Program message is always the same
 - In whatever words you choose, the point of your message must remain “the kingdom is coming soon...receive your King”
 - Jesus did not give His Church liberty to change the content of His message or substitute a different message
 - The message of the Kingdom program is, once and always, the Gospel of Jesus dying for our sin to give us eternal life in a Kingdom to come
- Just to be absolutely clear, let's understand what the Kingdom program message *isn't*
 - Proclaiming that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life is *not* the Kingdom program message

- Proclaiming that God wants you to have your best life now is *not* the message
- Proclaiming that God wants to heal your body or take away your emotional pain or bring you wealth and happiness are *not* the message
- Proclaiming that God wants you to come to church or to be part of a community or to hear relevant messages about life coaching is *not* the kingdom program message
- And the reason those things are not in the Kingdom program is because they do not save souls and they do not turn believers into disciples
 - Those messages feed our egos, fill our church buildings and obscure the truth of Jesus' words
 - Where the Kingdom program has been diluted and the message has been changed you find unsaved and undisciplined people
- The irony is that when an unbeliever agrees with a vapid, unbiblical proclamation, they are actually receiving their best life now
 - Because when they die, they will realize that the actual Kingdom program message did not promise your best life now
 - It promised you best life in eternity but great sacrifice now
- That's the message of the Kingdom program
 - It's a message that convicts the heart, exposes sin and makes clear we are not ok apart from Christ
 - And that we need His grace and mercy, we need His forgiveness and it's only available through the blood of Jesus
- That message will not affirm people and it may not fill our church building as fast as we desire
 - But that message has something no other message has: the power of God to bring a lost sheep to his or her knees in repentance
 - And to impart spiritual life and an eternity of glory upon a sinner
 - To transform a person into a disciple of Jesus, living with eyes for eternity, destined to reign with the King in a Kingdom to come
 - And to make them a messenger in the Kingdom program, willing to bring a message of hope to another lost sheep
- Friends, that's the message of our Kingdom program
 - We can't reserve it for just a few people...it's for everyone, everyday
 - We can't soften it or talk around it...it's to be preached boldly
 - And we can't water it down or substitute something more palatable in the hope of winning more converts
 - It's the power of God to saving of souls
 - If we swap Jesus' part of this message for one of our own, we may very well win more converts

- But we will be winning people to ourselves and not to Christ
- You can fill buildings with converts to yourself, but you're supposed to bring lost sheep into the Kingdom
- I asked you last week to go out seeking for lost sheep, to see everyone you meet as a potential convert and trust God with the outcome
 - Now I'm asking you to do the same thing again, and this time to remember the circumstances, calling and content of your message
 - Do not be afraid to share your message...remember God saves, you are just the messenger
 - But dare God to show up in your day...see what He's willing to do through you if you just open your mouth as you go
- Secondly, preach this word boldly...don't fear the consequences, just be faithful to the Lord's direction
 - Make an appeal, ask the person to accept what you're saying and encourage a response in the moment
 - Preach to them knowing that a soul is on the line
- Finally, declare the Kingdom of God is at hand...that Jesus is the King, He is coming back, and He has died to cover their sins
 - So when that day comes, they will be able to enter the Kingdom and live eternally in glory
 - Don't change that message, because there is no better message
 - That's our Kingdom program message, and it's our mission...it's why the Church exists at all

- Class is back in session tonight
 - Once again, we return to studying Jesus as He trains His disciples in the ways of the Kingdom program
 - The Kingdom program is the mission Christ gave to every disciple that as we go, we are to seek for lost sheep in the world
 - We proclaim the Gospel message of Christ and His Kingdom
 - And by the preaching of that message, we know the Lord will stir hearts to bring men and women to faith in Jesus
 - In effect, we're recruiting a population of citizens for the Kingdom in anticipation of its arrival
 - This will be the Church's mission until the Lord returns to inaugurate His Kingdom on earth
 - And in Chapter 10 Jesus is training the twelve apostles to carry out that assignment
 - As ambassadors for Christ, they would explore strange, new worlds...seek to bring new life to new civilizations, boldly going where no disciple had gone before
 - We follow in their footsteps, so we too need to learn the lessons Jesus is teaching to these men in this chapter
 - We've reached the third step in my six-part outline of this chapter
 - Part I was the objective, Part II was the message, and tonight we study Part III, the method Jesus gave to these men
 - As we study this method, keep in mind that Jesus does all the hard work of the Kingdom Program, and we're just learning to walk with Him
 - When it comes to bringing new spiritual life into the world, we're like a spiritual midwife
 - It's the Spirit Who brings new spiritual life; we just receive that person
 - We show up at the end of the process to receive a new life and then begin a process of caring for that new believer
- So let's look at the Method, which has three steps, starting in v.8

Matt. 10:8 “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.

- Jesus tells His apostles that as they go their way, they will have power to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons
 - Now last time I checked, these activities are not usually part of an evangelist's job description
 - And that's for good reason...because Jesus is speaking to men who had very unique roles in the early church

- These men were called and commissioned as apostles, and as we discussed in earlier weeks, that means these men had a unique role
- To remind you of what we've discussed in the past, every believer in the body of Christ receives a spiritual gift
 - A spiritual gift is a supernatural equipping made possible by the Spirit of God
 - Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians that the Lord assigns each believer a spiritual gift according to His will
- As we work in our spiritual gift, we bring glory to the Lord
 - Spiritual gifts glorify the Lord but not because the activity itself is miraculous but because they achieve miraculous results
 - Two people can pray and their prayers won't appear to be miraculous, but the person with the spiritual gift of prayer may achieve miraculous results
 - Two people can teach the Bible, but the teacher with the spiritual gift to teach will make far greater impact on the students
 - Example of spiritual gift of evangelism....
- Those miraculous outcomes are not credit to the person; it's evidence of the Lord working through a gift to bring glory to Himself
 - Others who see your gift at work will recognize the Lord was working through you for their benefit
 - We simply showed up...it was the Lord Who did something special through us...*availability, not ability*
 - In that way, the Lord receives the glory through our spiritual gifts
- I went through that background to remind us that the apostles also received a spiritual gift
 - The apostolic spiritual gift was a special and unique gift befitting an apostle's unique role in the church
 - That gift included multiple supernatural abilities, some of which can also be given to other believers individually (like healing)
 - And in v.8 the Lord is referring to supernatural abilities that are part of the apostolic spiritual gift
 - For example, Jesus told the apostles to heal the sick, because the apostolic gift included the ability to impart supernatural healing
 - They also raised the dead, cast out demons and authorized Scripture
 - We even see apostles pronouncing judgment on sinning believers which results in their physical death
 - Those examples show us that the apostolic gift was truly unique and unequalled in the church
- Jesus was referring to those unique abilities in v.8, telling the apostles to go out using the spiritual gift they had received
 - Therefore we need to generalize Jesus' instructions a little for our sake

- To the apostles, Jesus said heal and raise the dead, etc. because their spiritual gift allowed them to do such things
- But for us, we should hear Jesus saying “use *your* spiritual gift”
- Teach, pray, serve, give, help, discern, or do whatever your gift appoints
 - As we work in our gifting, we show the love of Christ to those we meet along the way
 - And through those moments, we draw people’s hearts to God
- Think of it as a supernatural magnet that draws lost sheep
 - As the Lord does a spiritual work through us, He’s calling His lost sheep
 - Jesus described the effect this way

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,
John 10:15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

John 10:16 “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the One drawing men and women to Himself
 - And Jesus assures us that His sheep will hear His voice when He calls
 - But that call comes in a variety of ways, including by our witness, as we minister through our spiritual gift
 - When we minister to someone in our spiritual gift, we’re giving opportunity for a lost sheep to “hear” the voice of their Shepherd
 - The lost sheep will be attracted the work of the Spirit...it will appeal to them, leading them to ask questions, to look deeper
 - In that way it becomes a test to know whether someone may be receptive to the Gospel message
 - Jesus used this method frequently...do you remember the story of the woman at the well in John 4?
 - As Jesus talked to that woman, there came a moment when Jesus used His spiritual insight to test her heart

John 4:15 The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.”

John 4:16 He said to her, “Go, call your husband and come here.”

John 4:17 The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband’;

John 4:18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.”

John 4:19 The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

John 4:20 “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

- Jesus used a spiritual gift to minister to this woman
 - He revealed hidden truth, a gift of discernment or knowledge, pointing out the woman’s ungodly lifestyle
 - That’s something that could not have been known apart from a supernatural insight that comes from God
- Notice in John 4:19 the woman responds immediately saying I perceive you are a prophet
 - Jesus’ spiritual power caught her attention and drew her into a spiritual conversation
 - She then proceeds to ask Jesus about where is the proper place to find God...that’s a lost sheep trying to find her Shepherd
- Jesus had put a test before this woman, to see if she was a goat or a lost sheep
 - If she had been merely a “goat” then His accusation would have offended her, and she would have walked away
 - But because she was a lost sheep, she heard her Master’s voice and she was drawn to Him despite His stern statement
 - The lost sheep of God are instinctively drawn by demonstrations of His love and power
- So we’re supposed to use our spiritual gifts as part of the method of seeking lost sheep
 - Your spiritual gift is your superpower, your way to jumpstart a conversation about Jesus
 - So if you have the gift of service, serve an unbeliever in unexpected ways, and they may be drawn into a conversation
 - Do you have the gift of giving? Give to someone who never imagined they would receive generosity, and watch their heart soften
 - The gift of discernment? Speak wisdom and insight to someone suffering in difficult circumstances and see where that leads
 - The gift of mercy? The gift of healing? The gift of prayer?
 - Show Christ’s love to someone in those ways, and don’t be surprised when they open up in a spiritual conversation
 - If you haven’t been approaching evangelism in that way or if you don’t even know what your spiritual gift is, then you have some homework to do
- That’s step one in our method...as you go, minister to others in your spiritual gift as a means of drawing their attention to God and testing their hearts
 - And that leads us to Jesus’ second instruction in the Kingdom Program method at the end of v.8: freely give what you have freely received

- The apostles were sent out with something precious, something of immeasurable value – the Kingdom message
- They had the words of life, the way to heaven, the explanation for how to be reconciled to God
- That is the most valuable thing you could ever offer to another human being
- Just think...given what you know now about heaven and hell, about salvation and judgment, what would you give to have that knowledge?
 - If you had to buy your salvation from God, what do you suppose the gospel would be worth to you?
 - How much would you be willing to pay to know how to go to Heaven? Wouldn't you give everything? Every penny?
 - What good would your money be anyway if in the end you left it behind to spend eternity in eternal punishment?
- My point is we know our message is priceless, and when we give something of great value to another person, it's human nature to expect something in return
 - Psychologists call this effect reciprocity, and it's a basic human instinct
 - Salesmen are taught how to use this principle to encourage a sale
 - They will give a potential customer a free sample because they know it will trigger reciprocity
- For example, when you go to the supermarket or warehouse club, you see those ladies serving samples of food in the aisles
 - If you take their sample, have you noticed how it makes you feel obligated to buy their product?
 - You feel guilty for saying no to that nice lady who was nice to you first...that's reciprocity at work
- We all experience this sense of obligation when someone is kind to us, and Jesus wants us to be aware of this principle so we don't abuse it
 - Because in the world's way of thinking, when you give someone an incredibly valuable gift, you expect something in return
 - You expect the other person to reciprocate in some way
 - And if they don't at least offer to repay or just thank you, you consider it rude or ungrateful
 - That's how the world works, but that thinking is counter productive to advancing the Kingdom Program
 - Because taking a worldly approach to reciprocity causes people to resist accepting that free gift in the first place
 - Remember my example of the ladies in the supermarket aisle...
 - Have you ever declined a free sample even though you wanted to try it?
 - Why did you stop yourself? It was probably because you knew you would feel obliged to buy something afterward

- So to prevent yourself from spending money on something you didn't need, you didn't engage in that exchange
- You didn't want to incur a debt of kindness because you knew you would feel pressure to make a purchase
- So imagine what would happen if we operated with the expectation that people should give us something every time we shared the Gospel?
 - What if we told people we have a free gift for them but we meant it the way the lady in the supermarket aisle offers
 - If we give people our message expecting them to repay us in some way, then we're abusing the reciprocity effect
 - It's like ministries that tell you their teaching resources are free..."for a donation of any amount"
 - Immediately you realize that free isn't really free...they want to be paid for something they received freely
- If we do that with the Kingdom message, people will decline to listen to our message
 - People are smart...everyone knows how the reciprocity principle works, even if they can't name it
 - So people will instinctively resist a free offer if it comes with a catch
 - Which is why Jesus says what we freely received from Him we should give freely also, with no strings attached, no expectation of reward
 - We all need to understand that...there is no reciprocity with the Gospel
 - Jesus didn't tell us we could have salvation freely but He expected us to pay Him back somehow
 - You can have salvation freely now, but I'm expecting you to give Me some percentage of your income
 - Eternal life is free, but you better show up to church every week...
 - Unfortunately, ignorant or selfish church leaders have tried to make people think the Christian experience works this way
 - They put a guilt trip on you making you think that Jesus is expecting pay back for your salvation
 - That kind of reciprocity robs us of the joy of serving Christ
 - Jesus said His burden is easy, light...it doesn't come with strings attached
 - We received the priceless gift of salvation without any cost...Jesus paid the price to make it available, you paid nothing
 - So how could we possibly put a price tag on others receiving it?
 - That's why VBVM has never charged for its resources or placed any burden, reciprocal or otherwise, on those who use them
 - We received the word of God freely, and we give it back freely
 - So if you're giving money or your service to Christ because you feel some guilt and

obligation, please stop

- If that's why you give your time or treasure, you're serving your own guilty conscience, not Jesus
- He doesn't want guilt offerings from us, or service done out of obligation
- He tells us to give freely out of joy and to serve Him with an eager heart, out of the desire to bless others
- So Step 2 of the method is offering our message without expecting anything in return... which leads to Step 3

Matt. 10:9 “Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, Matt. 10:10 or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

- Jesus say go out in a state of dependence and vulnerability
 - Notice in v.9 Jesus says don't take gold, silver or copper in a money belt, which suggests living day-to-day
 - And in v.10 He adds don't take a bag, extra clothes, extra footwear or extra staff
 - The men could take one coat, one set of sandals, one staff, but not extras
- The point is we must operate from a position of vulnerability and dependence
 - We don't pack a suitcase with extras of everything we might possibly need
 - We don't wait to accumulate a cushy retirement before engaging in the Kingdom program
- That's our human nature...to protect against every possible contingency, to make every preparation before taking a step of faith
 - We tell ourselves we don't want to become a burden on others
 - But the truth is we don't want to lose control
- But as hard as it may be for us to accept, Jesus wants us to work from a state of dependence: dependence upon the Spirit and dependence on others
 - First, we need to get used to the fact that we are dependent upon the Spirit in this work
 - Remember our objective: finding lost sheep
 - That's an objective that depends entirely on the work of the Spirit...God has to produce the sheep, we can't
 - And He has to direct us to them, because He knows where they are and we don't
 - So if we aren't comfortable leaning on the Spirit, we're just going to stumble around in the darkness getting nowhere with our mission
 - The Spirit doesn't give us the whole plan in advance, so we have to live in the moment, day-to-day as we seek lost sheep

- I think one of the reasons modern Christians experience so few miracles in our everyday life is because we've made self-reliance our highest goal
- God has to strip away all those sources of support and move us out of our comfort zone so He can guide us into unexpected moments
- We received a letter from a member of our congregation:

I thought God had set me aside because I have been struggling through a really long season. Yesterday, there was a story about a woman who was helping the homeless during this recent winter snap by putting them in a hotel. My immediate thought was "Great, another person I am NOT like." Then I said to God, "If you put a person who needs help in my path tonight, I will help them." I was coming out of a restaurant and a young man asked if I could spare 20 dollars for a hotel. I said, "I'll do you one better, I'll pay for your hotel outright." "Get in and I'll drive you back to your hotel."

Then I prayed for safety. While driving, I was reminded of Pastor Steve saying that preaching the gospel was like being on an easter egg hunt. All the work was done for us, we just needed to keep looking for the "egg."

So I preached the. most. awkward. gospel presentation ever. I even started with "This is gonna be awkward" and launched into my practiced 3-minute testimony. I tried to be as theologically correct about salvation as I knew how to be. Not sure if he was an egg. But thanks to the teaching, the pressure was off and the gospel was preached.

Signed "a donkey" P.S. I hope I didn't lose heavenly rewards by publicly stating my good deed.

- When it comes to leading us to lost sheep, that's how the Spirit works
 - He uses dependence to bring people into relationships...people we would have otherwise passed by unnoticed
 - How many times have we read stories of people saved by a "chance" encounter with another person
 - A car accident, getting locked out of a house, returning a lost wallet, a package delivered to the wrong house
 - God uses everyday circumstances like that to bring strangers together
 - And in those moments, the Kingdom message can be shared and a sheep can be found
 - But if we're wrapped up tight, in our world of self-reliance with every contingency covered, we will overlook those moments

- Ironically, you can go into the mission field too prepared, and as a result, unable to hear the Spirit when He directs you
 - So when find yourself in unexpected situations, like a flat tire on the side of the road, expect God to use that moment in miraculous ways
 - Don't get mad or worried...get excited because the Spirit may be about to put a lost sheep in your path
 - And if you're thinking that way, seeing dependence as opportunity not burden, then you're living the Kingdom method
- But there's a second reason to go out in a dependent mindset...remember that reciprocity effect I explained earlier?
 - Here's where you can put it to work for the Kingdom in the right way
 - When you accept a free gift from someone, they will expect you to offer to reciprocate
 - They gave your car battery a jump start, they put gas in your tank, or bought your meal...
 - So now you owe them a debt of kindness
 - And that's when you have the chance to give them the greatest gift they could ever receive
 - As you thank them for their kindness, you say "I'd like to give you something out of gratitude, something very valuable..."
 - "It's the good news of how you may enter Heaven, to know that God has forgiven you so He will welcome you into His presence when you die."
 - Because of reciprocity, the person will listen when they might not have done so under other circumstances
 - They will feel obligated to allow you to offer them something
 - That's how Jesus wants to use your dependence on others
 - And it's what Jesus means at the end of v.10 when He says a worker is worthy of His support
 - The Lord will reward your willingness to be dependent by bringing people to you who will help you
 - And then when someone gives you support, take an opportunity in that moment to reciprocate by giving them the Gospel
- Finally, step four:

Matt. 10:11 "And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city.

- This fourth step of the method bridges us into the next section I call the Result
 - So we will only look at it briefly today...we'll look at it in greater detail next week

- Jesus says that as you go out seeking the lost, inquire who is worthy
- The word translated inquire carries more intensity in the Greek
- It's the same Greek word that Herod used when he told the magi to search for the Child born under the star
- It means to investigate, to carefully scrutinize
 - So Jesus is asking us to carefully investigate a town or village or community before beginning our work
 - We are to choose our stopping place with some forethought, to consider our options and choose with some consideration
 - So do we strike up conversations at the local coffee house? A street corner? At our place of business? To our next-door neighbor?
- Jesus' point is that preparation is part of the method too
 - He's balancing His earlier advice that we go about our work in a state of dependence following the Spirit
 - Sometimes we hear that direction and we think we just walk out our door and see what happens
- Operating in ignorance and without proper preparation isn't the same thing as being dependent; it's arrogance and foolishness
 - We must balance dependence with intellectual preparation by doing our homework and being wise as serpents, innocent as doves
 - So as you enter into a situation to find lost sheep, don't walk in blindly; without an understanding of the situation on the ground
- We have a brain for a reason, so Jesus asks us to combine spiritual dependence upon the Spirit and our material dependence upon strangers with a careful process of thoughtful preparation
 - That preparation will help us avoid dangers or waste time in places that aren't sensible or helpful to our mission
 - A single woman seeking for lost sheep in dark alleys at night is not sensible
 - A group of teenagers traveling through a war zone in Central America is not sensible
 - The Lord doesn't give us bonus points for how much danger we expose ourselves to in the course of our work
 - Perhaps a good example from recent news would be the man who was killed by natives on the Island of North Sentinel
 - Based on the reports of that incident, he seems to have ignored obvious signs that there was no one worthy to receive him
 - He tried to get on the island multiple times
 - In earlier efforts he had been hit by arrows and was forced to swim back to his ship when they burned his canoe
 - He persisted, and was finally killed on his third attempt to land

- We don't know what the Spirit was telling him, but this was not a case of persecution or martyrdom
 - The trouble didn't come to that man because of his faith...he went looking for the trouble and he found it
 - Paul didn't work that way, and Jesus isn't asking us to operate that way
 - On the contrary, He says carefully investigate the best place to go as you begin your work
- There's more we will say on this third step, because it leads us into our next section on "the results", which we study next week
 - For now, it's time for me to issue my weekly challenge
 - Each week in this chapter, we've learned a little more of how to serve Christ in the Kingdom Program
 - We've learned our objective was to find lost sheep, so I challenged you to see the world with spiritual eyes
 - Knowing that everywhere you looked, you might be seeing a lost sheep waiting to be found
 - And then last week we learned the circumstances, calling and content of our Kingdom Message
 - And then I challenged you to obey Christ so as you go you preach the truth to someone
 - And we've already heard a testimony of how someone carried out that challenge and was blessed by it
 - So now, here's your challenge this week... practice getting comfortable with vulnerability, with being dependent on the Spirit
 - Look for those moments that God creates for you, put your spiritual gift to work and freely give what you have been given
 - And let's see if we can get a few more testimonies this week

- We're studying the Kingdom Program as Jesus taught it to His apostles in Matthew 10
 - Jesus is on the cusp of being rejected by the nation of Israel
 - So in anticipation of that rejection, Jesus has begun preparing His apostles to take the message of the Kingdom to the world
 - I call this the Kingdom Program and it's the mission of the Church
 - Remember, the concept of the Kingdom in the Bible develops through four stages
 - The Kingdom began as a Promise God made to Abraham and his descendants
 - Then when Jesus came, the Kingdom became a Proposal, and the Lord declared the Kingdom was at hand to Israel
 - But Jesus was rejected by Israel, so the Kingdom transitioned into a Program of the Church recruiting Kingdom citizens
 - Finally, in a day to come the Kingdom will become a Place on the earth at Jesus' Second Coming
 - Promise → Proposal → Program → Place
 - So in Chapter 10 of Matthew Jesus initiates the formal preparation of His disciples to oversee the beginning of the Kingdom program
 - But the Kingdom program will operate contrary to human thinking...God's ways are not man's ways
 - The program of recruiting citizens for the Kingdom won't be a marketing campaign or a sales effort
 - We don't collect followers for Jesus through clever arguments or by force
 - People won't be awarded Kingdom citizenship by birthright, nor can they earn them by good behavior
 - The recruiting method Jesus gave His disciples worked according to different rules, and relied on supernatural power
- My outline for our study of Matthew 10 is in your bulletin, and today we move into Part 4; the Result
 - Last week we looked at the Method, and in a sense you can say that this entire chapter is a method of sorts
 - But specifically, in vs.8-11 Jesus gave us four steps that should guide our approach to recruiting, to evangelism
 - First, He told us to use our spiritual gift to minister to those we seek to reach
 - Our spiritual gift is a superpower that has potential to yield supernatural results as the Lord appoints
 - The Lord will work through our gift to open doors and open hearts to make opportunities for Gospel conversations
 - Secondly, Jesus commanded us to give this message freely, because we don't want to erect unnecessary barriers to the Gospel
 - The Lord gave us His Kingdom freely

- So what God gave us freely, we share freely with no demands or expectations on those we serve
- Jesus, and His word and His Kingdom are not ours to sell
- So any suggestion that people owe us something in return for the Gospel will inhibit them from responding
- Thirdly, we go about in a posture of dependence and vulnerability, which will lead to opportunities to engage with others
 - As we lean on others to meet our needs, we'll have opportunity to present the Kingdom message
 - And when we receive a gift of kindness, reciprocation kicks in, leading the other person to anticipate something in return
 - And we take advantage of that opening to offer them the Gospel
- Finally, step four was do our homework before entering a situation
 - I want to pick back up with that thought as move forward into the Results this evening

Matt. 10:11 “And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city.

Matt. 10:12 “As you enter the house, give it your greeting.

Matt. 10:13 “If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace.

Matt. 10:14 “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.

Matt. 10:15 “Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

- Once again, in v.11 Lord gave His apostles step four in the method, which is do their homework
 - Jesus said “inquire who is worthy” meaning understand where opportunity is greatest
 - Combine a reliance on others’ kindness with careful forethought on how to make the most of every encounter
 - Ask questions of local expert, connect with other ministries on the ground, partner with existing mission organizations
 - Watch YouTube videos, check out social media, etc.
 - The point is, take advantage of every resource the Lord places in your path to understand your opportunities
 - But as you do, here’s the thing to remember...the point of this research is to detect where the Spirit is already at work
 - The best evangelists become experts at following the Spirit, because they know

He does the real work

- So all their research of who is worthy is directed at learning where the Spirit is already at work opening doors
- They're not trying to decide whose door to knock down
- When you understand this concept, it completely changes your approach to the Kingdom Program, both in how you prepare *and* how you measure results
 - It's the difference between searching for buried treasure using a shovel vs. a metal detector
 - Our human way of thinking of evangelism can sometimes feel like searching for underground treasure with a shovel
 - We depend upon on our strength and persistence thinking if we dig long enough and in enough places, we'll find some gold
 - In reality, that method just wastes a lot of lost time and effort and accomplishes little more than spreading a bunch of dirt around
 - Eventually, we'll get tired and frustrated of trying
 - And all we learn is a bunch of places where the treasure isn't
 - But the method Jesus gave us is so much easier, because His burden is light
 - He asks us to work with a metal detector before we pull out the shovel
 - We don't waste effort digging in fruitless places...we only invest time in places worth digging
 - So we do our homework expecting the Spirit to lead us in our search
 - The Spirit already knows where the sheep are, so we don't need to work in random fashion
 - We inquire (of the Spirit) who is worthy, and when He shows us, we focus our efforts there
 - It's like following the signals of a metal detector, letting the Spirit lead us to buried treasure
- Now you see how Jesus' Kingdom Program *method* operates differently from human approaches, and likewise, Jesus says consider your results differently
 - The first step of assessing results comes in v.12, where Jesus says as you enter a house, begin by giving it your greeting
 - What's our greeting?
 - By the context, our greeting is the message Jesus defined earlier in v.7, the message of the Kingdom Program
 - So Jesus is saying as you begin your encounter, give your Kingdom Program greeting right away
 - As we learned back in part 2, the specific words we use in our presentation will vary to fit our culture and circumstances
 - To Jews of first-century Palestine, Jesus declared the Kingdom of God was at

hand, but we will state it differently

- Regardless of the words we use, the content of our message will remain the same: it's always Christ and Him crucified
- We preach that entry into the Kingdom has been made possible by the sacrificial death of the King
- Presenting that greeting is your first step in assessing our results
 - Does that statement sound odd to you? Does that seem too soon for us to begin evaluating results?
 - Well, here's another chance for us to rethink our approach to the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus is telling us to begin assessing our results early in the process, not at the end
- Perhaps when you've delivered the Gospel message in the past, you were focused on getting to the end of your presentation?
 - You launched in, full speed ahead, and plowed along hoping to get to the end uninterrupted and unchallenged?
 - If that's how you worked, you weren't following the Kingdom Program method
- That's racing out ahead of the Spirit, that's trying to work the process in your own power
 - What Jesus is saying is, don't get ahead of the Spirit
 - Think one step at a time, don't outrun your headlights
 - Instead, send up a trial balloon to see whether the Spirit is at work in that moment
- Think back to my metal detector analogy
 - Hovering over a spot of earth with a metal detector does not produce gold
 - It's merely a way of testing whether that spot is likely to yield the gold should you make the effort to dig
 - We wave it back and forth for a moment to get a reading
 - If we don't get a response, we just move along
 - But if we get a positive reading, we look closer, and if we get consistent positive responses, we begin digging
 - So you have to pay careful attention to the signals coming from your spiritual metal detector to know whether digging is warranted
 - Give someone your spiritual greeting but before you go too far, pause to take a reading
 - See whether that person is willing to go deeper
 - Dumping your entire presentation on someone before understanding whether their heart is ready is like working with only a shovel
 - It's blindly digging holes hoping to find a sheep buried at the bottom

- More importantly, it's working without the Spirit's leading
 - When the Spirit points us in a certain direction, we can't turn to Him and say, "Thanks, I got it from here..."
 - We need to rely on Him every step of the way
- Now practically speaking, these spiritual metal detector moments play out in endless ways but always with fascinating results
 - Ask simple questions like, "Has God been doing anything in your life lately? Have you been reading the Bible? Do you have questions about Jesus?"
 - One friend strikes up conversations with taxis/Uber drivers by asking if he enjoys conversations about spiritual things?
 - Or when someone indicates they're going through difficulties ask if they want prayer or maybe a word of advice from Scripture
 - Personal examples...telling a waitress we pray to thank Jesus before the meal, and asking if we could pray for her in some way
- On the other hand, there are wrong ways to approach the greeting moment which can lead us to misleading results
 - You get false positives, like a metal detector going off when nothing is truly there
 - For example, asking if someone is interested in Christianity or if they want to be a Christian may get you a false positive
 - Because those terms comes with a lot of baggage
 - Many people think they are Christian simply because they grew up in "Christian" homes
 - Or because they went to church or were born in the Southern US
 - Likewise, we can't measure a person's interest in Jesus by asking if they want to go to church or read a book or listen to a podcast
 - The Kingdom Program isn't about leading people to church or a book or website
 - Because even if they say yes to those offers, we still won't know whether they have responded to Jesus Himself
 - Meanwhile, we've missed the chance to put the truth of salvation before them for their immediate consideration
 - In a sense, we're passing the buck to someone else
 - The Kingdom Program is about about leading people to a Person, to Jesus Christ
 - Of course, it's ok to invite someone to church or to suggest a good book
 - Or even send them to a website with good Bible teaching like ours...
 - But both those offers aren't substitutes for the Gospel itself
- Remember Paul's example in Athens:

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being

provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

Acts 17:17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

Acts 17:18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,” — because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 17:19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?”

Acts 17:20 “For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.”

- In v.16, Paul was doing his homework in Athens when he strikes up a conversation with some locals in the market
 - Notice the men remarked that Paul was discussing strange deities because he was preaching about Jesus and the resurrection
 - Paul was preaching the Kingdom message looking for a response
 - And it triggered the men’s interest and resulted in an invitation for Paul to tell them more...that’s a metal detector going off
 - So Paul followed up with a deeper presentation of Christ
- If you’ve read how that story ends in Acts 17, you know most of that crowd eventually loses interest in Paul’s message but a few believed
 - Paul was able to find a few lost sheep by simply following the leading of the Spirit
 - But like Paul, our message won’t appeal to everyone
 - Sometimes our message is met by a negative response – that’s going to happen, and it’s ok
- So Jesus says give a house your greeting, and then as you do, begin measuring your results
 - And if there is a positive response to your message, Jesus says in v.13 give that house or person a blessing of peace
 - In the original Greek, the text translated as “give your blessing” is just the word *erchomai*, which is the Greek verb to come or go
 - So perhaps a better translation would be “if the house is worthy, peace comes”
 - In other words, if the person gives a positive response to your spiritual greeting, peace has come to that person
 - In Hebrew the word for peace is *shalom*, but that word also carries other subtle meanings
 - Shalom means completeness, perfection in welfare and health and safety, wholeness

- Jesus uses the word peace to say that spiritual wholeness, spiritual health has come
- A broken heart has been bound, a new spiritual birth has taken place, a child of God has been born again
- That's a beautiful and succinct way to understand the moment of salvation –
 - When a person is born again through an encounter with the power of God in the message of salvation, they receive *shalom*
 - Paul puts it this way

Rom. 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

- In fact, Paul described Jesus' own preaching of the Kingdom as a message of peace

Eph. 2:17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

Eph. 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

- When a person accepts the Kingdom message, our search is over...it's just that simple
 - Then a new process begins, a process of discipleship
 - Matthew doesn't mention that step specifically, but Luke's account gives us that additional piece

Luke 9:4 “Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city.

- Luke says that the house (or person) that receives our greeting will be our focus for a time, we stay there until we move on
- We make that new sheep our primary concern until such time that we feel led by the Spirit to move on to the next place
- So imagine you're out on a street corner or going door to door in your neighborhood giving your “greeting”
 - Then someone expresses interest, your metal detector goes off
 - So you dig deeper, explaining how to receive Christ as Savior
 - And the person follows suit and confesses Christ
- What happens next? Jesus says that person is now your focus
 - In effect, the Lord has just given you the privilege to be the first person to disciple that new believer
 - Now perhaps you're not equipped to work with this person very well...

- Perhaps you meet them on an airplane and you're landing in 30 minutes
- In those cases, you work to find them a local church community, or refer them to an organization or friend or pastor you know in the area
 - At the very least, point them in the direction of good Bible teaching resources; a way for them to pursue Christ
 - In the best cases, you take them under your wing for a time and help them begin an obedient walk with Jesus
- Whatever you do, don't say goodbye and move on...because the Kingdom Program isn't about simply putting notches in our belt
 - It's about finding – and caring for – lost sheep
 - So we must take a long term perspective...a view that seeks to serve Christ in a process of preparing disciples
- For the same reason, if the results go nowhere we need to move on
 - In v.13 Jesus says if the person is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace
 - Here again I think this English translation isn't as helpful
 - A more literal way to render v.13 would be “let your peace return to you”
 - In Luke 10, Jesus is quoted speaking it this way:

Luke 10:6 “If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you.

- The idea here is that in the face of a rejection, our offer of peace continues on with us elsewhere
 - Jesus is preparing us for the reality that at times – in fact many times – our message of peace will be rejected
 - The idea that someone would refuse an offer of peace with God seems almost unimaginable to us, but the human heart is hard
- And if we worry too much about failure, we might be tempted to come up with alternative methods – to consider alternatives
 - We might begin to think that there's something wrong with our message or a method that could be improved
 - That if we made “improvements” in what Jesus told us to do, if we innovate, we might get more yes's and fewer no's
- While that thinking might seem sensible and even well-intentioned, it's both wrong and dangerous
 - Jesus didn't ask us to innovate on His methods, to improve on the message or to make the Gospel more palatable
 - As I've mentioned in past weeks, we need to remain absolutely clear that our objective is finding lost sheep – not turning goats into sheep

- Our message must always be the Gospel and not some other, more palatable and easier-to-accept worldly message
- And our method is preaching about Jesus, not trying to soft-sell religion or to sneak up on someone with the Gospel
- Then notice in vs.14-15 Jesus also makes clear we aren't to dwell on the rejections so they don't become motivation to not do these things
 - If someone will not receive us or heed our words, we shake the dust off our feet and move on
 - Receiving us refers to how they respond to us as we offer someone our spiritual greeting seeking an audience
 - And heeding our words refers to their response to the Gospel message itself
- Jesus says regardless of whether they reject us or the Gospel itself, our response is the same: shake the dust off
 - In that day, travel was mostly by foot with sandals or leather boots
 - And roads were either hard packed soil, brick or stone, and the ground was always dusty
 - So travelers' feet became caked in dirt
 - When travelers sought shelter in a home, it was customary for the host to offer to wash the person's feet as a form of hospitality
 - Hospitality of this sort was very important in Eastern culture, and still is today
 - So if a traveler had to shake dust off his feet as he left a town, it meant he didn't receive a good reception
 - And that was a severe indictment against the town and a sign of shame
 - In fact, Jesus says those who heard and rejected the Kingdom message faced harsher judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah
 - Jesus is speaking about the unique consequences for the generation of Israel who rejected Messiah when He came
 - We'll take a close look at that consequence when we get to Chapter 12
 - The point is that even when your message is not received, you have still produced a testimony to the glory of God
 - You came to someone bringing a message of grace and mercy and hoping to produce a testimony of their faith and salvation
 - But instead, the Lord chose to use you to produce a testimony of judgment
 - You shake the dust off your feet in the sense that you acknowledge their rejection is on their own head, not yours
 - And that's a part of the Kingdom Program...God may use us as a witness so someone may come to know the truth
 - Or He may use us as a witness against someone
 - Either way, it's in God's hands...we're simply called to be obedient to deliver

the message

- And obvious as it is to say, the Kingdom Program will not result in the salvation of everyone who hears our message
- Use that truth to produce even greater urgency to reach the next town
- Don't continue digging after the Spirit says you won't find gold
- That's why Jesus says when someone rejects the message, our peace returns to us
 - He's reminding us that the Spirit wasn't working in that moment through our message to bring faith to that heart
 - And if the Spirit isn't working, we can't work without Him
 - So it's as if our message of peace went out and bounced off their hard heart, and in that sense it returns to you
 - Which means you still have that message available to share with others
 - One person's rejection doesn't mean the message was wrong or that our method was wrong
 - It means we need to keep looking...we haven't found our lost sheep yet
 - Do you remember in Luke 14 the parable about the king who holds a banquet and invites guests to attend?
 - The invitation goes out, but the invited guests refuse to accept the offer
 - The king doesn't say, "Well I guess my invitation was worded wrong. I need to change my approach, make the menu more appealing,...etc."
 - No, the king in that parable tells his servants to look elsewhere, talk to more people
 - Because the king knew his offer was good and the opportunity would appeal to someone sooner or later
 - And sure enough, the servants filled that banquet table with people all around
 - Of course, in that parable, Jesus is the King, and we are both the invited guests who received the offer...
 - And we are His servants seeking to fill the seat next to us
- Now it's time for another challenge...
 - In weeks past, I've asked you to go out from this building with a willingness to put to work what you've learned
 - In Week 1, it was to look at the world with spiritual eyes knowing that lost sheep are all around us
 - After that, I asked you to prepare your message and to apply the method Jesus taught us
 - And in those weeks, I've been hearing great testimonies
 - We had a group of ladies organize to go out on Super Bowl Sunday
 - They went to the Riverwalk with Gospel tracts and engaged in conversations about Jesus

- Last week I read you the letter from the lady who listens online who heard my challenge to reach out in the way Jesus taught
 - So she prayed for an opportunity to help someone in need
 - And the Lord put a person in her path literally minutes later
 - So then she was faithful to preach the Gospel to that person, something she hadn't done before
- This week the ministry received another letter from a listener in Indiana who also decided he wanted to be more receptive to the Spirit's leading
 - He told a story of helping a woman who was walking at night on the side of the road through a snow storm
 - He took her to her destination and along the way he offered her a spiritual greeting, praying for her and telling her about VBVM
 - Turns out the woman was a former student of the man's wife, who taught her in junior high school years earlier
- I also heard from a man who took initiative to talk to an Amish man about Jesus and VBVM
 - After months, he ran into the Amish man again and this what he heard

[The Amish man] came up to me and couldn't stop talking about what he was learning in the Genesis series and he really liked the way VBVM taught. He told me he was texting and telling all his friends about the website. I told him if you like Pastor Armstrong, then his Sovereignty of God Lesson 6 message will change your life. The next night he couldn't stop talking about how he never knew God could be like that. Yep, I told him the last ten minutes of that teaching CHANGED MY LIFE. So it seems God's word and Verse by Verse Ministry are going into the Amish community. God is sovereign.

- Indeed, God is sovereign...and all those people had to do to experience those miracles was set their minds to following the Spirit
 - That's all that stands between you and a miracle in your week ahead
 - Who will you give your greeting? Where is the Spirit leading you? What could happen?
 - I can't wait to hear next week

- Having spent several weeks studying the Kingdom program, we've got a pretty good idea now of how Jesus wants us to work in His absence
 - We understand our objective, we're clear on the message and we've got the method Jesus gave His disciples
 - Last week we learned a simple way to assess our results
 - Jesus said inquire who is worthy, but Jesus didn't mean who is worthy to *receive* the Gospel
 - Because no one is worthy to receive the Gospel...that's why it comes by grace alone
 - Jesus meant see who is worthy to receive your time and attention...who the Spirit is working in around you
 - When you find that person, you make an initial assessment by offering them your spiritual greeting
 - And if the person's response is encouraging, pursue them further hoping to bring them to the truth
 - And if they agree, help them begin their walk with Christ
 - Now after last week's sermon, someone asked me how much persuasion is appropriate in bringing someone to faith in Jesus?
 - Since we follow the Spirit as He leads us to opportunities, is it wrong to then press someone into believing?
 - The answer is, there is a place for persuasion but, like everything else in the Kingdom Program, it requires following the Spirit
- Think back to my metal detector vs. shovel analogy I gave you last week
 - In my analogy I compared the Spirit leading us to lost sheep, to the signals coming from a metal detector as you sweep the ground
 - We look for signals that the Spirit is preparing a heart before we invest significant effort in our work
 - Those "signals" generally take the form of a receptiveness to our spiritual conversation and a willingness to engage with us
 - When we detect such an opportunity we pick up our shovel, so to speak, and start digging
 - It's at that point, you are free to persuade, to push, to answer objections, to make your best case for Christ
 - But even then, you continue watching for signals from the Spirit
 - It's as if you have a shovel in one hand and a metal detector in the other
 - As long as you continue getting positive responses, keep digging
 - If the signals ever go cold – if the person stops listening or starts arguing or just walks away – then it's time to move on
- Here's how Paul combined personal effort with dependence on the Spirit:

2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- First, Paul said he served as an ambassador for Christ, as though God were making the appeal through him
 - Paul knew he wasn't in control of this process...Christ determines the results and Paul was Christ's ambassador
 - Nevertheless, when Paul found a receptive audience, as he did in Corinth, he picked up a shovel and dug with all his might
- Paul says, I beg you to be reconciled to Christ
 - The Greek word translated beg could be also be translated implored, pleaded...and it can even mean prayed
 - Paul didn't just deliver the Gospel message, casually waiting to see what happened
 - He did everything in his power to pull his audience across the finish line of faith
- That's our model for seeking results in the Kingdom program
 - Remain sensitive to the Spirit's leading, recognizing the Lord is the one Who determines our results
 - But we give Christ our best efforts in that work
- That brings us to our next major point, one I've titled "Our Mindset" and it's found in v.16

Matt. 10:16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

- I'm calling this section "Our Mindset" but we could also label it "Our Enemy"
 - Because this step of the Kingdom program involves a certain understanding that our work will be opposed by a powerful adversary
 - It's a mindset that recognizes our opposition are *not* those we're trying to reach with the Gospel...
 - Nor are our enemies those who hate us or hate Jesus or hate Christianity
 - In fact, we don't fight *against* any human being...because we are fighting *for* everyone to know Jesus
 - No...as Paul explained, our enemy is something altogether different

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- Paul says our struggle isn't against flesh and blood, which refers to all physical creatures, whether man or beast

- Our enemy is not physical; he is a dark, spiritual ruler, Paul says
- Of course we know Paul is referring to Satan and to the demons who follow after him and do his bidding
- Satan wants to stop the progress of the Kingdom program by any means necessary, because the Kingdom program undermines his goal
 - Satan's goal has always been to be a god, so he opposes anyone or anything that glorifies the true Living God
 - Of course, nothing brings God more glory than men and women praising Him for His plan of redemption through Jesus Christ
 - Therefore, when we win new citizens to the Kingdom – or even just preach the Gospel – it will incite the enemy against us
- Jesus wants us to be spiritually, mentally and emotionally prepared for that opposition so that we will respond to it in the right way
 - Jesus gives us that proper mindset in v.16, and our study of this verse will be similar to our study of v.7 a few weeks ago, coming in three parts
 - Part 1 is the first half of the verse, where Jesus says He sends His disciples out as sheep in the midst of wolves
 - Once again, Jesus draws upon a metaphor of shepherding
 - And of all the threats a shepherd faced in his work of caring for the flock, probably the greatest threat was attack by predators like wolves
 - Wolves attack quickly, silently, viciously, and they can bring down a sheep in a moment
 - As one sheep is attacked, the rest of the flock is scattered by the commotion making life very hard for the shepherd
 - And to make matters worse, typically a shepherd would be held financially liable for any sheep lost to predators
 - So when Jesus spoke these words, the disciples immediately recognized what He was saying...they faced real danger in the Kingdom Program
 - They had a fierce and determined enemy who would prey on them
 - Moreover, they were like sheep...defenseless and comparably weak, so they needed to depend on the Lord for protection
 - Nevertheless, in the course of time, they should expect to suffer losses
 - That's how Jesus describes the way it's going to be in the Kingdom program...like sheep surrounded by wolves ready to attack
 - If we're going to remain diligent and effective in our work, we must first recognize there will be opposition
 - We need to understand that we operate behind enemy lines...we are playing on the enemy's field
 - We can't be naive about our enemy nor cavalier about the risks
 - So Jesus puts us on notice informing us we will face opposition, so that when it

comes we won't be surprised or complain or give up

- Nor does He want us to act foolishly, stumbling into danger without considering the cost
- While we won't find Satan waiting behind every corner, we will certainly experience his displeasure from time to time
- Now before we look at the mindset we need to face that foe, I need to address two misconceptions that often arise out of the first part of v.16
 - First, some assume that Jesus willingly sends His disciples out among wolves because our faith in Him has rendered us untouchable by Satan
 - Some will tell you that your faith in Jesus has given you power and authority and dominion over Satan, etc.
 - You may hear Christians talking about binding Satan or rebuking Satan in the name of Jesus
 - Some go so far as to assume we are conquerors of Satan, as if the sheep are more powerful than the wolves
 - This kind of thinking is a mixture of ignorance and arrogance, and it plays right into the enemy's hands
 - Obviously, Jesus didn't say we are sheep among wolves to embolden us or to reassure us that we can't be hurt
 - More importantly, the Bible clearly teaches that believers are not more powerful than Satan
 - In fact, the Bible makes clear that no created thing is as powerful as Satan

Jude 8 Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.

Jude 9 But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Jude 10 But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

- In Jude's day, false teachers downplayed the power of Satan and his forces; mocking him and dismissing him
 - Jude says such men were guilty of reviling angelic majesties
 - Jude is referring to Satan and his demonic forces
 - Satan is the source of all evil, but he is still an angel of great power, according to the Bible
 - And therefore, his angelic majesty demands respect, at least in the sense that we shouldn't underestimate his power

- In fact, Jude says Satan is so powerful that not even the great and powerful archangel, Michael, dared to oppose him directly
 - During a dispute over Moses' body, Michael refused to speak a word against Satan but left it to God to rebuke Satan
 - God made Satan so powerful that nothing else in the Creation has the power to oppose Satan
 - Only the One Who created Satan is stronger
 - So don't be fooled into thinking your faith in Jesus suddenly gave you personal power over Satan
- The second misconception floating around in the church says God will always defend us from Satan's attacks, so we need not worry about our enemy
 - While that sounds appealing, it's also wrong – at least in the sense that God doesn't *always* defend us nor can we be sure God will defend us in the way we desire
 - On the contrary, Scripture says Satan will have opportunities to oppose us, to attack us, and even to defeat us on earth at times
 - And again, the Bible is filled with examples of this truth, but certainly the most classic example is that of Job
 - Most of us have heard at least a little of Job's story...he's the guy that suffered through a series of terrible attacks brought by Satan
 - The Bible describes Job as a righteous man, a man of great wealth with a large home, many children and a successful business
 - Then in one day, Satan attacked Job and took everything
 - Satan killed all of Job's children, stole all his livestock and killed all his servants, ruining his livelihood and destroying his house
 - And if that weren't enough, Satan inflicted Job with painful sores over his entire body leading Job to curse the day he was born
 - Job is the classic example of the Lord permitting the enemy to attack us despite our faithfulness...in fact, *because* of our faithfulness
 - But what many Christians overlook in that story is how Job came to Satan's attention in the first place

Job 1:8 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

- The Lord was the One Who brought Job to Satan's attention, which then led to Satan's attacks
- What we're learning is that not only does the Lord *permit* the enemy's attack's from time to time, the Lord *causes* those attacks

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.

- Therefore, we can't assume God will always protect us from the wolves...on the contrary we should expect attack from time to time
 - The Lord uses those trials for our spiritual good as a test of faith
 - And the Bible says by our response to those trials, we may glorify the Lord and He may bless our obedience

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James tells us to consider it all joy when trials come
- Notice he doesn't say *feel* joy, because you won't feel joy in the midst of a trial...Job certainly didn't
- James meant count your circumstances as joy because in a day to come, the result of your endurance will be great joy
- This is a classic "eyes for eternity" passage in the Bible, because you can only understand what James is teaching by thinking in eternal terms
 - James says as we endure trials, we will receive a result that leaves us perfect and lacking in nothing
 - In earthly terms this statement makes absolutely no sense, but in eternal terms it makes total sense
- James is saying that when we endure trials in faith, we give opportunity to be sanctified or perfected in our spiritual maturity
 - And as a result of our endurance and the maturity it produces, we will not lack for eternal rewards in the Kingdom
 - So as you face trials, count it as joy because the Lord has granted you a tremendous opportunity for gain in the Kingdom
 - That's a gain you can only obtain through enduring trials
- But if we are to receive those benefits, we must be prepared to endure the trials with godliness just as Job endured his trial in obedience
 - Enduring well depends in part on proper mental preparation, including having an awareness and appreciation for our enemy

- Jesus says you will be surrounded by Satan and his demons, so be prepared
 - Don't let the enemy discourage you, don't play into the enemy's hand, and don't give up at the first sign of trouble...
- Think of Jesus' warning like the way a dentist or doctor warns you before you get a shot by saying "this might sting a little"
 - Their warning gives you opportunity to prepare mentally for what's coming so when you feel the pain, you can handle it well
 - That's what Jesus is saying in v.16...
 - He started with the word "Behold" meaning pay attention, take note...you *will* face opposition
 - Be prepared to deal with it
- Which bring us to Part 2 of the verse...how do we prepare to deal with an enemy who is more powerful than any other creature?
 - Jesus says be as shrewd as a serpent
 - The Greek word translated as serpent is *ophis*, and it's the common Greek word for snake
 - In fact, we could have translated this verse to say "be as shrewd as a snake" and in fact the NIV chose that translation
 - But most English translations render the word as serpent, not snake, because the translators recognized Jesus was alluding to something
 - Jesus wasn't complimenting the intelligence of snakes...snakes have far less intelligence than many other animals, to say nothing of humans
 - In fact, snakes are probably second only to poodles for dumbest creature
 - Jesus wasn't talking about literal snakes...He was alluding to the wisest of all creatures, who famously indwelt a snake once

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

- Satan indwelt a snake in the Garden of Eden to deceive Woman into eating the forbidden fruit
- The serpent in the Garden was the craftiest beast of the field in the sense that Satan was in the snake
- And the Bible says Satan is the most intelligent being God ever created (Ezekiel 28)
- So Jesus is telling His disciples we should emulate Satan's shrewdness
 - Shrewd means wise, discerning, being thoughtful and informed – not being naive or foolish
 - But it's more than merely being as wise as Satan

- Jesus used Satan as our comparison to say we must learn the enemy's tactics so we can anticipate how he will try to stop us
- We have to be creative in our own thinking, taking advantage of what we know about our adversary so we can find ways to thwart him
- I can illustrate with a simple story about a wise, older gentleman who was dealing with rowdy teenagers in his neighborhood

The retired man lived near a junior high school, and as a new school year began, three young boys decided to beat and knock down every trash can on the man's street as they made their way home from school each day.

Finally, the man has enough of their vandalism and decides to take action. He walks out to meet the boys. He says, "You kids are a lot of fun. I'll give you each a dollar if you'll promise to come around every day and beat these trash cans." The kids continue to do a bang-up job on the trashcans.

After a few days, the man tells the kids, "This recession's really putting a big dent in my income. From now on, I'll only be able to pay you 50 cents to beat on the cans." The noisemakers are displeased, but they accept his offer.

A few days later, the retiree approaches them again. "Look," he says, "I haven't received my Social Security check yet, so I'm not going to be able to pay more than 25 cents. Will that be OK?"

"A stupid quarter?" the drum leader exclaims. "If you think we're going to waste our time beating these cans around for a quarter, you're nuts. We quit."

- That's a cute story and an even better illustration of how we can find creative ways to combat the chaos and opposition the enemy tries to sow
 - For example, I know of missionary teams who travel into dangerous places where the enemy has set the culture against the Gospel
 - Traditional Christian evangelism in these places is all but impossible due to government restrictions and persecution
 - On the other hand, these countries are very welcoming to Western businessmen who bring the prospect of greater wealth
 - So the missionaries were shrewd...they decided to travel under the cover of businessmen entering the country to buy and sell goods
 - They printed business cards, they carried briefcases full of product samples...
 - They even made websites advertising their wares so that if immigration authorities did a random check, all looked fine

- As they move around the country, these “businessmen” naturally made many contacts in shops, cafes, marketplaces, taxi cabs, airports, etc.
 - And of course, with each of these contacts they would inquire to know if the person was willing to hear the Kingdom message
 - They gave a simple spiritual greeting, and if they got a positive response, they pressed further without giving too much away
 - They worked shrewdly, understanding they were surrounded by powerful wolves capable of attacking from any direction
- And even here at home in our everyday life, we too need to be shrewd in how we work the Kingdom Program so that we don’t play into the enemy’s hands
 - For example, men in ministry typically follow guidelines for not meeting with women one-on-one to avoid giving the enemy opportunity
 - For the same reason, churches do background checks on ministry workers
 - And as you might preach Jesus to coworkers in a workplace setting, you keep a low profile to avoid unhelpful attention
 - When I travel to teach in muslim countries, I have to be careful not to say things about Islam that might be reported back to the authorities so I don’t lose my chance to visit again
 - I call this approach the James Bond mindset...working as a secret agent on enemy ground...that’s the mindset Jesus is calling us to have
 - And I think it’s the most fascinating part of working the Kingdom Program
 - I love the cat-and-mouse game, the working behind enemy lines, the matching of wits with the enemy
 - Now, of course, this isn’t a game, and we can’t hold a candle to Satan’s wisdom or power
 - But we have the Holy Spirit, and He Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4)
 - So while the Bible calls on us to respect the enemy’s power, it never tells us to fear him...in fact, it commands us not to fear
 - Go out into that world full of wolves, just go with wisdom and discernment, preparing to face your enemy knowing his ways
 - If we walk by the Spirit we can navigate the enemy’s traps and pitfalls...
 - So long as we don’t shoot ourselves in the foot
- Which brings us to the third part of v.16...Jesus says we must also be innocent as doves
 - Just as the term serpent was an allusion to something more, so too does the dove represent something greater
 - In Scripture the dove often represents the Spirit of God
 - So in effect, the Lord is asking us to be as innocent as God Himself; or we could simply say “do not sin”
 - But more than that, we must learn the Spirit’s ways so that we operate in

concert with Him at all times

- So Jesus is telling us that as we go about the Kingdom program, we must combine the shrewdness of Satan with the innocence of God
 - Obviously, the Bible directs all believers to put away sin because as Paul says, should those who died to sin still live in it?
 - But besides that, now we're learning that in the Kingdom Program our sin can do great harm to our mission
- Now we all have sin...none of us are perfect, so clearly Jesus wasn't suggesting only perfect people may serve in the Kingdom Program
 - But the problem isn't the existence of sin... the problem is when our methods or lifestyle come into conflict with our message
 - When we work to reach lost sheep in dishonest or unloving ways, our behavior stands in contradiction to our message
- We have a word for someone who says one thing and does another: hypocrite
 - And nothing neutralizes your message faster than hypocrisy
 - When someone notices that we preach about the Kingdom but live like the world, they will immediately lose interest
- We can see that Jesus has placed these two commands – be shrewd as Satan and innocent as God – in opposition to guide our thinking and behavior
 - In reaching the lost, we want to use every trick in the book, every scheme we can imagine, every tool at our disposal...without crossing the line into sin
 - Sometimes finding that line can be difficult
 - Think back to my example of the missionaries posing as businessmen...was that lying?
 - Well, it could be, and the missionaries recognized they were getting close to the line
 - So to make sure they could honestly represent themselves as businessmen, they went a step further in their plans
 - They actually started real businesses...a t-shirt printing business, a consulting business, an advertising business
 - The businesses were real in every sense of the word...they even sold to a few customers in the nations where they visited
 - But of course, these missionaries put almost no time or attention into running their business, and they made no effort to turn a profit
 - In the end they could honestly declare they were businessmen without sinning
 - And then they took advantage of their occupation to shrewdly penetrate unreached areas of the world
 - That's being as shrewd as a serpent and as innocent as a dove
 - Nothing they did compromised their witness or their message

- Yet they were as crafty as the enemy in getting around the barriers he erected against the Gospel
- Finally, we need to remain as innocent as doves because if you let sin take hold in your life, the enemy will use your sin against you
 - Many men and women have seen their opportunities to serve the Kingdom Program ruined by sin
 - We see the stories all the time...pastors cheating on wives with the church secretary
 - Elders taking money out of the building fund to buy a nice car
 - Youth leaders compromised with their students, associate pastors lying about their background on resumes, etc.
 - And outside the church staff, individual Christians engage in all manner of secret and not-so-secret sin thinking no one will ever know
 - Besides being hypocritical, that behavior runs the risk of letting the enemy get the upper hand
 - Because you may think no one knows what you say or do in private, but God knows, and in many cases, so does the enemy
 - His agents are everywhere, and when they discover your secret shame, your spiritual weakness, the enemy loves to exploit it to bring shame to Christ and to weaken the Church
- So when we sin, we give the enemy a weapon he can use against us in stopping our Kingdom Program work
 - It's like we took a loaded gun, cocked the hammer, pointed the barrel at ourself, and placed the gun in the enemy's hand
 - We're daring him to pull the trigger
 - Maybe he will reveal your sin to your spouse somehow, or to your boss or to your pastor or to the I.R.S...
 - And just like that, your sin has now sidelined you in the work of the Kingdom
 - Jesus asks us to be innocent not only because it brings Him glory when His children obey Him
 - And not only because it keeps us from being hypocrites
 - He doesn't want us to be disqualified in our work by playing into the enemy's hand
 - How will you respond to this week's message from Scripture?
 - Obviously, we need to develop wisdom in the face of the enemy's schemes against us
 - And we need to double-down on our efforts to keep ourselves from sin, especially in ways that compromise our message
 - But here's a simple way to get started...spend the next week observing how the enemy is at work to stop you in the Kingdom Program

- Just as you get up the courage to tell a co-worker about Jesus, his phone rings or a friend interrupts your conversation
- As you get ready to come to church, you get into an argument with your spouse or the kids start screaming or the car battery is dead
- Don't look past moments like that...see them as attacks because they almost always are...and then respond in godliness
- Don't play into the enemy's hands, don't give up easily, build wisdom, put away sin

- I've good news and bad news...the good news is we've reached the sixth and final point in our outline of Chapter 10
 - Today we study the section I've labeled *The Cost of the Kingdom Program*
 - This section runs from v.17 through the end of the chapter
 - Which leads me to the bad news...I'm going to teach 26 verses tonight
 - But don't worry, we will address it in large sections
 - Last week we studied part 5, the mindset Jesus said we will need to serve in the Kingdom Program
 - As we bring the Gospel to others, we enter a world where the enemy had the advantage
 - Like a wolf, the devil and his demons work behind the scenes to disrupt our progress and discourage our interest
 - So Jesus told us to become as wise as our enemy, learning his ways so we can anticipate them and work around them
 - And at the same time, learn how to work in harmony with the Spirit of God – without sinning
 - Combining shrewdness and innocence to defeat the enemy's schemes and maintain a Christ-pleasing witness
- Jesus' advice will keep us in the game and position us for success, as the Lord appoints
 - But let's be honest...as I said last week, Jesus is also warning His disciples that we will suffer losses on this spiritual battlefield
 - The more invested we become in the Kingdom Program, the more we invite the enemy's wrath
 - So it's time for us to consider, are we prepared for the cost of serving Jesus?
 - Elsewhere in Luke 14, Jesus says that wisdom is calculating the cost of an endeavor before entering into the work
 - So it's time we pulled out our calculators, because serving in the Kingdom Program will cost us something
 - At the very least, the Kingdom Program will take time away from other things we might prefer to do with our time
 - It may take us away from our family at times
 - It will almost certainly impact our personal finances
 - And in the most extreme cases, it may cost us our earthly life
- So in the last section of this chapter, Jesus explains to His disciples the cost of serving Him in the Kingdom Program

Matt. 10:17 “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;

Matt. 10:18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake,

as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

Matt. 10:19 “But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.

Matt. 10:20 “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Matt. 10:21 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.

Matt. 10:22 “You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

Matt. 10:23 “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

- In our first section, Jesus issues a series of stark warnings to His apostles
 - And perhaps most interestingly, notice Jesus doesn’t offer them solutions on how to avoid the trouble in the first place
 - Which is rather odd, from our point of view, since we tend to think that the purpose of a warning is to help us avoid trouble
 - But Jesus simply tells us His apostles how to endure the trouble
 - Remember, last week we learned from James that a trial is an opportunity to bank future joy in the Kingdom
 - He told us to count trials as joy knowing that as we endure a trial, we gain spiritual strength and eternal reward
 - And that’s the overriding theme of this final section of the Kingdom Program
 - The Lord is calling us to count the cost of serving Him and be prepared to pay that cost because we stand to gain far more than we will lose
- Jesus starts in vs.17-23 with two warnings given specifically to His apostles
 - His first warning is in vs.17-18 and the second warning is in vs.21-22
 - First, Jesus says His apostles would be handed over to courts to be whipped in synagogues and hauled before kings
 - And obviously, Jesus is referring to the early days of the church
 - As the Gospel began to take hold in Judea, the Jewish Pharisees initially ignored the movement
 - But as the movement gained momentum, the mood among Israel’s religious leaders changed
 - They began to vigorously oppose the leaders of the church
 - They assumed that if they persecuted Peter, James and John, the movement would fall apart
 - Instead, Jesus says in v.18 that the Lord had planned this persecution as a means of bringing a testimony of the Gospel to the Gentiles

- Opposition to the gospel by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, and the rest of Judea, led to a seismic shift in the early church
- Persecution of the apostles dispersed the early leaders into the diaspora and there they began to teach Gentiles about Jesus
- And that's what the Lord intended, which is why He permitted persecution to begin
- Notice the Lord tells the apostles not to worry about how to deal with the coming persecution
 - Instead, leave it to the Lord to handle it
 - In vs.19-20, Jesus says that when they were standing before synagogue trials and kings, they would receive instructions in the moment
 - The Spirit would speak to their minds, giving them words to say that would accomplish God's purposes
 - Elsewhere, Jesus goes a step further and forbids His disciples from even planning ahead for these situations

Luke 21:12 “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake.

Luke 21:13 “It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.

Luke 21:14 “So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves;

Luke 21:15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.

- Jesus says just enter into those moments with the faith to know I will ensure that my purpose is fulfilled
- So Jesus warns the apostles that the Kingdom program will be opposed by powerful institutions
 - Yet the Lord would use that opposition to bring Himself glory and to grow the church
 - That promise was fulfilled soon after Jesus left the earth, as the apostles confronted opposition in Jerusalem as told in Acts 4

Acts 4:5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;

Acts 4:6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

Acts 4:7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?”

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of

the people,

Acts 4:9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,

Acts 4:10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

Acts 4:11 “He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone.

Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Acts 4:14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

- Obviously, the Lord continues to use government and religious opposition to strengthen and spread the church
 - In fact, it's been said that the church is always at its strongest when persecution is greatest
 - And the church is always at its weakest when its safety and comfort are greatest
- Jesus' second warning in vs.21-22 moves from societal opposition to personal opposition
 - He says not only will governments and authorities oppose you but so will those who know you best, including your own families
 - Brothers would betray brothers, parents and children would be set against one another
 - We don't have a record of such a thing happening in the book of Acts
 - But Jesus probably wasn't speaking of a specific situation
 - Notice Jesus switched from second person plural to third person in that verse
 - Jesus is speaking in generalities about how bad opposition to the Kingdom program will eventually become for His disciples
 - It's one thing for the world to oppose you, but it's another thing when your own friends or family turn against you
 - And that has happened many times in the history of the Church
 - In the first century and during times like the Reformation
 - And it continues to be a threat for believers in certain places today
 - But then notice in v.22 Jesus switches back to the second person plural to say the apostles would be universally hated for their work
 - That was the cost those men paid for serving Jesus in the Kingdom Program

- Early church fathers report that virtually all the apostles were martyred
- And even before that, they spent many years on the run, evading their enemies
- The apostles were hated by everyone in Judaism outside the church, which meant their entire culture opposed them
- You wouldn't wish the apostles' experiences on your worst enemy
- Given the costs of serving Him, Jesus offers the apostles two consolations
 - First, He says the one who endures to the end shall be saved
 - Jesus is not speaking about receiving eternal life, because that would be saying salvation was earned through works
 - And we know that's not what the Bible teaches, so we have to think more deeply about Jesus' choice of words
 - The Greek word translated "end" is literally the word for tribute, as in an accolade or the finishing tape used to mark the end of a race
 - So Jesus is saying the disciples who endure these trials to the end of his race will be saved
 - That takes us in the direction of eternal rewards for serving Christ
 - And in that context, the Greek word for saved has several shades of meaning, including preserved or maintained
 - So a paraphrase of this verse could read "the one who endures until the end of his race will see his reward preserved"
 - It's the same idea we saw in James last week...count it joy when you endure trials knowing endurance brings reward
 - Secondly, because of opposition Jesus says in v.23 that the apostles should keep moving, don't stay in one place too long
 - Specifically, Jesus says move through the towns, villages and cities of Israel
 - Obviously He was speaking to these men concerning their ministry to Israel in that day
 - And He even adds that they would not reach every Jew with the Gospel message until the Messiah sets up His kingdom
 - In other words, Jesus says the proper response to persecution is simply to take our message to the next place
 - And in that way, persecution serves God's purpose by scattering His messengers to reach more people
 - And this pattern of movement will continue until the Lord returns, in such that not even all the Jews will be reached until the end
 - Because until the Kingdom becomes a place on earth, the Kingdom Program of recruiting citizens will continue
- So here's what Jesus says to His apostles (and indirectly to us) regarding the cost of serving Him in the Kingdom Program

- You will be opposed in your Kingdom Program work, both by authorities and individuals and even by members of your own family
 - You may find yourself in difficult, threatening situations before powerful people, but let Me do the talking
 - And you may be hated by the world, even by your own family, but if so, go find new friends and new family
 - But whatever you do, don't stop serving the Kingdom Program...endure until the end knowing you will be preserving your reward
- Jesus' advice is entirely different than the world's advice for how to face these kinds of situations
 - The world (and too often the church) tries to tell us we need to escape difficulty, stop the trial and ease the discomfort
 - When we face opposition, they say we need to back off, be more tolerant, seek compromise
 - Others advise to leave the situation, quit the church, take a vacation, take a pill
 - After all, God wants you to be happy, so certainly we shouldn't have to feel sad emotions, endure discomfort, face persecution
- But that's not Jesus' advice...He merely says be forewarned and let's endure it together, turning it to our advantage
 - We're learning that the Lord's highest priority for us isn't our personal safety or our freedom from suffering
 - Therefore, we can't make our goal in this life to be avoiding trouble either
 - In fact, if we strive to be like Jesus, we will know suffering

Matt. 10:24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.

Matt. 10:25 “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

- Jesus says a disciple is not above the teacher or a slave above the master, which is a basis principle of rank and authority
 - A person who falls under the authority of a superior can never possess more privilege or authority than their superior possesses
 - A disciple falls under the authority of a teacher so a disciple can never have greater authority than the teacher
 - A slave falls under the authority of a master so that slave can never possess more authority than the master
 - In v.25 Jesus says the highest goal for any disciple or slave is merely equalling the teacher or master
 - So knowing Jesus is our Teacher and Master, His life sets the bar for our life

- If we follow in His footsteps, we can expect no better treatment than He received
- At the end of v.25 Jesus asks, if the head of the household was labeled Beelzebul how much more will the members of that household be maligned?
- The name Beelzebul is a title of Satan meaning Lord of Flies, and Hebrews 3 tells us that the head of the house of God is Christ
- So If Jesus had to endure comparisons to Satan as He preached the Gospel, what should we who are less than Christ expect to receive?
 - Do we suppose that we can preach the Gospel and avoid persecution when our Lord received it?
 - Jesus isn't saying we *will* suffer the same things He did
 - But if the Father allowed Satan to murder His Son for our good, then nothing is off the table for us
- No, the Father's highest priority for His disciples is not our earthly happiness...it's our eternal holiness
 - And the proof of that is seen in Jesus, Who we are to follow as His disciple

Heb. 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- So Jesus is asking us to understand what is coming, to count the cost before serving Him in this program
 - Because if happiness is our highest priority in this life, then we shouldn't get engaged in the Kingdom Program
 - The enemy will only need to push on us a little to cause us to give up or change our message
- And if that's how our service goes, then we risk shaming Christ...
 - Better that we never get engaged than to begin a work that casts shame upon Christ
 - So Jesus puts us on notice...serve in this program and we will experience some degree of persecution and suffering

2Tim. 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

- Now at this point, I'm guessing it might be really difficult to sign anyone up for a mission trip...Jesus has just said there will be a cost
 - But obviously, He doesn't want that truth to keep us from the work, so He follows with two arguments for why we should persevere
 - First, Jesus reminds us of God's sovereignty over all of it

Matt. 10:26 “Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

Matt. 10:27 “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.

Matt. 10:28 “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matt. 10:29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

Matt. 10:30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Matt. 10:31 “So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

Matt. 10:32 “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 10:33 “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

- Earlier, Jesus said beware men, but now He adds do not fear them
 - Fear is a sin, because it’s a manifestation of a lack of faith in God’s power and a lack of trust in the Lord’s good purposes
 - And Jesus begins by reminding us of God’s sovereignty
 - He says there is nothing concealed that won’t be known or secret that won’t be revealed
 - In short, Jesus is saying that the truth we’ve been given to share with the world will be known by all eventually
 - In the end, Jesus will conquer Satan, the Kingdom Program will prevail and all opposition will cease
 - So don’t fear the battles in the meantime
 - Have you ever recorded a football game or a basketball game on your DVR and then watched it after you already knew how it ends?
 - Perhaps somewhere in the game, your favorite team is losing and it looks like there is no chance they can pull it out
 - But because you know the final score, you’re not nervous, you’re not worried
 - In fact, you enjoy watching how the tide turned and how they found a way to get the win in the end
 - That’s how it should feel to work for Christ in the Kingdom Program
 - Some days may feel like it’s late in the fourth quarter and the home team is way behind and there’s no way to win
 - But you know how this game ends, so there is no need to fear
 - Which is why Jesus says proclaim the Gospel from the rooftops, without worrying about what the world of the enemy thinks
 - No matter what comes to you, the good guys win

- But then you will say to Jesus, yes I know YOU win in the end, but in the meantime I don't want to suffer personal losses
 - To which Jesus says in v.28, you're worrying about the wrong thing
 - You may not have noticed, but everyone dies somehow, some day...the death rate for human beings is 100%
 - So unless you're banking on the Rapture, you aren't getting out of this world alive
 - So don't spend your life worrying about your death and how to avoid it
 - Instead, Jesus says concern yourself with what happens after you die
 - Jesus is not saying we could be sent to hell...He's simply making a point by comparison
 - He's saying if we shrink back from the Kingdom Program because we fear personal loss, we're worrying about the wrong thing
 - We ought to be far more concerned with the eternal consequences of our decisions than we are with preserving our earthly life
 - Instead, trust your earthly circumstances to God – He has a plan for us all and cares for us intimately
 - In vs.29-31 Jesus says you are so precious to Christ and to His Kingdom Program that He knows exactly how many hairs are on your head
 - Moreover, the Lord is watching events on earth so closely that not even a worthless sparrow dies without God's active involvement
 - Think about that...how many countless birds die each day (to say nothing of every other animal)...
 - Yet Jesus says the Father has ordained each death at a certain time and place, just as He wills
- Knowing we are far more valuable to Christ and knowing our Father is in control of everything, we become free to focus on eternal things instead
 - And here's the eternal perspective on the Kingdom Program

Matt. 10:32 “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 10:33 “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 10:34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Matt. 10:35 “For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW;

Matt. 10:36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

Matt. 10:37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and

he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Matt. 10:38 “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

Matt. 10:39 “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matt. 10:40 “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.

Matt. 10:41 “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.

Matt. 10:42 “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”

- First, having eyes for eternity recognizes the awesome privilege we’ve been given by God to participate in the Kingdom Program
 - We have been called by God to proclaim a message with the power to grant men and women eternal life
 - Jesus says those who confess Christ in response to our message will be acknowledged by God and those who don’t, will not
 - Is there any more noble, meaningful, awesome way to spend your life on earth than in the pursuit of those moments?
 - You share a simple message, and depending on the response, you get to watch someone’s eternal future change before you
 - Secondly, having eyes for eternity recognizes that this message will invite conflict with the world
 - But we’re not afraid of that conflict, and we don’t see conflict over the Gospel as a problem that we need to solve
 - We simply work in wise and innocent ways to navigate the minefields the enemy places before us, knowing opposition is inevitable
 - Because if we love harmony more than Jesus, even harmony in our families, than we are not worthy to follow Him into that work
 - We can’t serve Him because the opposition will stop us or else we will change the message to avoid the opposition
 - Notice in v.39, Jesus says the one who foolishly tries to hold on to what they have here in this life will lose it in the end
 - But the one who lets those things go to serve Christ will find good things waiting in a life to come in the Kingdom
- Finally, eyes for eternity knows that our Father cares for us and will shepherd us and care for our needs even in the face of trials
 - In v.40 Jesus assures us that as someone receives our message, they are receiving

Christ, and if they receive Christ, they receive the Father

- What Jesus is saying is you will not go out alone...the Father will go with you and will work through you
- From time to time we will experience success
- Preach the Gospel often enough, and you will be rewarded with hearts that accept your message
- And when you see that response, the Father is right there too...encouraging you and reminding you He is working through you
- In fact, the Lord honors all His workers equally and according to the same standard
 - When someone receives a prophet (a messenger) or a righteousness man (a godly Christian) in the name of Jesus, they will be rewarded
 - The reward isn't salvation itself, for that comes by grace only
- The Lord is promising that those we bring to faith will share in the same inheritance that He has made available to all saints
 - Receiving the same message means sharing in the same inheritance in the Kingdom
 - It's as if you carry a winning lottery card with you everywhere you go, ready to hand to anyone who would accept your message
- And in the final verse, the Lord adds that even the smallest act of kindness done in the name of the Kingdom, in the name of a disciple, gives opportunity for the Lord to reward us
 - The point couldn't be clearer today...there is a cost to the Kingdom program
 - But it's so small and meaningless
 - It only requires that we give up things of this world...things destined to burn up or die anyway
 - But serving Christ brings opportunity for eternal gain
 - Such that even the smallest gesture of service to Christ in furthering that program will bring eternal reward
 - So what do you have to lose?

Eph. 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Eph. 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Eph. 2:7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- One of the challenges of studying verse-by-verse through books of Scripture is maintaining a view of the big picture
 - When you move a verse or two at a time, it's easy to become myopic; to miss the forest for the trees
 - Focusing on one thought at a time can mean overlooking where the story is going, missing the main point
 - And when we divorce an individual verse from the larger context, it can lead to mistakes in interpretation
 - So we need to keep the overall narrative in mind so we can understand the details within
 - I say this by way of transition, because today we're leaving Chapter 10 of Matthew behind and moving into new things in Chapter 11
 - And yet the things we're going to study in Chapter 11 are a direct result of the events we studied in Matthew 10
 - And they will lead us into some of the most important events of Matthew's Gospel in Chapter 12
 - So as we move ahead tonight, let's try to connect these dots in Matthew's story

Matt. 11:1 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

Matt. 11:2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples

Matt. 11:3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

- Chapter 11 opens with a brief look back at Chapter 10, which gives us an opportunity to review what we learned over the past several weeks
 - In a nutshell, Chapter 10 was Jesus preparing His disciples to minister in His place following His death and ascension
 - I told you that in Chapter 12, the religious leaders of Israel will formally and irrevocably reject Jesus' claims to be Messiah
 - And when they do, that generation of Israel loses their opportunity to receive the Kingdom in their day
 - Jesus will withdraw the proposal of the Kingdom for that time
 - And He refocuses His earthly ministry on preparing His disciples to carry out the program of recruiting Kingdom citizens
 - So Chapter 10 saw Jesus teaching the disciples how to carry out that program, after which He let them loose to give it a try
 - Jesus instructed the apostles to travel to the cities of Israel with the message of the Kingdom

- And that wasn't just a temporary assignment...Jesus was commissioning those men for a lifetime of evangelistic ministry
- But they began their work even while Jesus was still on the earth
- As we reached the end of Chapter 10, Jesus warned the men about the trials and difficulties they would face in the conduct of that program
 - They would be hated and opposed by powerful men and family members alike
 - They would be persecuted, harassed, lives would be lost
 - But in the end, many would be saved by their faith
 - That's not a very encouraging way to begin a mission, is it, but nonetheless the apostles went out as instructed on that day
 - Matthew doesn't tell us about their adventures, but Luke gives us just a little insight on how things went
 - In Chapter 9 of Luke we learn the apostles went to the cities of Israel preaching the Gospel
 - And as they went, they used the apostolic power Christ gave them to validate their message
 - When they returned, they told Jesus of all they had accomplished
 - So what came of the apostles' first mission trip?
 - Was there a great revival within Israel? Did their Jewish brethren run to embrace Jesus as Messiah?
 - The text doesn't tell us, but we know the answer indirectly
 - Like all short term mission trips, this exercise was less about reaching the lost and more about training the disciples
 - They went out, they did what they were told, they gained some experience and they came back home to relate their adventures
- But there is a powerful subtext building in Matthew's narrative...a dark cloud gathering on the horizon
 - Because while we can be sure some Jews received the apostles' report and accepted Jesus as Messiah, most did not
 - By and large, the nation of Israel in that day did not recognize that the Messiah had arrived and the Kingdom was at hand
 - And this reality begins to trouble Jesus' supporters and confuse His disciples
 - They knew He was the Messiah sent by God in fulfillment of the covenants promised to Israel
 - So how could Israel reject their own King sent to her? Impossible!
 - And yet, that's exactly what is happening, as we'll see later in this chapter and into Chapter 12
 - Meanwhile, Jesus' inability to convince the Jewish people to embrace Him leads some of Jesus' earliest followers to question His identity

- In v.2 we hear that John the Baptist sends representatives to Jesus with a question
- John doesn't go himself because by this time he's been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great
- Mark tells us that Herod imprisoned John after John publicly condemned Herod for marrying his brother's wife
- Later Herod has John beheaded as a gift for his wife's daughter
- For now John is still alive, and from prison he sends his disciples asking is Jesus the Expected One or should they be looking for someone else?
 - In other words, John is asking Jesus to confirm He is the King, the Messiah appointed to rule His people
 - John's question has puzzled Bible students for centuries...we all ask ourselves how could John doubt Jesus' claims?
 - Earlier in the Gospels John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus and he heard the voice of God affirming Jesus' claims
 - So how can John doubt in Jesus, we wonder?
- First, we have the problem of Jesus' unpopularity among religious leaders and the indifference of the general population
 - If Jesus were truly the King, and the Kingdom were about to appear, why wasn't the nation accepting their king more readily?
 - No doubt this was a source of confusion for John
 - As he languishes in prison facing certain death, he had to wonder if perhaps he got it wrong
 - Maybe Jesus isn't the King, maybe He wasn't the One appointed to rule over Israel
 - On the other hand, John did see what happened in the water that day he baptized Jesus
 - He declared Jesus is the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sins of the world
 - So how can John believe that Jesus is the Messiah Who came to save Israel and yet doubt that Jesus truly is the King to rule His people?
- We find our answer from an understanding of the teaching and circumstances of Jesus' day
 - In Jesus' day rabbis taught that as God brought this age to a close and set up His Kingdom, certain messengers would appear to Israel
 - First, the prophet Malachi promised the prophet Elijah would return back from the dead prior to the end of the age

Mal. 4:5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Mal. 4:6 “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

- Back in his day, the prophet Elijah performed 8 major miracles including raising the dead
- So the rabbis taught that one day Elijah would return to Israel, and when he did, he would perform great miracles again
- This would be a sign to Israel that the end of the age had dawned and the Messiah was about to appear
- But as the rabbis studied their Scriptures concerning the Messiah’s arrival, they noticed a two-sided nature to those prophecies
 - Some passages in the Bible spoke of the Messiah as a suffering servant who would die for the sins of Israel, notably Isaiah 53

Is. 53:4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

Is. 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.

Is. 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

Is. 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

- But then other passages taught the Messiah would be a conquering king who would rule over the whole world with power, notably Psalm 2

Psa. 2:6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

Psa. 2:7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.

Psa. 2:8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

Psa. 2:9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"

- These passages appeared to contradict one another, and the rabbis searched for an explanation that could reconcile them
 - Eventually they determined that in addition to sending Elijah to Israel, the Lord would also send not one but *two* Messiahs
 - And the rabbis invented terms for each to help keep them straight in their teaching
- The first Messiah they called the Prophet, who would come to fulfill the prophecies of suffering and dying to atone for Israel's sins
 - This Messiah would be a sacrifice like a lamb for the sake of His people
 - For that reason, the rabbis called the suffering Messiah the "son of Joseph", mirroring how Joseph suffered in Egypt to save his brothers
- The second Messiah they called the Christ, which means Anointed One
 - The Christ would be a King who would fulfill the prophecies of ruling with a rod of iron over a Kingdom for Israel
 - The rabbis also called the Christ "the son of David", because He would follow David's example of ruling over all Israel
- We know John the Baptist grew up hearing this explanation of two Messiahs and we know he accepted it
 - As John was baptizing by the Jordan, the Pharisees come to question him

John 1:19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

John 1:20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

John 1:21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

- The Pharisees ask John if he was one of those three men
 - They ask are you Elijah, the Prophet or the Christ?
 - John answers no to all three because John was actually a fourth character prophesied by Isaiah
 - But notice, John doesn't correct the Pharisees' assumptions about two Messiahs, he simply denies being either of them
 - So like the Pharisees, John assumed two Messiahs would come for Israel – not just one

- Of course, we know that there aren't to be two Messiahs, but rather two arrivals of one Messiah: Jesus
 - The first time Jesus appears on earth, He comes as the son of Joseph; the suffering Messiah dying for the sins of the world
 - The second time Jesus appears, He will come in glory as the conquering King to rule His Kingdom
- But as we learned in Chapter 10, even at His first appearance Jesus offered the Kingdom to Israel
 - But because His offer was rejected, the Kingdom's arrival was delayed for centuries
 - That's what the prophets told Israel...that they would reject their King when He came to rule them just as Joseph's brothers rejected his ruling over them
 - And when Joseph's brothers rejected him, it led to Joseph's suffering in Egypt, just as Israel's rejection leads Jesus to the cross
 - So one Messiah, two appearances
- But back up a minute...put yourself in John's place...as he sits in prison he knows Jesus is the Messiah
 - And he knows Jesus and the apostles are preaching that the kingdom was at hand
 - So naturally, he assumes Jesus is the Christ, the son of David, the One sent to rule over Israel
 - He expects the Kingdom is about to appear, he will be released from prison and Jesus will rule the world
 - But then John begins hearing disturbing reports from the Galilee that Jesus' offers wasn't being met with acceptance
 - In fact, the religious leaders were actively opposing Jesus, persuading the crowds to reject Jesus' claims
 - So John begins second-guessing his conclusions. Did he get it wrong? Maybe Jesus wasn't the son of David?
 - So in v.3, John's disciples ask Jesus are you the Expected One or will there be someone else?
 - The Expected One is a reference to the Christ, the son of David who rules
 - John wasn't asking *if* Jesus was the Messiah, he was asking Jesus *which* Messiah are you...the Christ, or was the Christ still to come
- There's something reassuring about John's confusion, isn't there?
 - John knew Jesus very well...he was Jesus' cousin after all
 - Yet he grew up not knowing his cousin Jesus was the Messiah
 - And now we see that John didn't even understand the ministry of the Messiah properly
 - Look, if a prophet can misunderstand Scripture, then certainly we shouldn't be surprised when our understanding falls short too

- And for that matter, we shouldn't get too upset with our brothers and sisters when they struggle with the Bible
- Everyone falls short to some extent, because we're trying to understand the mind of God
- If this were easy to do, then it means we've got the wrong god
- Do you want to know how common misunderstanding of Scripture is? Even the apostles themselves struggled to understand each other
 - Listen to what Peter says about one of his contemporaries

2Pet. 3:15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, **2Pet. 3:16** as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

- Peter said that some of the things Paul wrote were difficult to understand...for Peter
- To which we all say Amen!
- The point to remember is that misunderstanding Scripture or being ignorant of some truth is not unusual...it's common for all of us
 - Each of us know some things and each of us are ignorant or wrong about some things
 - Knowing this, we can't make knowledge of Scripture a litmus test of godliness – not in and of itself
 - None of us are approved by God on the basis of our knowledge of the Bible, so we should not look down on any in the body on that basis
- Instead, like a rising tide that lifts all boats...we want to cultivate an atmosphere that appreciates and values study of God's word
 - And from that culture, we seek to do what Jesus did for John
 - He answered John's misguided question while maturing John's understanding of the bigger picture
 - Look at Jesus' answer

Matt. 11:4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see:

Matt. 11:5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

Matt. 11:6 "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

- First, Jesus tells John's disciples here's what I want you to report to John...tell him what you see me doing
 - Specifically, Jesus said tell John six things
 - The blind receive sight, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached
 - At first glance, it seems as though Jesus were simply telling John, "My miraculous works prove my identity"
 - That is, "you may not understand the whole picture, but you know what your eyes tell you"
 - But we know John already believed Jesus was the Messiah, so how does Jesus' answer settle John's concerns?
 - John hasn't doubted Jesus' power or claims to be sent by God
 - He's wondering if Jesus is the Prophet or the Christ?
 - So why did Jesus just point to His miracles?
 - Jesus wasn't simply saying trust me or believe in my power...Jesus was answering John's specific question
 - Jesus quotes from two passages in the book of Isaiah
 - The first part of Jesus' statement is a quote from Isaiah 35
 - And the second part of Jesus' statement is taken from Isaiah 61
- To understand how Jesus just answered John's question, we have to know something about how the Jews organized the book of Isaiah
 - In the 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah there is a distinct division that occurs at Chapter 40
 - The first 39 chapters of the book read very differently than the last 27 chapters
 - In fact, the division is so pronounced that the rabbis typically divided the book into First Isaiah and Second Isaiah
 - The prophecies of first Isaiah focus on the suffering servant Who comes to save His people Israel
 - Jesus quotes from that section in Chapter 35

**Is. 35:4 Say to those with anxious heart,
"Take courage, fear not.
Behold, your God will come with vengeance;
The recompense of God will come,
But He will save you."**

**Is. 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.**

**Is. 35:6 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.**

**For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the Arabah.**

- So Jesus is saying to John, I'm fulfilling first Isaiah
- I am the suffering servant sent to save His people
- But then Jesus also quotes from Second Isaiah, from Chapter 61

**Is. 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;**

**Is. 61:2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,**

**Is. 61:3 To grant those who mourn in Zion,
Giving them a garland instead of ashes,
The oil of gladness instead of mourning,
The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting.
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.**

**Is. 61:4 Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins,
They will raise up the former devastations;
And they will repair the ruined cities,
The desolations of many generations.**

**Is. 61:5 Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks,
And foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers.**

**Is. 61:6 But you will be called the priests of the LORD;
You will be spoken of as ministers of our God.
You will eat the wealth of nations,
And in their riches you will boast.**

- So by His second quote, Jesus is saying to John I'm also the ruling Christ sent to give Israel the Kingdom
- I am both of whom you await
- Do see where Jesus sent John? Back to Scripture
 - And not to some strange corner of the Bible, but to the most important prophet in the Jewish Bible
 - It's likely that John the Baptist had memorized the book of Isaiah like many rabbis

- This was meat-and-potatoes teaching for any Jew of that day
- So we can be encouraged to see that great men of God can be confused about God's plan
 - And now we can be even more encouraged to know that the answers to what we don't know are sitting here waiting for us
 - John had read those passages countless times and each time he left the book believing that he saw two Messiahs
- Why did he believe that? Maybe because someone told him that first, and then he interpreted the Bible through a lens of prior teaching
 - Or maybe he simply lacked the perspective to understand what God was at work doing
 - Either way, his mistake was easy to make
 - But for that reason, it was just as easy to correct...it just required the revelation of God at the right moment
 - When the time was right, the Lord simply had to reveal Himself to John in a new way, and all the pieces clicked together
- I imagine when John heard Jesus' response he pondered it at first, running those verses through his mind, over and over
 - Until he noticed that Jesus' miracles were fulfilling prophecies from both First Isaiah and Second Isaiah
 - And from there, I assume he understood that Jesus was saying He was both Messiahs
- Even still, perhaps John didn't understand how that could be true...he probably didn't know that Jesus was about to die
 - Which is why Jesus adds that the one who does not take offense in Jesus will be blessed
 - Jesus was reassuring John that Jesus would not be universally accepted, and that too was part of God's plan
 - So don't doubt my identity simply because I am not being embraced by all, Jesus was saying
 - The blessing of the Messiah was reserved for those in Israel who accepted Jesus' testimony
 - Perhaps John understood all that Jesus tried to explain
 - But regardless, we know John gained a perfect understanding when he left this earth and entered into Jesus' presence
 - That's the encouragement I want us all to have this evening...
 - First, know that misunderstandings and confusion about spiritual truth within the body of Christ are to be expected as long as we live here
 - We hate to see it, and we strive to avoid disagreements
 - But there's only so much we can do, because we are all dependent on the Lord's

revelation to us

- And some of us are further along a path of learning than others, and some of us receive more revelation than others
- And maybe some of us are listening more intently than others
- But whatever the cause, when we leave this earth and enter into the Lord's presence, we all leave ignorance behind
- As Paul says, we all come to know Jesus plainly even as He knows us plainly now

1Cor. 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

- So there is a day coming when Jesus will give us everything we need to know
- But in the meantime, be encouraged to know that the answers are here – in your Bible
 - They have always been here, and as you devote yourself to understanding them, the Lord will delight to reveal Himself to you
 - And the journey of discovery is well worth your effort, because as you grow in your knowledge of Jesus, you grow in His grace
- Think about John once more...how much did his outlook on life change when he came to understand that Jesus was both Messiahs?
 - He went from doubt and worry, to joy and contentment
 - He could face death knowing that the Lord had been faithful to His promises to Israel
 - And even if John didn't understand the whole plan, he knew what he knew
 - And what he knew gave him comfort
- We make a priority of studying the Bible not because we want to solve riddles or fill our heads with knowledge, but because we want to grow
 - We want to grow in our knowledge, yes, as the Lord may reveal Himself to us by His grace
 - But we want that knowledge because it brings us comfort and assurance and joy
 - Because what I know guides how I live, and how I live matters to Jesus
- I hope you take some encouragement from John's example and from how the Lord responded with the answer
 - Don't be afraid to ask Jesus the hard questions
 - But when He answers, expect Him to point you back to Scripture...where the answers always were

- Why did Israel reject Jesus?
 - It's a question we take for granted, but it's not easy to answer
 - After all, Jesus offered Israel something they longed to receive
 - And He proved His ability to deliver it with miraculous power
 - Why wouldn't Israel embrace Jesus?
 - The answer to that question is more fundamental and more important than you may think, and understanding the answer takes some time
 - We have to gain a better understanding of first century Judaism
 - And we need a greater appreciation of how unbelief corrupts and handicaps the human heart
 - Chapter 11 is the place in Matthew's Gospel we see these things
 - In Chapter 10, Jesus began preparing for His rejection by Israel
 - In Chapter 10 He trained His disciples in the program of the Kingdom so they could reach the people of Israel in His name
 - And in Chapter 11 Jesus turns His attention to the fickle crowds, with their fleeting affections and easily manipulated emotions
- Last week the chapter began with an odd scene involving disciples from John the Baptist
 - John wanted clarity about Jesus' identity
 - Rabbis in that day taught that Israel was to receive two Messiahs – a prophet who dies for Israel and a king who rules over Israel
 - John assumed Jesus was the dying prophet, but then he heard Jesus preaching the Kingdom and wondered if Jesus was the king
 - Jesus answered that He fulfills prophecies for both, so that He was both the dying prophet and ruling king
 - Matthew opens Chapter 11 with that moment because John's confusion reflected a growing concern within Judea over Jesus' identity
 - For Jesus' supporters like John, there was confusion over why Israel wasn't running to embrace His claims
 - The religious leaders in particular were resisting Jesus despite His supernatural demonstrations
 - And the crowds themselves were on the fence too
 - Jesus amassed a large following, but those crowds represented a small fraction of Israel as a whole
 - Moreover, many were following Jesus for reasons unrelated to His claims to be Messiah
 - These two groups, the religious leaders and the crowds, each contributed to Jesus' eventual rejection and death on the cross
 - And in Chapters 11 & 12 Matthew is showing us how each played a part in that

rejection

- Chapter 11 focuses on the crowds while Chapter 12 focuses on the religious leaders
- And by the time we reach the end of Chapter 12, Jesus' formal rejection has taken place
- And Jesus' offer of the Kingdom comes off the table
- Last week in v.6, Jesus ended His conversation with John's disciples saying the one who isn't offended by His claims will be the one who will be blessed
 - Jesus draws a line in the sand saying, your eternal future turns on what you believe about Him
 - Are you offended by Jesus' claims to being God and your Judge?
 - Then you will know His justice in the end
 - Or do you embrace His claims and confess His name?
 - Then the Lord will bless you by forgiving you and adopting you into His family
 - There is no third choice
 - This chapter tells the story of how this crowd kept looking for a third choice and as a result they ended up with nothing
 - John the Baptist's own ministry suffered from the same fickleness and organized opposition
 - Like Jesus, John's followers followed him for a variety of reasons
 - And also like Jesus, the Pharisees conspired to diminish John's influence
 - So having dismissed John's disciples, Jesus now uses John's example to expose the crowd's false intentions

Matt. 11:7 As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

Matt. 11:8 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces!

- Using metaphors, Jesus asks the crowd sarcastically what were you expecting when you went to see John in the wilderness?
 - Many in the crowd now following Jesus in the Galilee had earlier flocked to John the Baptist in the wilderness
 - Certainly, some of them were moved by the Spirit and were operating out of sincere faith
 - But for every one of these true disciples there were hundreds of unconvinced, uncommitted observers

- They were culturally Jewish, religiously curious and generally opposed to orthodoxy and authority
- In today's parlance, we might call them ecumenical, unchurched or seekers
- When they heard reports of John's ministry in the wilderness, they were intrigued
 - They were drawn by the spectacle, especially for the chance to watch a rebel like John stepping on the religious leaders' toes
 - So they traveled out to see John for themselves, and they hung around for a time
- After John was imprisoned, many of that same crowd found their way to Jesus in the Galilee for the same reasons
- So Jesus turns to the crowd and asks rhetorically what interested them about John's ministry?
 - What did they expect to find in the wilderness?
 - And Jesus suggests a couple of answers using two metaphors
 - First, He asks if they thought they would find a reed blowing in the wind?
 - A reed is a tall, hollow grass that grows by a river, and when wind blows through reeds, they make a low howling sound
 - The Greek word for reed comes from Greek mythology
 - The Greeks tell a tale of two young boys, Karpos and Kalamos, who were close friends who spent all their time playing together
 - One day, as the myth goes, Karpos fell into the river and drowned
 - His friend Kalamos was so grieved by Karpos' death that he turned into a river reed
 - And to this day you hear the mournful song of Kalamos mourning Karpos as wind blows through hollow water reeds
 - And the Greek word for reed is *kalamos*
 - Jesus draws upon this myth to make a point about the crowd's superficial interest in John's ministry
 - Jesus says the crowds treated John as if he were a reed standing by the edge of the Jordan river making mournful noises
 - He fascinated and mesmerized the crowd, drawing their attention in the same way that we slow down to gawk at a car wreck on the freeway
 - They weren't interested in his message...they were captivated by the scene, the novelty of what John was doing
 - He was a spectacle, a rabble-rouser, someone railing against the powers that be in his day
- Or maybe, as Jesus suggests, they went out expecting a man dressed softly
 - Obviously, we know John's clothing was anything but luxurious
 - In fact, Jesus Himself points out that we should only expect to find such things

in king's palaces

- Jesus is referring to those who visited the king's court, seeking to gain influence with the powerful and connected
- He's accusing the crowd of seeking after John as if he were a man of importance, a man of prominence and fame
 - For these opportunity seekers, John represented a chance to get in tight with a new power player in Jewish religious culture
 - Someone to cozy up to for influence and the chance for wealth
 - After all, they assumed surely John had some some plan to turn all that attention into an advantage
- So whether it was for spectacle or self-interest, Jesus says the crowds followed John under false pretense
 - And Jesus' implication was they were doing the same thing in His case
 - Some were there for the spectacle of the crowds and the entertainment value
 - Others came hoping to gain something
 - Each had his own agenda, his own expectations, and each projected those things onto Jesus
- That same translation process takes place today and it largely follows the same pattern we see here
 - Today, we have huge buildings filled on Sundays with crowds
 - But the question remains...why are they there?
 - Many are drawn to Christ in authentic desire to be His disciples, to see His name lifted up and to serve the Kingdom Program
 - But just as it was in Jesus' day, many are attracted for spectacle or self-interest
 - Many of those crowds are flocking to a hyped and over-produced Jesus starring in a weekly Broadway show called "Church"
 - He's an entertainment event, a motivational experience, a light show and concert followed by a pep talk
 - They come looking for a reed blowing in the wind, so to speak
 - And then there are those chasing the Jesus genie
 - They have felt needs, and they're told that following Jesus is like rubbing the lamp
 - Follow the Christian recipe and Jesus will give you everything you desire
 - Just as Jesus was surrounded by fickle crowds, the church today is dominated by movements turning the Christ-centered story of the Bible into a man-centered story of self-actualization
 - Whenever we remake God in accordance to our own expectations, we set ourselves up for disappointment
 - Because when the spectacle grows old or the prosperity never arrives, we

become cynical and ultimately we blame God

- But the problem wasn't with a God who failed us but with false expectations that deceived us
- Jesus didn't leave His place at the right hand of the Father to take on flesh and die on a Roman cross so that we could be entertained on Sundays
 - Nor is Jesus our genie or good luck charm promising us our best life now – or anytime prior to the Kingdom
 - Jesus is the the Alpha and Omega, the Creator of the Universe, our Savior and Lord and Judge of the living and the dead
- By His grace we are called out of darkness and into His marvelous light, commanded to follow Him in submission to His will
 - We are to live a life set apart from sin, fueled by a love for His word and focused on His glory among the nations
 - Those are the expectations we find in Scripture, and they are not self-affirming...they are Christ-affirming
 - And any other view of Jesus is false religion – no different from any other – even if it comes with a veneer of Christianity
- In a way, it's reassuring to know that these false views of Jesus are not new...they existed even in His day, as we see here
 - And now Jesus turns to explaining what the crowds missed about John and what they were missing about Jesus

Matt. 11:9 “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.

Matt. 11:10 “This is the one about whom it is written, ‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’

Matt. 11:11 “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

- Jesus asks yet another question, but this time it comes without irony or mocking
 - He asks the crowd did you believe John was a prophet? If so, you were right
 - But John was much more than a prophet
 - He was the one sent to announce the arrival of Messiah
 - Jesus quotes from Isaiah 40 where the prophet foretells of John's ministry
 - Isaiah says that shortly before the Messiah appeared, the Lord would send a prophet
 - This forerunner would serve God by alerting Israel to their Messiah's arrival and prepare their hearts to receive Him

- In that sense, John was a prophet, but because his ministry ushers in the Messiah's ministry, he was much more than a prophet
- John represented the end of Israel's waiting, the end of one age and the beginning of the next
- In fact, Jesus says that no one born from the dawn of time was more important than John the Baptist – save Christ Himself
 - Consider that statement for a moment
 - Adam was not more important than John
 - Nor was Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David – not even Isaiah who prophesied of John
- How can this be true? Because as important as those men were, they could only speak to the promise of the Messiah
 - But John...John ushered in the fulfillment of that promise
 - There is simply no event in human history more important than the Savior entering the world to save the Creation
 - And John had the unique privilege of introducing the world to its Savior at His baptism
 - So John not only prophesied about the Messiah, he presided over the fulfillment of that prophecy – and no one could be more important than that
- Then Jesus adds that as great as John was, the least who enters the Kingdom will be greater than he
 - What Jesus means is that as great as John was in earthly obedience and purpose, he was still a sinner
 - But the one who has received the one John foretold will by faith be made even greater
 - As obedient as John was, we will be made perfect, sinless, in our eternal bodies through our faith in Jesus
 - And as close as John came to the Messiah in the river, we will be like Christ in glory
 - Jesus' point is clear...John was a prophet, the most important prophet of all time
 - But his importance came by association with the Messiah, and his message directed his followers to receive that Messiah
 - So that if we truly believed John was a prophet then we would also heed his message
 - And if we heed his call to believe in Jesus as Messiah, we become even greater than John was in his day
 - Acknowledging John was a prophet was simply agreeing with the obvious, and acknowledging the obvious gains us nothing with God
 - The people knew John was a prophet, but they ignored the prophet's call to follow Jesus as Messiah

- It was hypocritical and self-serving
 - If we truly believe someone possesses the truth, then shouldn't we agree what they say and act accordingly?
 - Instead, the crowd was saying John had his truth about Jesus and they had their truth about Jesus
- But that's not how truth works...there is only one truth...two people can't each have their own, different "truths"
 - At best, one will have the truth while the other holds to a lie thinking it's true
 - There is no third option
 - But Jesus is pointing out that His crowds wanted a third option
 - They know John was a prophet of God and at the same time they remained skeptical of Jesus' claims to be Messiah
- That's relativism...it's redefining truth to suit our evil desires so that we can hold onto our preferred view
 - Today the world thinks it fashionable to invent personal views of God and eternity
 - And of course each person's view of God is carefully crafted so it doesn't conflict with our social views
 - How convenient that what they think is true about God just happens to agree with what their flesh desires
 - And even inside the church, we hear people expressing their own views of God's word as if truth is a matter of personal opinion
 - So that in a small group or a church body you may find multiple people holding to mutually contradictory views of the truth and content to remain there
 - But in reality, some know the truth while the rest are simply wrong
 - As Peter wrote...there is no third option:

2Pet. 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- If something is Scripture (or prophecy as Peter calls it), then it's true and from God, and therefore the meaning of it is also set by God
 - Jesus' crowds were seeking for a third option
 - They wanted a way in which they could both respect Jesus' ministry without acknowledging the truth of all Jesus said
- In other words, they believed they could still get to Heaven even as they rejected Jesus' claims that no one comes to the Father but through Him
 - And it's what post-modern society does today

- In a sense, it's trying to make your way to Heaven
- We've all heard that meaningless statement at some point...all roads lead to Heaven
 - Never has Satan crafted a more appealing lie
 - It says two things we desperately want to believe...that everyone is ok and God likes us just the way we are
 - Both statements couldn't be farther from the truth
 - We are not ok apart from Jesus, and God detests our sin
- Consider what Jesus says about them next

Matt. 11:12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

Matt. 11:13 “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

Matt. 11:14 “And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.

Matt. 11:15 “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

- Referring to John again, Jesus says that ever since John the kingdom of heaven suffers violence
 - Now how can God's kingdom suffer violence
 - Well first, remember that the concept of the Kingdom moves through four phases in the Bible
 - Promise → Proposal → Program → Place
 - In the time between John the Baptist until Jesus, the Kingdom concept has transitioned to a proposal
 - So Jesus is talking about violence being done to the proposal of the Kingdom, that is to the message John and Jesus preached in their day
 - That message centered on a Person, on the Messiah
 - Said another way, entering the Kingdom isn't about accepting an idea or starting a journey or performing a work of any kind
 - It was only about receiving a Person – Jesus
 - The Kingdom Proposal is essentially a marriage proposal...enter into covenant with Jesus and He will give you the Kingdom
 - That proposal was suffering under violence, Jesus says, because those who came to John and to Jesus didn't like the message they heard
 - So they tried to change it, to make it what they preferred
 - They were taking it by force in that they were pushing back against what they heard, contending with the truth of it
- In reality they were trying to change the testimony of God's word

- Notice in v.13 the Lord says that all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John
 - The phrase Law and Prophets was the Jewish way of describing their Bible, or as we would say today, the Old Testament
 - The entire word of God has been foretelling the very same things that John the Baptist declared in his day
- Which means that those who opposed John's message and Jesus' message were no different than those who opposed the prophets before them
 - We're not talking about a clash of ideas or interpretations
 - We're talking about two kinds of hearts...those who hear the word of God and those who don't
 - Those who are children of God and those who are not
 - Those who receive the grace of Christ in their Messiah and those who haven't
 - Believers, unbelievers
- Jesus is looking at His audience and saying, if you accepted the word of God then you would accept John's testimony
 - And if you accepted John's testimony, then you would also accept Mine
 - And if you accept Me, then you have the Kingdom
 - There is no third option
- In v.14 the Lord says if you are willing to accept the truth, then for you John is like Elijah
 - This is an important but veiled comment...it ties back to something we learned last week
 - Remember, I said that the rabbis taught there would be three visitors before the Kingdom of God appeared
 - They taught that there would be two different kinds of Messiahs (rather than one Messiah coming twice)
 - But before them the rabbis knew that Malachi said Elijah would appear to warn the people that their Messiah was coming
 - Malachi specifically says that Elijah's appearing will happen shortly before the end of this age
 - So we know that Elijah appears before the Kingdom becomes a place, which happens at Jesus' Second Coming
 - Elijah will appear for Israel shortly before Christ's Second Coming to earth
 - So why is Jesus saying that for those who accept the truth of John's testimony, John is Elijah for them?
 - We know John wasn't Elijah, since John specifically denies being Elijah in John 1
 - What Jesus is saying is that John is a type of Elijah
 - To use the rabbi's teaching of two Messiahs, we could say that John comes before the Prophet, the son of Joseph

- And Elijah comes before the Christ, the son of David
- So for those Jews who received John's testimony about Jesus, they could have the Kingdom in their day
 - For them John was their Elijah, because they won't have to wait for Elijah to appear to have that promised Kingdom
 - They could receive it now in faith
- He who has ears to hear, let him hear, Jesus says
 - Or as Paul says later, faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ
 - Jesus is saying, not everyone hears the truth
 - Even though many followed them in huge crowds, still not all received John's testimony, and not everyone received Jesus
 - Why was Israel willing to reject their King? Because they preferred a different path into the Kingdom
 - They preferred a path that allowed them to remain unrepentant
 - They intended a recipe for Heaven that didn't require submission to God's word
 - They preferred to take Heaven by force rather than accept it the way God offered it
 - John said Jesus is the Messiah...follow Him, but the people said that's not the kind of Messiah we were expecting
 - Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life...no one comes to the Father but by me
 - They said we want to go to the Father, but we prefer another way
 - Jesus says there is no third option

- We're in Matthew 11:16 studying how it could happen that Israel rejected their Messiah in the day He came for them
 - The Gospel of Matthew divides roughly into two halves between Chapters 12 and 13
 - That division, as you've heard me say before, is centered on the moment Israel formally rejects Jesus as their Messiah
 - In the chapters prior to that moment, Matthew's account demonstrates the truth of Jesus's claims to be Messiah
 - He records Jesus' words and Matthew documents the various ways Jesus validated His claims
 - Then as we approach the division, Matthew begins to prepare his readers for that coming rejection moment
 - Sometimes rejection is easy to understand

Three brothers each marry a woman. The first one married a woman from Alabama, and said to her, "When I get back from work, I want the house to be clean and tidy." He didn't see any changes on the first day, but on the second day the house was clean and tidy.

The second brother married a woman from California, and said to her, "When I get back from work, I want the house to be clean, the laundry done, and have food ready on the table." On the first day he didn't see any changes, nor on the second day either, but on the third day it was as he had asked.

The third brother married a woman from Texas, and said to her, "When I get back from work, I want the house to be clean, the laundry done, and have food ready on the table." On the first day he didn't see anything, nor on the second or even on the third day either. On the fourth day the swelling had gone down enough that he could begin to see a little bit with his left eye, and he gained enough mobility in his right hand to make himself a sandwich.

- Sometimes, rejection is easy to understand, but not in Jesus' case
 - Frankly, if we didn't already know how this story ends, we would be shocked to discover that Israel rejected their Lord
 - Israel's rejection of Jesus was so surprising that it could lead Matthew's readers to suppose the Jewish authorities found a flaw in Jesus' claims
 - Perhaps Jesus wasn't the Messiah and that's why Israel rejected Him...certainly that's what Israel's religious leaders wanted people to think
- Matthew anticipated his readers' surprise, so he spends considerable time explaining how Israel's rejection happened
 - Matthew gives us that story across two Chapters, 11 & 12

- In Chapter 11, he focuses on the first of two primary causes for Jesus' rejection: the hard hearts of the people and their leaders
- Later in Chapter 12, Matthew gives the second cause which was Jesus' refusal to support the rabbinical system
- Even today in Chapter 11, we'll begin to see evidence of reason #2
- At the end of last week's teaching Jesus was castigating the crowds for pursuing John and Jesus for cynical, selfish reasons, and He ended with a provocative statement
 - Jesus said in v.14 that had Israel received John's testimony in faith, then John could have been their Elijah – so to speak
 - Jesus was referring to the Bible's promise that the prophet Elijah will return to Israel before the Messiah's entry into His Kingdom
 - We know that John the Baptist was not Elijah, since he himself denied being Elijah
 - But John was the forerunner God sent prior to the Messiah's first coming
 - So John marks the Messiah's first coming while Elijah will mark Jesus' return
 - And Jesus tells the people that had they believed John, then they would have recognized Jesus as the Messiah
 - And had they received Jesus as their Messiah, then they would have received the promised Kingdom in their day
 - So in that sense, Jesus says if they were willing to accept Jesus as Messiah, then John could have fulfilled the purpose of Elijah's ministry
 - But as it was, they ignored John, and since they did not receive John, neither did they receive Jesus either
 - Consequently in v.15, the final verse we read last week, Jesus issued the call that "He who has ears to hear, let him hear"
 - That's the first time Matthew records this statement in His Gospel, but we're going to hear it a lot more often going forward
 - It's Jesus' way of saying "I know not all of you accept what I am saying, so I'm speaking to those who are truly listening"
 - Until now, Jesus hasn't had reason to say this publicly – because He's been offering the Kingdom to all Israel if they would receive Him
 - But now that the tide is turning, and Jesus knows it, He begins to acknowledge His coming rejection in this subtle way
- So knowing He's preaching to a people who aren't listening for the most part, the time has come to explain the consequences of rejecting Him

Matt. 11:16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children,

Matt. 11:17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

Matt. 11:18 “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’

Matt. 11:19 “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

- Rhetorically, Jesus asks to what could He compare this generation of Israel?
 - He’s searches for a comparison to illustrate the heart of an entire generation of Israel
 - And He lands on a comparison that would have been very familiar to anyone in His day: children in a marketplace
 - Marketplaces were the center of life in a small town, a place of hustle and bustle that attracted adults and children alike
 - Even the very young would wander out to play in the dusty square
 - And children’s games of that day weren’t much different than those played today – except their games didn’t require WiFi or batteries
 - They only required imagination and they often took the form of role playing
 - A child would propose a storyline, like cops and robbers, and then the rest of the children joined in playing parts of the story
 - Even though that storyline wasn’t scripted, the group understood the general way things should be done
 - Each child was expected to play his or her part accordingly
 - But if a child refused to play his role as required, he spoiled the fun for everyone else in the group
 - So naturally there was peer pressure to do what’s expected
- Jesus compares Israel’s treatment of John and Himself to that of children complaining that a child broke the rules of their pretend game
 - The children say they played the flute but the child didn’t dance or they sang a funeral dirge but the child didn’t mourn
 - Jesus is describing an ancient form of the game “Simon Says”
 - A leader initiates a certain action and then the rest in the group are supposed to respond in an expected fashion
 - And to trip up the contestants, the leader issues contradictory commands hoping to catch the group unaware
 - So in this case, a child pretends to play a flute and the group must perform a gleeful dance
 - Then the leader sings a funeral dirge, which forces the group to suddenly change from dancing to mourning
 - But what if a child refused to dance or mourn during the game? The whole game comes to a stop and the fun is ruined for everyone

- As is obvious, Jesus is comparing the Jewish crowds and their religious leaders to those complaining children who want everyone to follow the rules
- Which means John and Jesus were that child who refused to play along with the game
- Religious life of Israel was a lot like playing Simon Says...it was a gigantic game consisting of leaders and followers
 - It had many rules, often contradictory, and these rules could change at any time
 - And the followers in the game – Jewish society – were constantly being tripped up by these rules
- The game we're talking about is rabbinical, Pharisaic Judaism which ruled religious life in Israel in that day as it does today
 - In past chapters we learned a little about the rabbinical system
 - How rabbis added rule upon rule to the Law of Moses over centuries until the Law itself was unrecognizable
 - Those rules were codified into a work called the Mishnah, and that code grew until it eclipsed the Law itself
 - As a result of the rabbinical system, Judaism evolved into a system of manmade rules and ritual
 - Effectively, it became a new religion – let's call it Pharisaism – and it was unrecognizable from what God gave Moses at Sinai
 - It was a false religion invested by rabbis over centuries, and yet everyone in Israel was told it was what God gave to Moses in the beginning
 - The rabbis manipulated this game for their own gain...and protected it at all costs
 - Including changing the rules when necessary to catch people in violation, very much like a leader of Simon Says
 - In v.18 Jesus cites examples of how the religious authorities played their game against John and Jesus
 - Jesus says John fasted regularly and refused to drink wine as part of his ministry of being set apart in the wilderness
 - His choices were not a sin, of course, neither according to God's law nor even by the rabbi's own standards
 - Nevertheless, the Pharisees seized on John's unique lifestyle to claim he was possessed by a demon
 - We don't have a record of their accusation in the Gospels, except by Jesus' testimony here
 - On the other hand, Jesus ate without regular fasting and drank wine like anyone else, so the Pharisees changed their rules
 - Like the leader of Simon Says, they switched things up to trap Jesus
 - They told the crowds not to follow Jesus because He was a gluttonous man and a drunkard

- And because Jesus showed compassion for the repentant, they accused Him of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners
- Here again, there was nothing in the Law of Moses nor even in the rabbinical system that prohibited these things
 - But it's how they played their game, always to their advantage
 - So they played a flute for John, but he wouldn't dance
 - Then they sang a funeral song for Jesus, but He refused to mourn
 - Then they blamed both of them for ruining everyone's fun
- Obviously, Jesus was fighting against the corrupt and hypocritical Pharisees
 - But the challenge Jesus faced in winning over His people went much deeper than mere corruption or hypocrisy
 - Jesus was fighting against hard hearts, hearts that weren't listening to the Spirit
 - Instead, the Israel of His day was trapped in a systematic pursuit of self-righteousness in the form of Judaism
 - For all intents and purposes, the religious practices of Jewish society in Jesus' day – let's call it Pharisaic Judaism – constituted a false religion
 - Pharisaic Judaism substituted manmade rules and ritual for a true relationship with God
 - Which is what every false religion does...including those false religions that take a Christian form
 - In fact, let's drop the word "false" at this point, because all religion is a substitution for knowing God
 - Religion is man's attempt to reach God through a set of rules, rituals and creeds
 - Religion creates an outward appearance of piety, and we assume piety means a person possesses insight about God
 - And sometimes it does, but only if that person has a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ...otherwise, it's just a game
 - A true saving relationship with God, with our Creator, comes only by a revelation from God to our spirit
 - The Bible says a true knowledge of God must come from above, God must reveal Himself to us, or else we won't find Him
 - So when God's revelation concerning Himself is lacking, all that remains is religion
- Religion is attractive because it seems to us like something God Himself might invent
 - Religions feature elaborate and mysterious pageantry, they demand commitment to a routine, and they offer moral lessons that seem wise
 - And of course, religions have millions of devoted followers...people flock to religions of various kinds
 - And a large following only serves to reinforce the notion that everyone must be

on to something

- But the truth is that it's just a game of Simon Says...people agreeing to follow the leader in an elaborate game
 - And they hate it when someone won't play along
 - Because if enough people stop playing, everyone will wake up to the reality that religion is false
 - That it was devoid of truth and purpose because it operated absent divine revelation
- Do you remember the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis?

Gen. 11:4 They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Gen. 11:5 The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

- In v.4 we're told that ungodly humanity built a giant tower hoping to reach into the Heavens
 - In the end, God comes down to see what the sons of men did
 - You won't find a pair of more ironic verses in the Bible, God mocking the ridiculous notion that we can reach God
 - The people were engaged in a game of Simon Says and the leader, a man named Nimrod, directed them in a false religion
- How did God respond? He scrambled the language of humanity, so that no one could understand each other any longer
 - And when no one could follow the leader, the game stopped
 - It put an end (or rather it slowed) the spread of false religion because it put an end to Simon Says
- That's what Jesus was confronting...a false religion that stood in the way of His claims
 - And it's no wonder that the Pharisees opposed Jesus, and neither is it a surprise that the Jewish people aligned with their leaders over Jesus
 - Jesus was offering a new and better relationship with the God of Israel
 - Because only a relationship with Christ solves our key problem...the problem that no mere religion can solve...the problem that separated us from God in the first place:
 - Our sin
 - And the only solution to sin is Christ's death on the cross, and when we place our trust in that sacrifice, we enter into a relationship with Jesus
 - That's the relationship Jesus was offering Israel

- But if they were to receive Jesus as their King, they must do it in place of the Pharisee's leadership
- Which would have meant an end to the Pharisee's game of Simon Says
- So it's no wonder the Pharisees opposed Jesus, but now we're understanding why the people also rejected Jesus
 - Because their hearts were too invested in the game
 - Once someone gets hooked into the ritual and rules of a religion, it can be nearly impossible to pull them free
 - People assume all that pomp and circumstance is proof there's someone behind the curtain
 - And they will rebel at any suggestion they've been duped
- So as demanding as Pharisaic Judaism may have been, the Jewish people were invested in it
 - As the saying goes, the devil you know is better than the one you don't
 - And when you add to that resistance the constant accusations of the Pharisees, it's not hard to understand why Israel turned away
- That's what happens when manmade religion comes face-to-face with the living God
 - Apart from those hearts touched by God's spirit, the rest remain in their sin
 - That's why Jesus called Israel to repent and believe in the Gospel
 - That repentance step does not refer to a repenting of our sins, as in a repudiation of doing bad things
 - Good luck with that...who can fully stop sinning this side of glory?
 - The repentance step of "repent and believe" means to turn away from false ways to God
 - Repent of self-righteousness, of salvation by human works, from trying to live apart from dependence on Christ
 - Simply put, it's a forsaking of all other gods and all religion for the opportunity to enter into a relationship with God
 - Not everyone will make that trip, which is why Jesus said him who has ears to hear, let him hear
 - Unsaved humanity prefers religion over relationship: religion is visible, tangible, and ultimately predictable and controllable
 - A relationship with God is none of those things, which is scary for the heart that hasn't been quickened
 - But even true Christians are susceptible to attractions of religion over relationship...we call it legalism and it's pervasive in the church
 - Legalism happens when we try to impose religion on top of our relationship with Christ

- Legalists tell you their ritual and rules are requirements that came along with the relationship
 - But usually it's just a new game of Simon Says again
 - "Simon Says don't dance, drink or chew, or date girls that do"
 - Or when those rules don't suit us any longer, we change the rules, all the while telling ourselves God gives us the rules
- Legalism doesn't just rob us of our liberty in Christ, it also erodes our trust in our relationship with Jesus
 - Over time believers can begin to place more importance on their rules or their unique doctrinal perspectives than on the relationship we have with Jesus
 - And at its worst, churches or entire denominations move away from relationship altogether to become false religions
- Now of course, our relationship with Christ isn't without structure or rules
 - Biblical Christianity has doctrine and even practices a little ritual, but those rules are all found in God's word as interpreted by God's spirit
 - But unlike the Simon Says game of religion, God's rules don't change...they always remain the same
 - And they aren't intended to trip us up or accuse us or disqualify us, and they certainly don't take the place of a relationship
 - On the contrary, God's rules exist to guide us into a deeper, more abiding relationship with Him
 - For example, a true Christian should never say "I know the Bible says 'go left' but our pastor says we should go right"
 - We don't follow leaders when they tell us to do things that contradict God's word
 - Nor can a believer say "The Spirit tells me that this verse means go left, but our denomination believes that it says go right"
 - We don't let denominational rules direct us away from the word of God and the leading of the Spirit
 - But for the same reason, we also can't say "I know the Bible says go left, but I personally feel the Spirit is saying to me go right"
 - If you hear a voice tell you to go against the Bible, then it's not the Spirit you're hearing!
 - A true and abiding relationship with God under the leading of the Spirit, remains true to His word
 - In fact, when a true believer disobeys the word of God, he or she will feel conviction to know they are wrong
- That's what Jesus means at the end of v.19 when He says wisdom is vindicated by her deeds
 - He's using a proverb of the day which simply says that our behavior ultimately

reveals what we hold to be true

- Our wisdom is vindicated or proven by our deeds
- You may say you believe something about God, but in the end I will know what's truly in your heart by what you do
- Jesus isn't making a litmus test for salvation here, but He is saying we judge our sources of "truth" by how they live
 - So in John's case and Jesus' case, what would someone have seen in their daily lives?
 - Both men lived upright, even sinless lives (in Jesus' case), and both men honored God and served Him in holiness
 - Both men loved those who came to them, and served them by teaching them the truth about God
 - And both men willingly suffered at the hands of God's enemies
- So their wisdom was vindicated by their deeds
 - Had the crowds considered each man honestly, they could have easily recognized that the Pharisee's accusations were false
 - They would have seen their deeds, and realized that these men could be trusted in what they said
 - On the other hand, if the crowds had evaluated their own leaders in that same way, they would have come to an opposite conclusion
- When people try to add rules and ritual to your relationship with Jesus, or when you have to sift through multiple voices offering us contradicting truth, remember Simon Says
 - First, remember you don't have to dance to someone else's song...you're responsible to obey the Master Who has bought you
 - God isn't pleased with ritual for ritual's sake
 - And He certainly doesn't want us thinking we can make ourselves righteous by following rules
 - Remember what Jesus told the woman at the well when she asked Jesus which rules should she follow to worship God

John 4:20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

John 4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

John 4:22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

John 4:23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

- The woman asked Jesus to settle an argument between Jews and Samaritans over where God wanted people to worship
 - She was trapped in the Samaritan’s false religion just as Jews were trapped in Pharasaic Judaism
 - And what mattered to her was getting the rules right, but what mattered to Jesus was getting the relationship right
- So Jesus told the woman, you worship what you do not know
 - Wow...imagine learning you are worshipping a God you do not know
 - Jesus told her that the Jews were the ones who had the right God, at least in the sense that they were the true chosen people
- But then notice Jesus didn’t say the Jews have the right rules...because finding God isn’t about finding the right rules
 - It’s about a true relationship with Christ through His word
 - And so Jesus told her that the time had come for true worshippers to find God in spirit and in truth
 - In other words, it’s not what you know, it’s Who you know
- We must worship God in Spirit and in truth, not in rules and ritual
 - So let’s never let our relationship take a backseat to rules or ritual that can’t substitute for spirit and truth
 - And let’s continue working together to teach San Antonio and beyond how to find God through relationship rather than rules
- I believe the Lord has some exciting things coming for this body in the near future, things that have the potential to grow us and extend our reach
 - But to whom much is expected, much is required, or to quote the more familiar wisdom of our day, with great power comes great responsibility
 - Growth is a double-edged sword...it can bring new opportunities but it will also bring new challenges
 - One of those challenges will be not becoming too “corporate” in our approach to ministry even as we strive to be efficient and effective
 - We need to always remember that what we’re here for is relationship, not religion
 - We never want to become like first century Israel, so committed to playing our game of religion that we miss the Lord when He comes calling

- We're studying the reason why Israel rejected their Messiah
 - And as we do, we're also considering why people today still do the same
 - Including why Christians sometimes get caught up thinking as the world does in these things
 - In last week's passage Jesus told the crowds they wouldn't receive Him, for the same reason they rejected John
 - The people were too invested in a religious game invented by the rabbis – a system called Pharisaic Judaism
 - That system dictated religious life for everyone in Israel, and it created a culture committed to self-righteousness and presumption
 - The system reinforced the thinking that they must depend upon their own works under the Law to please God
 - And they believed themselves to be a privileged class of humanity, chosen by God and destined to Heaven automatically
 - As a result, the people of Israel were deeply invested in a religious way of life that they weren't willing to abandon easily
 - Simply put, they had hard hearts – and that's what we learned last week
 - A hard heart doesn't necessarily require that a person be mean or stubborn or even unreligious
 - A spiritually hard heart is simply one that is closed to the suggestion that they don't know the truth about God
 - An atheist can have a hard heart, certainly, but so can an unsaved Baptist or Catholic or Methodist
 - On the other hand, we can find a Mormon or Muslim or other pagan who has an open heart to know more about the God of the Bible
 - So the issue isn't where a person starts in their journey toward knowing Christ...
 - The question is how receptive that person is to the suggestion that what they know now is wrong, and needs to change
 - An open heart is open to change, ready to listen, eager to find the truth
 - A hard heart isn't – and that's what Jesus encountered in Israel in His day
- That's why John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching "repent and believe" to Israel
 - Israel had to turn away from Pharisaic Judaism and self-righteousness *before* they could receive the Kingdom by faith
 - They had to reject the authority of their religious leaders before they could embrace the Messiah's reign over them
 - But the people took a look at the unimpressive man from Nazareth standing before them, and their hearts closed up
 - Their pride and devotion to their religious game blinded them to the obvious truth of Jesus' claims

- In a sense, we could say Israel knew too much about God and too little about themselves to receive the truth
 - Their heads were filled with religious notions invented by the rabbis, which distorted their understanding of the Messiah and His Kingdom
 - So in that sense, they knew too much about God to accept the truth
 - And Pharisaic Judaism taught the people to rely on a system to make them righteous and deserving of the Kingdom
 - Such that they didn't recognize they were sinners in need of a Savior, so in that sense they knew too little about themselves
- That's the situation Matthew is showing us in Chapter 11
 - So now he moves to recording Jesus' judgment of the people, and it's not pretty

Matt. 11:20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

Matt. 11:21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Matt. 11:22 “Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Matt. 11:23 “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

Matt. 11:24 “Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

- Jesus denounces the people by naming three cities in the Galilee: Bethsaida, Capernaum and Chorazin
 - These three settlements were the most prominent Jewish towns along the western, Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee
 - Capernaum was on the northwestern shore of the lake, and it was Jesus' adopted hometown during His time of ministry
 - Chorazin was a short distance away at the northern tip of the lake
 - While Bethsaida was the edge of Jewish settlements at the northeast
 - So in effect, Jesus is denouncing the entire Jewish community using these three cities as example for the whole
 - And the Greek word for denounce could be translated “reviled”, and it's a very strong word in Greek
 - Jesus isn't holding back or pulling punches here; He's speaking in the strongest possible terms
 - Jesus condemns the Galileans for not repenting, having seen the great many

miracles Jesus performed in their presence

- Now notice, the issue for Jesus was repentance
- Their rejection of Jesus as Messiah was just a symptom of a larger problem, and that larger problem was an unrepentant heart
- Remember what we learned last week about repenting, with a capital “R” vs. a small “r” as I defined it
 - Jesus is speaking of repent with a capital “R”, which in this context is something very specific
 - He’s not directing the people to simply feel sorry for committing a certain sin (that’s what I call repentance with a small “r”)
 - Jesus was calling for a change of heart, a change in perspective, a turn from living in disobedience to God, to obedience in faith
 - That kind of repentance starts with recognizing we are sinners in trouble with God, Who is our judge
 - For many of us, repentance leading to faith began as a feeling in the pit of our stomach telling us we’ve been found out
 - Of knowing God is aware of your sin and you can’t hide
 - Like the feeling of looking in the rearview mirror and seeing the police car lights flashing and knowing you were just speeding
 - It’s the panic that says “I’m in trouble and there’s no escape”
 - But even more than that, it’s realizing that God will hold you accountable in the day of your judgment
 - Repentance means abandoning any pretense that God accepts you the way you are
 - It’s ceasing to think you will survive His judgment by doing good works or living a “good” life because there is no such thing
 - It’s coming face to face with the reality of how much we deserve God’s judgment apart from His grace
- Repentance with a capital “R” doesn’t manifest in each of us in exactly the same way, but it will always have the same effect
 - Our concerns over sin lead us to seek a solution, which then causes us to embrace the grace and mercy of God in Christ
 - And at that point, our feelings of fear or sorrow are turned to relief and joy as we understand His plan of salvation
 - So repentance by its very nature leads a person to Christ and to a reconciliation with God
 - But that journey depends on an open heart, a heart willing to receive God’s provision in Christ
 - That’s why Jesus’ offer of the Kingdom was expressed as, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand”

- Jesus was saying to Israel, to have your Kingdom, you must receive me as your Messiah
- And to receive me, you must recognize your need for a Savior to take away your sins
- And to recognize your need for a Savior, you must acknowledge you are a sinner in need of God's mercy
- Or simply put, "Repent and I will give you the Kingdom"
- Now if Jesus had made this declaration by itself, then the people of the Galilee could be forgiven for ignoring Him or dismissing His claims
 - Words are cheap, and any crackpot could have walked around making such an offer and it would have been meaningless
 - And over the centuries, many imposters did just that; claiming to be the Messiah sent to Israel, and none of them were true
 - But that's not what Jesus did, of course, as Jesus Himself reminds them in this passage
- Matthew says in v.20 that in these three cities Jesus performed *most* of His miracles
 - The Gospel records miracles in Bethsaida and Capernaum but none in Chorazin
 - But apparently, the miracles Jesus did in Chorazin were just as substantial as those done in the other two cities
 - So Jesus' message came with power – demonstrations of God's authority – proving His claims
 - He didn't demand that Israel accept His words without evidence...the Lord condescended to their doubts
 - That's a remarkable demonstration of God's grace to His people
 - The Bible testifies that we come to the Father only by His grace through our faith in His Son
 - Nevertheless, in Israel's case the Father was willing to go the extra mile of backing His Son's claims with signs and wonders
 - And then add to that the fact that God sent Israel the prophets, to speak the word of God telling them what to look for when the Messiah appeared
 - So between the prophecies of God's word and the miracles Jesus performed, the people of Israel had everything one could ask for
 - No one in that day could claim Jesus didn't make clear the truth
 - That truly exceptional dispensation of grace made Israel's rejection of Christ all the more shameful
 - In the history of this age, the Lord will only offer four generations of humanity the privilege of receiving visible signs of His power
 - Only the generations of the Exodus, of Elijah's and Elisha's ministry, and those of Jesus' first and second arrivals witness miracles routinely
 - Apart from these four periods of history, the world comes to know the truth of

God by faith alone in His word alone – apart from such signs

- And of course the reason such things are rare is because they are easily counterfeited and manipulated by the enemy
 - If the Lord depended on such things routinely, then we would find ourselves in a constant state of confusion at the hands of the enemy
 - Moreover, the Lord would find Himself competing with the enemy for our attention, which is not something He will do
 - So instead, the normative experience of every child of God is to know of Him by His word and to depend upon it entirely
 - Only in exceptional circumstances, when it suits God's purpose, will He supplement the revelation of His word with signs and wonders
- But for that reason, when the Lord does interrupt the course of history to confirm His word with supernatural displays, it deserves special attention
 - An encounter with the supernatural demands we ask fundamental questions and embrace the unavoidable answers
 - More than that, it begs the question why...what does the Lord want to change by a display of His power?
 - That's what repentance is all about
 - Repenting is the result of an encounter with God that causes us to reconsider everything we hold to be true and right
 - When the Lord makes Himself known to us, we must repent of our independence from Him
 - When the Lord displays His power to us, we acknowledge His authority over our lives
 - It's the height of foolishness to experience such things yet then proceed onward in life as if nothing has changed
 - But that's what Israel did
- So then Jesus explains where their willful ignorance is taking them
 - Jesus pronounces woe on these towns and their citizens
 - The word woe could be translated "alas", and it's an expression of grief or denunciation
 - But when spoken from the mouth of God, it's a final and irrevocable judgment
 - In literal terms, it's the Lord declaring "go to hell"
 - Jesus placed these towns under divine judgment...both the people who failed to receive Him and even the physical settlements themselves
 - The towns were condemned to being uninhabited and in the centuries that followed, they were eventually abandoned
 - Today, they are all in ruins apart from tourists who flock there
 - So you can draw a line between verses 19 and 20 in Matthew 11

- This is the moment Jesus turns against that generation of Israel
- Before this moment, the Kingdom invitation has been shared without hesitation or condition
- But now Jesus becomes a different kind of witness, declaring judgment on His own people – beginning with those in the Galilee
- And the people in these towns will suffer an eternal judgment that exceeds even the Gentile enemies of Israel, Jesus says
 - Jesus compares these disobedient Jewish towns to three notorious Gentile cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom
 - Now all of us have heard of Sodom, the town together with its sister, Gomorrah, famous for depravity in the story of Lot
 - Because of its great sin the Bible says the Lord destroyed it in a particularly public fashion as an example of God's judgment
 - But the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre were equally terrible in their day, worshipping Baal and persecuting Israel
 - These cities were wealthy trading centers that reigned unchallenged over the Mediterranean coast for centuries
 - And naturally with wealth and impunity comes great depravity...just look at Hollywood or Washington DC
 - So like Sodom, these towns were judged by God, ceasing to be important centers of power by Jesus' day
- But amazingly, Jesus says that these three pagan cultures would have reacted differently to Jesus had He visited them in their day
 - Jesus says they would have put on sackcloth and ashes, Jesus says
 - He's referring to a particularly Eastern custom of mourning, where people exchange normal clothes for rough burlap
 - And they would toss ashes in the air to cover themselves in the dust
 - It was a public expression of inconsolable mourning
 - Jesus is describing the intense sorrow that a person experiences when they fully appreciate how the Lord sees their sin
 - It's sadness born out of shame and self-loathing
 - It's regret at a wasted life lived apart from God
 - And it's horror at the prospect of receiving the penalty we justly deserve
 - That's what Jesus says those ungodly, pagan worshippers would have felt had they encountered Jesus' power
 - Despite not being Jewish and not having the benefit of Scriptures or even knowing what a Messiah is...
 - Despite the depths of their depravity and the height of their power and arrogance...

- Nevertheless, these people would have understood what they were witnessing, drawn the obvious conclusions, and repented
- Now as we read this, we have to wonder if Jesus was speaking purely literally or simply hypothetically...would those pagan cities truly have repented?
 - If you or I made this comparison, we could only mean it hypothetically
 - We can't change history or know what might have happened had history gone differently...all we can do is suppose
 - But Jesus is God so He knows all things, including what would happen if any detail of history had proceeded differently
 - So we have to leave open the possibility that He means this literally, that these cities *would have* repented
 - I believe He did mean it literally, because when God acts to reveal Himself to people, He does it for good reason
 - And with complete assurance of what will come to pass
 - As Isaiah declares

Is. 55:10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
 And do not return there without watering the earth
 And making it bear and sprout,
 And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
Is. 55:11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It will not return to Me empty,
 Without accomplishing what I desire,
 And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- As Isaiah declares, the word of God goes out on a mission, and it will accomplish that mission as God has determined
 - In the case of Tyre or Sodom, had Jesus gone there to perform miracles, it would have brought about whatever purpose God had in mind
 - So if God's purpose had been to bring repentance, then they would have repented
 - Just as Nineveh repented when Jonah eventually preached to them as God directed
- So why isn't Israel repenting now? Why isn't that God's purpose? The answer is that God's purpose was for Israel to reject Jesus
 - Through their rejection, Jesus will end up on a cross, which is where He was supposed to be in the end
 - And as Paul explains, by Israel's rejection of Jesus, the riches of the Gospel could come to the Gentiles
 - But Scripture also testifies that eventually, the Jewish people will receive their Messiah in a future day so that all receive mercy
- So if the outcome lies in God's hands, how can Jesus condemn their rejection of Him?

- The answer is that we need to understand Scripture from God's point of view, but we need to read Scripture from man's point of view
 - From God's point of view, outcomes are according to His will and purpose
 - And once we enter into eternity, we will share His perspective, and from that perspective everything will make sense
- But until that day, we see things from our very limited point of view, and from that vantage point we can only see things as men and women
 - The word of God was written from the perspective of humanity and it was written for humanity
 - So we need to read it from that point of view, especially in situations like this
- Speaking as a man to His brothers in Israel, Jesus says you should know better
 - You've seen and heard plenty to know the truth
 - And you can't stand before God in your judgment and use His sovereignty and providence as an excuse for your sin
 - That's a little like a Nazi concentration camp guard claiming that he was only following orders
- This generation will be rightly judged for rejecting their Messiah in His day
 - And the fact that the Lord turned their rejection of Jesus to good in the end, doesn't reduce their culpability one bit
 - They received more grace than any generation of humanity before, and they turned away from it
- Such was their offense, the Lord says, that they will suffer more than those pagans in the cities of Sodom
 - In v.22 and v.24 Jesus says the judgment experience for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom will be more tolerable than it will be for that generation of Israel
 - There is no side-stepping what Jesus is saying
 - He's implying that there are different levels of punishment in eternity
 - In this case the pagans would experience less suffering in eternity than the Galileans
 - Obviously, it's hard to step into a conversation about eternal punishment, because the concept is so hard to wrap our brains around
 - But the Bible is explicitly and repeatedly clear about the reality of Hell, and later the Lake of Fire
 - We won't take time to visit all the biblical references today, but suffice to say there are many and they are not ambiguous
 - Those who die apart from trusting in God's provision of Christ will suffer an eternity of punishment, because the Lord is just
 - But the Lord is so just, that His assignment of punishment is proportional in some way that we don't fully understand

- We can't imagine what it will be like to experience an eternity in punishment – what fills the time, what goes through the mind
- So we can't begin to appreciate how that experience could be made to vary by degree
- But Jesus says that judgment will be more tolerable for one group than for another, so we know it won't be uniform
- And that makes perfect sense when you remember that eternal rewards will also vary according to our service to Christ
 - So just as all believers enter Heaven by faith alone, yet our rewards in Heaven will vary by the degree of service
 - Likewise, all unbelievers will enter Hell for lack of faith, yet their degree of punishment will vary by degrees of sin
- So the very worst among humanity will experience something less tolerable than the others
 - And among the very worst of this age we will find those of first century Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum
 - They stared Jesus in the face, heard His words, saw His miracles and said no to His offer
- We all have our own ways of racking and stacking sin we see around us
 - Certain sins seem worse to us than others, and many secretly hope that God does apply stricter judgment to those sins
 - But be careful what you ask for, Christian
 - Before we encourage God to judge sinners, we should pay attention to what God values
 - Do you suppose think homosexuality is the worst sin? Or maybe idolatry? Or greed or some other depravity?
 - You could find all those things in Sodom, yet the Lord judged His generation of Israel to be worse than all that
 - And what was their offense? Turning away from the revelation of God
 - Remaining hard hearted to God's mercy, close-minded to His truth
 - So is your "worst sin" the same as God's?
 - I know Jesus was speaking about the sins of unbelief, and of course we here are believers, and therefore we will not know His judgment at all
 - But if your understanding of Jesus' words go no farther than that, you're missing the main point here
 - The principle is simple: to whom much is given, much is required
 - In His perfection, the Lord takes everything into account when levying judgment, including what grace we received
 - In the case of Israel, they received immense grace

- They had the Law, the covenants, the prophets, the temple service
- They had the revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh
- They saw great miracles and were presented with an open offer of the Kingdom
- They received so much, which is why their judgment was so severe
 - It wasn't just that they disobeyed Jesus...it was that God had made it so easy for them to obey
 - That's the point here...to whom much is given, much is required
- So Christians what have you been given?
 - First and foremost, you have received grace in Jesus Christ
 - You are free from judgment
 - No matter what you have done or will do, no matter how far you stray from Christ, you will never be condemned
 - You have received the righteousness of Christ by faith, and therefore though your sins are as scarlet they will be as white as snow
 - Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool
 - But more than that, you have the whole council of God's word
 - Angels longed to look upon the things you have received, Peter says
 - The saints of old received but a portion of these things...they lived their entire lives seeing only pieces of this
 - But you were born into an age in which God's word was fully revealed to you
 - Moreover, you have received the indwelling of God's own Spirit, so that you have access to the mind of Christ at all times
 - You can know His will in ways no other age could
 - And if that weren't enough, you have spiritual powers, spiritual gifts, that are available for your use to glorify God
 - My goodness, I dare say we have received far more than even those in the first generation of Israel
 - So what do you suppose God's expectations are for His Church?
 - Knowing how He judged the disobedience of Israel, can we afford to be complacent or cavalier in our service to Christ?
 - Have we not been given much, and therefore isn't God going to require much of us?
 - And what does that look like? It means making your life a living sacrifice...seeking His will for how we may spend every day, every hour in His service
 - We aren't under judgment for sin, and Heaven will certainly be our home no matter how we serve Him
 - But we neither should we take His grace for granted, nor should we waste the opportunity He's given us to glorify Him with our life

- Time, talent and treasure...we owe Him it all

- Why did Jesus go to the cross? Why did Israel reject Him? Why did the religious leaders turn against Him?
 - That's what we're studying in this section of Matthew's Gospel
 - And with Easter right around the corner, there's probably no better subject for us right now
 - And as simple as that question sounds, I think many Christians would struggle to answer it from Scripture
 - Certainly, most Christians probably understand the basic reason Jesus was crucified
 - His popularity threatened Israel's religious leaders who manipulated the crowds and the Romans to put Jesus to death
 - But the true answer goes deeper
 - We need to understand why did the religious leaders see Jesus as a threat?
 - And in the end, we need to understand why those who followed Jesus turned against Him
 - That's what Matthew wants us to understand as he moves his narrative to the moment Jesus is rejected by His people
 - So in Chapters 11 and 12, Matthew walks us through two basic causes for Jesus' rejection
 - The last two weeks we studied the cause, which was the people's hard hearts
 - In Jesus' day, Jewish culture was devoted to a false religious system called Pharisaic Judaism
 - Their investment in that system of rules, rituals and Jewish identity, hardened their hearts to the truth
 - So when Jesus came preaching the Gospel, the people were unwilling to trade what they had for the Kingdom Jesus offered
 - In a word, they were unwilling to repent
 - And if you don't repent of what is false, you can't receive what is true
- Which is why Jesus condemned them...notice what Matthew said last week

Matt. 11:20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

- The issue was repentance...their unwillingness to turn away from a life of rebellion and embrace the truth Jesus revealed to them
 - As I explained last week, the repentance Jesus is talking about here is not feeling sorry...it's not regret over making a mistake
 - Repentance is a change in perspective, a change of heart, a fundamental shift in thinking that begins a new spiritual course
 - Jesus condemned Israel because they would not repent in that way, despite the

many miracles Jesus did in their presence

- So Jesus was rejected by Israel because Israel wouldn't repent
 - But if you think about it a little more, that doesn't really answer the question, does it?
 - We still need to ask *why* didn't Israel repent, especially in light of how much they heard and saw from Jesus
 - In fact, Jesus said less godly, less informed cultures, like Sodom, would have repented under similar circumstances
 - So why not Israel?
- In fact, what leads some to repent while others don't? Where does the desire to turn toward God come from for anyone?
 - Paul explained the source of repentance in 2 Corinthians

2Cor. 7:9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

2Cor. 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- The apostle distinguished between two kinds of sorrow over our sin
- There is a worldly kind of sorrow that simply expresses regret at the consequences of sin
- And then there is a godly form of sorrow, which is true repentance
 - That kind of sorrow leads us to the truth and brings us salvation
 - And that kind of sorrow comes to us by the will of God, Paul says
- You'll remember last week I said that Israel's rejection of Christ was according to God's plan
 - The Bible teaches that God intended Israel's rejection of Jesus so that His Son would die for the sins of the world

Is. 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.

Is. 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

- The Father would cause our iniquity to fall on Jesus, Isaiah foretold
- Because the Lord wrote this in advance, we know the Father planned for Jesus to die on a Roman cross
- And the means the Father used to place His Son on that cross was the hard hearts of the Jewish nation
- So the question of why did Israel reject Jesus, ultimately and inevitably leads us to God's sovereignty
 - Which is exactly where Jesus goes this week in Matthew

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

Matt. 11:26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

Matt. 11:27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

- Notice at the beginning of v.25 Matthew says that "at that time" Jesus spoke these words
 - So immediately after condemning the people for their failure to repent, Jesus turns to a moment of prayer and praise
 - Consider the shift that Jesus is making here...one moment He's pronouncing judgment on a generation of Israel, condemning them for their failure to repent
 - And the very next moment, Jesus is looking heavenward and praising the Father for His sovereign will
 - Remember last week I told you we must understand the Bible from God's point of view, but we must read it from man's point of view?
 - Here you see Jesus doing just that
 - Jesus understood the need to view His circumstances from two perspectives simultaneously
 - From a human point of view, the Galileans had all the proof they needed to know that Jesus was their Messiah
 - In fact they had more than enough proof, having seen most of Jesus' miracles, yet they wouldn't repent
 - Their unwillingness to repent was the result of their pride and spiritual blindness
 - Which is why Jesus declared they would justly experience a harsher judgment in the end
 - That's what it means to read the text from a human perspective
 - It means we understand the circumstances as a basic, cause-and-effect

outcome

- Jesus did the things He did, then the Galileans responded in the way they did
- And their response can clearly be understood as a consequence of their hard hearts
- So naturally Jesus condemns them...case closed
- But at the same time we must understand what we read from God's perspective, which means appreciating the sovereignty of God
 - In this case, Jesus knew He was to go to the cross for the sins of the world
 - In fact, Paul says in Ephesians that God authored the plan of redemption before the foundations of the world
 - So the crowd's failure to repent was part of the Father's plan
 - Said another way, had the Father willed for the people to repent, they would have done so, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians
 - But as it was the crowd remained unrepentant, which Jesus recognized as a result of the sovereign will of God
 - So in effect, Jesus was praising the Father for leaving the crowd unrepentant knowing it would take Jesus to the cross
 - Notice in v.25 Jesus says, "I praise you Father for hiding these things from the wise and intelligent..."
 - First, what things were hidden?
 - They were the same things mentioned in v.14, referring to John the Baptist's call to repent
 - Jesus is referring to the knowledge of Jesus as Lord and a desire to repent and receive Him
 - The Lord revealed this truth to some hearts, but to most these things remain hidden
 - And in particular, Jesus says the Lord didn't reveal it to the wise and intelligent; referring to the religious leaders of that day
 - Those men were the best trained, the most knowledgeable of Scripture, and therefore the best qualified to spot the Messiah
 - But they missed Him, and Jesus is praising the Father for hiding the truth from these men
- Now when the Jesus says the Father hid the truth from these so-called wise men, let's make sure we understand what Jesus is saying
 - Jesus isn't saying the Father prevented religious leaders from knowing a truth they would have otherwise discovered on their own
 - Notice in the second half of the verse...Jesus says the Father did not reveal the truth to these wise men
 - So we need to turn the question around...
 - God didn't *prevent* them from knowing, He simply left them in their ignorance

- by not revealing the truth to them
 - That's what the Bible means when it says that a truth is hidden by God...it's saying that the Lord hasn't revealed it
- In fact unless and until the Lord reveals spiritual truth to us, we will never find it on our own because spiritual truth lies outside our reach
 - Human beings gain knowledge by experience, gained through our five senses and by our reasoning
 - But the spiritual realm lies outside our experience...we can't detect it much less understand it
 - It's like we're fish in a fish bowl trying to understand the world that lies outside our bowl
 - We have no way to collect the necessary information...until we leave the fish bowl and die
- So God doesn't have to hide spiritual truth by preventing us from finding it...God merely does nothing and we remain ignorant forever
 - Simply put, no human being can ever know anything about God or of the spiritual realm unless God chooses to reveal it
 - Unless God intervenes into our blissful ignorance and grants us divine insight, we will remain forever ignorant of spiritual truth
- So Jesus praises the Father for choosing to not reveal truth to the haughty
 - But since some in Israel did accept Jesus as their Messiah, particularly His disciples, we know the Lord was revealing truth to some
 - Jesus refers to those who received that revelation as "infants" in v.25
 - He's speaking of His disciples, who were not exactly an "A" list of religious scholars
 - Jesus selected working class boys from poor areas of Israel to be His disciples
 - He even selected a tax collector, an outcast in Jewish society
 - These were "infants" in comparison to the mature religious leaders of the day
 - They were like children in that they knew little about religious matters and probably cared even less
 - But that's what made them perfect for the job...by their weakness, God invalidated the so-called wisdom of men
 - Or as Paul puts it:

1Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

1Cor. 1:22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;

1Cor. 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to

Gentiles foolishness,

1Cor. 1:24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1Cor. 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

1Cor. 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

- Notice Paul says that no one comes to know God by wisdom
 - So to mock the world's foolish reliance on wisdom, the Lord designed His message of salvation so that it appeared like foolishness
 - Think about it...the message of the Gospel is complete foolishness
 - The Gospel says, here's the secret to entering heaven...place your trust in a convicted criminal who was executed by Rome 2,000 years ago
 - It's like asking someone to believe in Bigfoot or the Tooth Fairy
 - Which is why Paul says that preaching Christ crucified was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles
 - God designed His message of salvation so that it won't appeal to human intellect
 - So that as someone believes in it, that person's conversion could only be understood as a work of God; a supernatural revelation
 - Or as Paul calls it, the power of God and the wisdom of God
 - So history will testify that the foolishness of God had power to save while the wisdom of men couldn't see it
 - But God's plan to shame the wise of the world goes even farther...
 - Not only did God design the message of salvation to confound the wise, He also prefers to reveal Himself to the foolish
 - Paul says God chooses weak things to shame so-called strong
 - He reveals Himself to the base things of the world (meaning insignificant), the despised, to those the world looks down upon
 - While withholding revelation from the powerful and privileged so that in eternity their power and wisdom will be nullified
- So when we answer the question, "Why did Israel reject their Messiah?" we must read the text from man's perspective and understand from God's

- Israel had hard hearts that refused to repent and embrace Jesus in place of their established system of rules and privilege
 - And Israel's refusal to repent was the result of the Father's choice to leave Israel ignorant so they would crucify their Lord
 - Meanwhile, the Father revealed Himself to a few, to spiritual infants, so that He could build a worldwide Church of believers
- Just as Paul explained

Rom. 11:7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Rom. 11:8 just as it is written,

**“GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,
EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.”**

- Quoting from Moses in Deuteronomy, Paul points out that the Lord was in charge of establishing who will have ears to hear the truth in Israel
 - But not all in Israel were going to receive the truth
 - Jesus knew that, which is why Jesus has begun declaring “he who has ears to hear, let him hear” in v.15
 - Jesus is acknowledging that His Father was not granting a knowledge of the truth to all Israel but only to some
- Now we might say, but didn't Jesus reveal truth to Israel when He openly declared He was the Messiah and performed His miracles?
 - The crowds certainly saw Jesus' miracles and they heard Jesus' words
 - But again, those moments were just human experiences...sights and sounds which were understood through human reasoning
 - And experiences by themselves, even great signs and wonders, do not communicate spiritual meaning
 - Spiritual meaning – spiritual insight – comes only from a revelation from God
 - That's true whether we're hearing someone explain the Gospel or if we're reading the Bible
 - Or even if we're watching Jesus perform miracles for us...
 - Those experiences can't by themselves impart spiritual truth unless God grants us revelation
 - They must be accompanied by the Spirit of God teaching us what they mean
 - As Paul says

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is

from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Spiritual truth must be spiritually appraised, Paul says, meaning it must be granted to us from a spiritual source
- Furthermore, Jesus and the Father are in agreement in this plan and work together to accomplish it
 - Notice in v.26 Jesus says that the plan to selectively reveal spiritual truth to infants was well-pleasing in the Father's sight
 - The Father saw the religious wise remaining ignorant while the religiously ignorant were enlightened and He was well-pleased
 - The Greek word for well-pleased simply means approval
 - God approved this plan for the sake of His Son
 - And Jesus too approves of such selectivity
 - In v.27, Jesus says only the Father knows the Son, and only the Son knows the Father
 - Jesus is speaking of the relationship between members of the Godhead, which is a profound truth
 - But as hard as it can be for us to understand the Trinity of the Godhead, Jesus' point here isn't hard to understand
 - Only a member of the Godhead can know and explain another member of the Godhead
 - Remember, the knowledge of God lies outside the reach of His Creation – apart from God revealing Himself to us
 - So naturally, we can't understand a Person of the Godhead unless a member of the Godhead explains it to us
 - And Jesus says the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father
 - And the Father has determined that the Son would provide revelation to the Creation concerning both
 - But apart from the revelation Christ gives us, no one can know of the Father
- And we have numerous other Scripture that echo this truth
 - For example, Hebrews says it this way

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of

all things, through whom also He made the world.

Heb. 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power...

- The Father has spoken to us in His Son
- Christ is the exact representation of the Father's nature
- And Colossians 1:15 says Jesus is the image of the invisible God
- And Jesus told His disciples this:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

John 14:7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

John 14:8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

- As we just read in Matthew, the Father has positioned His Son in the foreground, so to speak
- We see Christ, not the Father, as 1 John 4:12 says: no one has seen the Father at any time
- So as we encounter Jesus, we are seeing the Father
- In v.27 Jesus says the Father has handed Him all things – meaning all spiritual knowledge – and that knowledge is Christ's alone
 - No one else has the truth about God...not Buddha, not Mohammed, not the Dali Lama, not the pope
 - No other person or spiritual entity can explain the Father to us
 - Only the Son knows the Father, and the Father has determined that the Son would be the one to reveal the Father to the world
 - But then notice at the end of v.27 Jesus says the revelation of the Father reaches those the Son wills to reveal it to
 - So why did Israel reject their Lord?
 - Because they had hard-hearts blinded by a false religion that trapped them in works and a sense of entitlement
 - But why did Israel remain blind? Why did their hearts not soften in the face of so many miracles?
 - Because the Father and Son purposed to withhold spiritual truth from that generation
 - And why did God desire to leave Israel in their blindness? So that Israel would

- reject Jesus, placing Him on a cross
- And why did God place His beloved Son on a cross?
 - For you and me
 - For the sake of all those to whom God extends His grace
- That's the thought you should take out of this teaching and out of this room today...that God chose to reveal Himself to you. Why?
 - That's the question we should all be asking ourselves tonight?
 - Why did the Lord reveal Himself to me?
 - Had the Lord chosen to remain hidden from you as He did from most of Israel in Jesus' day, where would you be right now?
 - What would you know about Jesus? What would you think about the Gospel?
 - Apart from the grace of God, we would have been just like this generation of Israel... lacking true repentance and ignorant of the truth
 - Yet here we are...saved by His grace
 - Why are you here? Have you asked why God saved you?
 - We know it's not because we deserved it...as Paul says we're not noble or mighty and we certainly weren't holy enough
 - As you contemplate the answer to that answer, let it move you to rethinking how you're spending your time on earth
 - Are you living to serve Christ knowing what He has done for you
 - We can't ignore the implications of God's grace for the course of our lives
 - He didn't save you for your sake...He saved you for His glory
 - So any consideration of the question of why did Israel say no to Jesus, necessarily leads us to considering why did God say yes to us?
 - And the answer to that question ought to be the pursuit of your entire earthly life
 - Because it will be the center of your eternal life

- Tonight we transition out of studying the first reason for Jesus' rejection and into a study of the second reason
 - The first reason as we learned was the hard, unrepentant hearts of the Jewish people
 - They would not turn away from their system of religious rituals and rules, called Pharisaic Judaism, to receive the Kingdom
 - Moreover, the Father left Israel unrepentant because it pleased Him to send Jesus to the cross
 - But there is a second reason for Jesus' rejection
 - The second reason is closely related to the first in that it also traces its origins to Pharisaic Judaism
 - But our second reason involves a different group of people in Jewish society
 - Instead of the fickle crowds, now the focus is on the Jewish authorities; the religious leaders over the people
 - Remember, the Jewish nation was formed by a religious law given to Israel by God Himself in a covenant
 - Because the laws of the nation were religious in nature, so also were the authorities over the people
 - The highest authority in the land was the High Priest, while the judges and lawyers over Israel were rabbis
 - Or as they had become known in Jesus' day, the Pharisees
- We begin our study tonight with Jesus highlighting the differences between Himself and the Pharisees

Matt. 11:28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Matt. 11:29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

Matt. 11:30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

- I assume for most Christians the phrase “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” is very familiar
 - But unless you understand exactly what Jesus is saying, His words may seem completely opposite to the truth especially in some situations
 - For example, I don't recommend quoting this passage to a Christian friend enduring a great trial or persecution...
 - It will offer them little comfort in the moment
 - Because often obeying Christ in a fallen world means enduring trials that are hard, not light or easy
 - Which is why we must understand Jesus words in the specific sense in which He

intended, which was as a contrast to Pharisaic Judaism

- “Take my yoke” was a rabbinical figure of speech in that day referring to attending school
- Rabbis invited new students to join their school of studies by saying “take my yoke” which meant “come learn under me”
- But the fact rabbis compared joining a rabbinical school to shouldering the yoke of oxen reflects what life was like under Pharisaic Judaism
 - The burdens were immense and altogether unimaginable for us today
 - The life of a Pharisee was scripted by thousands of rules that addressed every aspect of daily activity
 - Pharisees prayed multiple times a day in public places, fasted several times a week, performed various washings repeatedly, memorized thousands of lines of text, etc.
 - From the moment a Pharisee woke to when he went to bed, he was bearing the burdens of that yoke
- Even the word Pharisee reflects what it was like to live under these rules
 - Pharisee comes from an Aramaic word meaning “separated ones”
 - The effect of the Pharisaic lifestyle was to separate the man from the rest of Jewish society
 - So when a new rabbinical student heard “take up my yoke”, it reminded him of the difficult burden he was going to carry
- But then Jesus said “take my yoke”, but He quickly added that his teaching wasn’t going to be burdensome at all
 - Jesus’ yoke was light and easy to bear
 - Jesus came offering freedom from following a strenuous religious system of rule keeping
 - Because by faith in Jesus, we instantly gain credit with God for the very thing that the religious are striving to obtain: righteousness
 - Jesus accomplished everything required in God’s Law
 - So by our faith in Him, the Bible says God credits us with Jesus’ work on our behalf
 - That’s what Jesus meant when He said His burden was light and easy
 - He’s already done the work...He kept the Law for us
 - And beyond that, He also paid the Law’s price for our sin debt before God
 - He lived a perfect life under the Law in our place, and He died in our place for our sin
 - So by faith, we get credit for both...you can’t get much easier and lighter than that!
 - By contrast, the yoke of Pharisaic Judaism meant trying to keep the Law plus the

thousands of additional rules the Pharisees had added to it

- And that was an endless burden...because it matters not how well you kept the Law yesterday
- Each day you started over with the burdens again
- That was the burden Jews of Jesus' day knew, and Jesus said He was prepared to free them from that burden
- Moreover, Jesus says His burden is light because He is gentle and humble in heart
 - Jesus is God, so He had genuine desire to help God's people obey and honor the Father
 - That's the heart of God...to help humanity become like Him, and the plan of salvation reflects God's love
 - So when Jesus came to bring us salvation, He came in a gentle, humble fashion, as Paul explained

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.
Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

- Meanwhile, the Pharisees were prideful, unloving men who cared nothing for God's people
 - Far from being humble, the Pharisees took great pride in their rigorous lifestyle, wearing their burdens like a badge of honor
 - And they were certainly not gentle
 - They leveraged their many rules to accuse their opponents and extorted money from the people
 - So naturally the system they invented reflected their hard hearts
- That was the system Israel suffered under, and Jesus invited those who were weary of its burden to come learn from Him and He would give them rest
 - And Jesus' mention of rest brings us to our discussion of the second major reason Jesus was rejected by the Jewish authorities
 - And that reason is the Jewish Sabbath Day; the day of rest
 - More specifically, it was Jesus' refusal to acknowledge the myriad of Pharisaic rules associated with Sabbath observance
 - If there was a time the average Jew felt the full burden of Pharisaic Judaism, it was on the Sabbath day

- In the Law God directed Israel cease from work on the seventh day of the week, beginning at sundown Friday

Ex. 20:8 “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Ex. 20:9 “Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Ex. 20:10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

Ex. 20:11 “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

- Despite the simplicity of that command, the rabbis soon made it very complicated
 - In fact, the Pharisees considered Sabbath observance God’s most important law
 - The day was so special to the rabbis that it came to personify God Himself
 - The Pharisees referred to the Sabbath day as the bride of Israel and the queen of Yahweh
 - Even today during Friday night Sabbath services in synagogues, the doors are opened for the congregation to sing a song entitled “Welcome my Beloved, let us greet Queen Sabbath”
- Why were the Pharisees so enamored with Sabbath? Because God’s prohibition against work offered Pharisees endless opportunities to craft new restrictions
 - Under Pharisaic Judaism there were more rules devoted to Sabbath observance than for any other area of Jewish life
 - The rules for Sabbath observance were Pharisaic Judaism’s crown jewel...their pièce de résistance
 - By one scholar’s count, the Pharisees recorded 1,500 rules in their Mishnah for proper Sabbath observance
 - In fact, even today the practice of Judaism is largely defined by three things: observing feasts, dietary restrictions and Sabbath rules
 - For that reason, the enforcement of these Sabbath rules was critical to the Pharisee’s power game
 - Breaking any of the Pharisee’s myriad of Sabbath rules could result in severe penalties, including even death
 - Since the people feared the consequences of breaking the Sabbath, the Pharisees gained great control over Jewish society
 - So ironically, the day God appointed for rest became the most burdensome day of a Jew’s week
 - But then Jesus came along and He didn’t play by the Pharisees’ rules, especially not when it came to their Sabbath restrictions

- Those 1,500 rules that the Pharisees invented were not from God nor were they consistent with God's heart
- The Sabbath was intended to be a day of refreshment, but the Pharisees had turned it into a day of fretting and worry
- Such that even the slightest deviation from those 1,500+ rules could result in condemnation
- So far from being refreshed, the Sabbath observance was a particular burden
- Jesus' refusal to keep the Pharisees' Sabbath rules more than anything else turned the Pharisees against Him
 - In the Gospels, most of the disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees center on Jesus violating one of the 1,500 Mishnah rules
 - Often it was Jesus healing on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees outlawed as a form of work
 - And in Chapter 12, we'll see that it was after one such healing on the Sabbath that the Pharisees decided Jesus had to die
 - From that point they plotted to kill Jesus and they turned the people against Jesus
 - Jesus knew that the Sabbath would become a major source of contention with the religious leaders
 - And Jesus even invited the conflict on several occasions by intentionally healing on a Sabbath day knowing the Pharisees would object
 - And so when Jesus tells the crowds that He would give them "rest" from their burdens, He's making a subtle reference to the Pharisees' Sabbath rules
 - In fact, notice Jesus uses the term "rest" twice in that short passage, first at the end of v.28 and again in v.29, quoting from Jer 6:16
 - In Jesus' second use of the word in v.29 He says He is offering Israel rest for their souls
 - And if you glance ahead to Chapter 12:8 you find Jesus declaring that the Messiah is the Lord of the Sabbath
 - We'll study that passage the week after Easter, but for now let's understand Jesus is trying to explain the true purpose of the Sabbath
 - Jesus was talking about offering Israel rest not merely from the Mishnah's demands
 - He was talking about the true spiritual purpose of the Sabbath, which belongs to every believer who comes to Jesus in faith
 - Jesus was offering Israel Himself as their true Sabbath rest, which the daily Sabbath in the Law of Moses simply pictured
 - We find a full explanation of the Sabbath in Hebrews 4
 - So before we can understand why Jesus chose to pick a fight over the Sabbath rules of the Mishnah, we need to understand how Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Heb. 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Heb. 4:3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,
**“AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
 THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,”**

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Heb. 4:4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: **“AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”;**

Heb. 4:5 and again in this passage, **“THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”**

Heb. 4:6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,

Heb. 4:7 He again fixes a certain day, **“Today,”** saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,
**“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”**

Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.

Heb. 4:9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Heb. 4:10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

- The writer of Hebrews was concerned that some in the church in his day had “come short” of entering into His (Christ’s) rest
 - So the writer draws from multiple examples out of the Old Testament to explain what entering God’s rest means and what it doesn’t mean
 - Because before we can understand why Jesus challenged the Pharisees’ on the Sabbath, we need to understand God’s purpose in giving Israel the Sabbath in the first place
 - And it starts with Heb. 4:2-3...those who believe in the good news are entering Christ’s rest
 - Notice in v.2 the writer refers to those of Israel’s past who had good news preached to them
 - He’s talking about the Exodus generation of Israel who came out of Egypt
 - In Chapter 3, the writer reminded his readers that the generation that left Egypt ended up dying in the desert because of unbelief
 - And now here in Chapter 4 the writer goes on to say they had good news preached but failed to believe it
 - The good news preached to that generation of Israel was that God was setting them

free from Pharaoh to live in the Promised Land

- But that generation of Israel didn't believe in that promise
 - Instead, they believed the false report of the spies who claimed the land was filled with giants and terrors
 - So because of their unbelief, the Lord didn't allow them to enter into the land... they all died in the desert for their unbelief
- Then in v.3 the writer establishes a principle from that biblical account...to believe in the promises of God is to enter rest
 - And to prove that principle, the writer quotes from Psalm 95 where the Lord declares that that generation's failure to believe barred them from rest
 - Now we know that God is referring to entering the land of Canaan
 - Nevertheless, the Lord euphemistically referred to entering the Promised Land as entering His rest
 - So the Lord connects three ideas through that example: belief is equal to entering His rest which is equal to entering the Promised Land
 - So what rest is God talking about? The writer then goes on to explore that idea beginning with the first time the Lord uses the term rest
 - After God finished the six days of Creation, the Bible says that the Lord ceased from His work of Creation
 - So in that sense, the Lord entered into a state of rest
 - Ever since the sixth day of Creation, the Lord has remained at rest from His creative works
 - So we could say that all Creation is in God's rest right now, in the sense that we share in God's ceasing from the work of Creation
 - But in vs.4-5 the writer notes that this can't be the "rest" God was talking about in Psalm 95
 - Because it was after God ceased from the work of Creation that He declared Israel wouldn't enter into His rest
 - Therefore, the Lord can't be referring to the Creation rest since it's ongoing for everyone
 - He must be referring to some other kind of rest that Israel has yet to experience
- So the writer concludes in v.6 that therefore, there is some other kind of rest that Israel must enter into – a rest that the earlier generation did not enter into
 - Perhaps God's rest refers to inhabiting the land itself, so the earlier generations failed to enter the rest of the land for their unbelief
 - In considering that possibility, the writer then reminds his readers what David wrote in the psalms on this subject
 - In v.7 the writer quotes again from Psalm 95
 - David warns his brethren in Israel saying don't harden your hearts like that prior generation of Israel who didn't believe

- Instead, David calls Israel to believe, saying today if you hear God's voice, respond in faith so you might enter His rest
- Now David's psalm was written hundreds of years *after* the Jews had already entered into the land under Joshua
 - Notice in v.8 the writer says if Joshua had given Israel rest by bringing them into the land, than David wouldn't have spoken of another day
 - In other words, if entering God's rest meant entering the Promised Land, then Joshua would have given Israel rest
 - But long after Joshua, David was still calling for his countrymen to enter God's rest even though they were living in the land
- So in v.9 the writer makes the unavoidable conclusion from Scripture
 - There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people...
 - Entering God's rest can't mean the rest God enjoys after completing Creation... we're still called to enter His rest
 - And it can't refer to entering the Promised Land itself, since Israel entered it under Joshua yet David was still calling Israel to enter it years later
 - And we can add to the writer's arguments that entering God's rest also can't refer to observing a weekly Sabbath day
 - Because Israel was observing a Sabbath day in David's time, yet the King was still calling for people to enter God's rest today...not just one day a week but everyday
 - So what does God mean by "enter my rest"?
 - It's something that requires faith, it remains true today just as it did in ages past
 - The answer is entering God's rest means trusting in the Messiah, Who is Lord of the Sabbath
- Look what the writer says in Hebrews 4:10
 - He says the one who enters into God's rest is the one who rests from his works, just as God rested from His works
 - The works the writer is talking about here are those religious works we did before we come to faith in Jesus
 - In Jesus' day those works were the rules and regulations of the Mishnah that so many Jews were faithfully keeping, hoping to please God
 - Those were the heavy burdens that the Pharisees had placed on the backs of the people which Jesus could remove for them
 - Jesus says come learn under me, and you will receive a light and easy yoke
 - Jesus will become your Sabbath rest, because Jesus will accomplish all those works for you
 - And having placed your faith in Jesus, you now gain credit for His work which means you do not need to perform any work any longer
 - That's the rest of God...knowing that you do not need to work your way to Heaven

but instead you can rest in the work of Christ on your behalf

- Had the Jews of Jesus' day accepted His offer, they could have set aside the works of the Mishnah – including all the rules of the Sabbath
- And in fact, they would have set aside the entire law of Moses knowing that Jesus had fulfilled it on their behalf
- That's what David was calling his countrymen to understand...that they could rest in God's promise of a Messiah if they would only believe
- That's what the earlier generation missed...because they didn't believe in the promises of God, they didn't enter into His rest
- And speaking of that generation, we're also learning that God used their experience in the desert as a powerful picture of how faith brings us rest
 - In that Exodus story, entering the Promised Land of Canaan was connected with faith as the writer explained
 - By their failure to enter for unbelief, we learn that we cannot enter into the Promised Land without faith in Christ
 - Furthermore, the land of Canaan is called the Promised Land because in the Kingdom to come it will be the home of the Jewish people
 - So entering the Promised Land is itself a picture of entering the Kingdom
 - So when we connect all three ideas, we arrive at a fundamental truth of the Bible
 - We enter the Kingdom of God by faith, just as Israel could only enter Canaan by belief in God
 - And having salvation means entering God's rest
 - Simply put, Israel could not enter the Promised Land by keeping the Law, and we cannot enter God's rest and the Kingdom by doing works of any kind
 - We only enter by faith in Christ, and when you place your faith in Christ you enter His rest; that is you enter into a Sabbath
 - The true Sabbath of God is placing faith in Jesus, and the the day of rest God gave Moses was just a picture of the greater spiritual rest we receive in Christ
 - And to make that picture clearer still, the Lord didn't allow Moses to enter the Promised Land
 - Instead, the people of Israel were led into the Promised Land by Joshua, who took power over Israel following Moses' death
 - Moses represents the Law itself, so we can say that a person cannot enter the Promised Land by Moses – that is by law
 - Instead, we enter the Promised Land by following Joshua, and Joshua's name in Hebrew is *Yeshua*, which is the same name as Jesus
 - Jesus leads us into the Promised Land, that is into the Kingdom
 - We can't enter God's rest by doing works of the law, and certainly not by following 1,500 rules in a Mishnah invented by Pharisees
- So the Lord gave Israel the Sabbath day observance to picture Jesus in this sense

- Once every week, the nation followed in God's footsteps
 - Just as God rested for a day after creating the world in six days, so Israel would work six days and then rest one day
 - This was a lesson to Israel teaching them they must enter into God's rest by placing faith in their Messiah's work
- If they placed faith in the Messiah, then they could enter a rest that never ends; the rest of trusting in Christ's work and of the Kingdom
 - It would be a rest for their souls not just their bodies, as Jesus said
 - And that rest would be never ending, unlike the weekly Sabbath that only lasted a day and then a new week of work began again
- If you have placed faith in Jesus, you have rested from working your way to Heaven
 - That's the true Sabbath rest the writer was taking about, the true Sabbath Jesus was offering Israel
 - It's the true Sabbath rest of every Christian
 - Once you place your faith in Jesus, there's no need to keep a weekly Sabbath because you already have the greater Sabbath
- So if you've ever been pressured by someone to keep a Sabbath day of rest, then you now know what a yoke feels like
 - Ironically, they may have wanted you to experience refreshment, but because it was presented as a mandatory rule, it actually created a burden
 - That's how laws work...they exist to convict us when we fail, they don't make obedience easier or more joyful
 - So when someone told you that keeping a Sabbath day was a requirement to please God, you felt constrained
 - And of course, on days you couldn't rest you felt guilty
 - Either way, it became a burden, a yoke on your shoulders that you were told to bear
 - That was a mini-Pharisaic moment, and if that's you tonight, then please hear Jesus' words again...His yoke is easy and light
 - With Jesus every day is your Sabbath, because Jesus kept that burden and all the burdens of the Law for you
 - By faith in Him you are freed from the burden of keeping meaningless rules
 - In place of that you live every day for His glory, following His Spirit, not worrying about old laws written for past generations
 - And (frankly) you couldn't keep the Sabbath even if you tried
 - Because going to Church is not keeping the Sabbath
 - Keeping the Sabbath means no work on one day every week
 - So no driving, no cooking, no emailing, no web surfing, no yard work, no working out at the gym, no hunting, no fishing, no riding bikes, no homework,

no chores, no work of any kind

- That's what keeping the Sabbath means, so who has ever actually kept the Sabbath that way in any case?
- Once again, keeping Sabbath is a burden that Jesus has taken for us, so we may pick up His easy and light yoke
- May I humbly suggest this is a good example of why our church exists...of why it needs to exist
 - Biblical ignorance leads people to accept burdens that Christ didn't give His Church, burdens like those the Pharisees gave Israel
 - And ignorance also prevents us from obeying Him in the ways He did intend, like serving Him seven days a week
 - Understanding the Bible properly removes unnecessary burdens to make room for a life of serving Christ in joy and freedom

- Tonight we move into Chapter 12 of Matthew, the pivotal chapter in this Gospel
 - And as we do, we also transition out of studying the first reason for Jesus' rejection and into a study of the second reason
 - The first reason was the hard hearts of the people of Israel
 - They preferred their system of rules and rituals over a plain carpenter from Nazareth claiming to offer Israel the Kingdom
 - But there was a second reason for Jesus' rejection, one that worked hand-in-hand with the first
 - The second reason was the religious leaders of Jesus' day
 - They set themselves against Jesus because He denied their authority and their system of rules and regulations
 - And in particular, they turned against Jesus when He disregarded their extensive system of Sabbath day rules
 - As I explained at the end of Chapter 11, the Pharisees had created more rules for keeping the Sabbath than for any other area of Jewish life
 - By Jesus' day the Pharisees had established some 1,500 rules for how Jews must observe the Sabbath
 - And they claimed their rules were equal to Scripture
 - In the process, the Pharisees turned the weekly day of rest into a day of burdens
 - Which is why at the end of Chapter 11 Jesus invited Israel to come to Him for rest...rest from the Pharisaic system now and rest for their souls
- But when Jesus positioned Himself as an alternative to the Pharisaic system of Sabbath keeping, He put Himself on a collision course with the religious leaders
 - It was bad enough that Jesus claimed to forgive sins and that He associated with tax collectors and the like
 - But now He was striking at the heart of Pharisaic Judaism
 - He was threatening the foundation of their authority and power and wealth
 - So if Jesus was looking to pick a fight with the religious leaders, He couldn't have chosen a better way to do it
 - So in this chapter Matthew shows us how Jesus' opposition to the Pharisees' Sabbath rules contributed to His rejection and death
 - Matthew opens Chapter 12 with two scenes of Jesus contending with the leaders over proper Sabbath observance
 - The first is found in vs.1-8

Matt. 12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat.

Matt. 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

Matt. 12:3 But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions,
Matt. 12:4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?

- Matthew sets the scene here by saying “at that time”, referring to the time of the events of Chapter 11 when Jesus was in the cities of the Galilee
 - This is the time when He condemned the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin for their unbelief
 - This is the time when He confronted the crowds for their hard hearts
 - And at this same time, Matthew says Jesus was contending with the Pharisees over the Sabbath
 - In the first incident, we find Jesus and His disciples walking through a grain field on the Sabbath
 - The Jewish Sabbath is Friday evening until Saturday evening, so this event happened on a Saturday somewhere in the Galilee
 - And the Galilee is a sparsely populated, rural area of Israel – both then as it still is today
 - It’s a farming region, with gentle rolling hills covered with grain fields and other crops
 - So on this day Jesus and His disciples passed through a grain field, perhaps because they were hungry and wanted a snack
 - And the Pharisees were following close behind, looking for an opportunity on the Sabbath to accuse Jesus
 - With 1,500+ rules devoted to Sabbath observance, the Sabbath was the best day of the week to find fault
- And sure enough, they witness Jesus’ disciples plucking heads of grain in the field and eating them, so they accuse the men of doing something unlawful
 - Now, the law of Moses specifically permitted this type of behavior

Deut. 23:24 “When you enter your neighbor’s vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you are fully satisfied, but you shall not put any in your basket.

Deut. 23:25 “When you enter your neighbor’s standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor’s standing grain.

- The idea in the law was very straightforward...
- A traveler was allowed to help himself to a few heads of grain in a field or a few grapes from a vineyard without paying the owner

- But he couldn't go the next step of taking a sickle or a basket to collect the produce because this would be considered stealing
- But in this case, the Pharisees weren't accusing the disciples of stealing
 - Notice they say Jesus' disciples were breaking the *Sabbath*
 - How? Among those 1,500 or so rules the Pharisees invented for Sabbath observance were rules on plucking heads of grain
- The Pharisees determined that when a man plucked an individual grain from a stalk, he was reaping, and reaping is a form of work
 - Moreover, when the man rubs the husk away from the kernel of a grain, he was winnowing which is also work
 - And if the man placed the kernel of wheat in his pocket to eat later, he was storing grain which was...you guessed it...work
- If that seems ridiculous to you, then welcome to first century Pharisaic Judaism...but it gets even worse
 - The Pharisees refused to even walk in a field of grass on a Sabbath for fear of breaking the Sabbath by working
 - He's an explanation from Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum for why:

If someone asked such a rabbi, "What is wrong with walking on the grass on the Sabbath day," his answer would be, "Nothing. It is permissible to walk on the grass on the Sabbath day." However, there is a problem. What looks only like a grassy field might have one stalk of wheat growing wild in it. A person walking through the field of grass might inadvertently step on that one stalk of wheat, separate the wheat from its stalk, and become guilty of reaping on the Sabbath day. Furthermore, if his foot came down and twisted the wheat just enough to separate the wheat from the chaff, he would be guilty of threshing on the Sabbath day. If he continued to walk, the outer hem of his garment might cause just enough breeze to blow the chaff away, and he would be guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath day. Finally, once the person had gone, a bird or rodent might see the exposed piece of wheat and swallow it, causing him to be guilty of storing the wheat on the Sabbath day

- This is a good example of rabbinical logic at work
 - It starts with a command of God, "Thou shall not work on the Sabbath" and then the rabbis took over
 - Seeking to appear wise in these matters, rabbis identified supposed loopholes that needed closing to protect against violations
 - So they created rules that closed the loopholes, but of course there were always new loopholes to find
 - In time these men stretched God's commandment beyond recognition, to the point of ridiculousness

- Remember how the Lord described Sabbath rest for Israel?

Ex. 23:12 “Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.

- The Lord said His Sabbath rest for Israel was intended to give His people refreshment
- Israel would cease strenuous labor so they could enjoy a day of idleness and relaxation
- Which tells us that God’s purpose in the Sabbath was to reduce burden in the lives of His people, not to add burden
 - Which means the Lord wouldn’t wish that His command to rest become a cause for worry over trivial matters like plucking grain
 - Yet that’s what the Pharisees have done with the Sabbath day
- So Jesus responds to the Pharisees’ charge with three arguments
 - In the first argument, Jesus denies the legitimacy of the Pharisees’ rules using Scripture to contradict the Pharisees
 - The Scripture Jesus uses comes from the story of David and Saul

1Sam. 21:1 Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, “Why are you alone and no one with you?”

1Sam. 21:2 David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, ‘Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.’

1Sam. 21:3 “Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.”

1Sam. 21:4 The priest answered David and said, “There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women.”

1Sam. 21:5 David answered the priest and said to him, “Surely women have been kept from us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels be holy?”

1Sam. 21:6 So the priest gave him consecrated bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away.

- Before David became king, Saul was on the throne
 - Saul became jealous of David’s growing popularity and threatened David’s life

causing David to flee with a few loyal men

- While on the lam, David needed food, so he sought support from someone he trusted: Ahimelech the priest
 - So David traveled to Nob, where the tabernacle was located at that time, and he asks the priest for food
- Ahimelech, the priest, says the only food available was the consecrated bread, referring to the bread used in the tabernacle
 - The law of Moses requires that once a week the priests placed bread in the Holy Place of the tabernacle
 - The shewbread, as it was called, was to remain in the Holy Place one week and then the old bread was taken out and given to the priests
 - Leviticus 24 commands that once the bread was removed from the tabernacle, it must be given to the priests as their portion
- But when David asks for food, the priest offers David the shewbread so long as David's men were ritually clean
 - At first glance it may seem to us that the priest was violating the Law by giving bread to a non priest like David
 - If so, then why would Jesus cite this example? How does it help His argument against the Pharisees?
- To understand Jesus' example properly, we first need to understand how the priest could give David the bread without breaking the law in Leviticus
 - The answer is that Ahimelech wasn't offering David the shewbread that was presently sitting in the tabernacle
 - That bread could not be eaten by David...it couldn't be eaten by anyone...not even by the priests
 - Before the shewbread could be eaten, it had to spend a week in the tabernacle and then be removed
 - So if Ahimelech is offering David consecrated bread, then that means this is bread that had already been removed from the Holy Place after its week of service
 - And since that bread had already been given to the priests, it now belonged to Ahimelech
 - And he could do whatever he wanted with that bread...it was his property at that point
 - There was nothing written in the law of Moses prohibiting the priests from sharing their bread with non priests
 - So Ahimelech and David weren't breaking the law of Moses...but they *were* breaking the Pharisee's so-called oral law
 - The Pharisees had rules for the priesthood too
 - And one of their rules said that the priests could never share the shewbread with a non-priest

- That rule was part of the Pharisees' Mishnah, their rulebook
- That rulebook is not Scripture, but the Pharisees said it was equal to Scripture
- As you may remember, I taught in past weeks how the Pharisees claimed their rules had been passed down orally from Moses
 - When Moses received the written law from God on the mountain, they said God gave Moses additional commandments
 - Those additional laws were not written down at the time, but instead were passed from generation to generation orally
 - Finally, the Pharisees recorded the oral law in the Mishnah
 - Obviously their claim of God giving the Mishnah to Moses orally was complete fiction, invented to give legitimacy to their rules
 - And Jesus uses the story of David and Ahimelech to expose this myth of an oral law
 - The Pharisees claimed that their rules originally came from God to Moses
 - And if so, then that would mean David and Ahimelech would have known about this oral law also, and they would have followed it
 - But since the Mishnah forbid priests from giving shewbread to non-priests, Ahimelech and David wouldn't have engaged in this transaction
 - And yet the transaction took place, and neither was concerned about breaking any law
 - So Jesus uses the example of David to prove that the Pharisees' rules did not exist in David's day and therefore they did not come from God
 - The Mishnah was an invention of the rabbis, created long after Moses, and as such it had no authority over the people
 - So any rules against picking grain on the Sabbath were nonsense and could not be used to convict Jesus' disciples
- The myth about the oral law is the oldest trick in the book...a person or a religious institution claiming they've heard from God in some matter
 - They say this so they can give legitimacy to their rules and stop people from challenging their authority
 - But it's a lie...always...and when we're confronted with that nonsense, we just need to do what Jesus did
 - Go to the Bible to find the truth
 - And when that truth contradicts what the person or institution claims to have heard from God, the Bible exposes the person or the institution to be a fraud
 - It's what Jesus did here, and it's what we can do too
 - This is perhaps the single most important reason to be life-long students of the Bible, to really dig in and understand it cover to cover
 - Knowing God's word inside and out is your best and only defense against nonsense...

- Against false gospels that deny grace and offer no comfort or assurance
- Against legalistic burdens that rob you of your freedom in Christ
- Against harmful and manipulative relationships that seek to exploit you for your money or allegiance
- The enemy has an unlimited number of lies at his disposal, but in order for his schemes to work, he depends on his targets remaining biblically ignorant
 - The writer of Hebrews warns believers about biblical illiteracy

Heb. 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Heb. 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

Heb. 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- The writer describes a believer maturing in his or her faith like a child moving from mother's milk to eating solid food
- Those who subsist only on milk remain weak, while those who mature into the meat of God's word gain strength
- But those who are not accustomed to the word of God, who never graduate to the meat of the word, remain spiritual infants
 - These believers never fully understand God nor the world properly and as a result they are susceptible to false teaching
 - They aren't equipped to discern the difference between good and evil, the writer says
- That was the central issue for Israel in Jesus' day...
 - They didn't understand the word of God so they fell prey to the evil teaching of Pharisees
 - Likewise, today we have millions of biblically-illiterate Christians falling prey to many schemes of the enemy
 - It's tragic...and it's preventable if we would just follow Jesus' example: learn our Bibles and use what we learn
- So Jesus' first response to their accusation was denying the authority and legitimacy of the Pharisee's rules...the Mishnah is not equal to Scripture
 - And then we find Jesus' second point in v.5

Matt. 12:5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?"

Matt. 12:6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here."

Matt. 12:7 “But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.

- The temple was a seven-day-a-week operation, so even on the Sabbath the priests were required to work making sacrifices for the people
 - In fact, Sabbaths were extra busy days for the priests because of additional sacrifices and special Sabbath rituals
 - There were other exceptions to the Sabbath law as well
 - Circumcisions were always performed on a boy’s 8th day of life even if that day happened to fall on a Sabbath
 - And even the Pharisees allowed exceptions to the Sabbath in situations like midwives attending to births
 - Jesus cites the example of priests serving on Sabbath to demonstrate how the Sabbath law served a higher purpose
 - The purpose of the Sabbath law wasn’t simply prohibiting work merely for the sake of obeying a rule
 - The purpose of the Sabbath was to relieve Israel of burdens
 - So when keeping the Sabbath law added unnecessary burden, the Lord set the law aside to ensure that burdens were reduced
 - For example, a mother in labor on the Sabbath would be burdened by being denied the care of a midwife, so an exception to the Sabbath was necessary
 - Likewise, the people of Israel would have been burdened if they lacked priests to officiate in the temple on the Sabbath, so an exception was made
 - Jesus’ point is that the ultimate goal of the Sabbath was to promote rest not burden, and that took precedence over rules
- But that was a foreign concept to the Pharisees...keeping rules was the point for those men, regardless of how burdensome it became
 - In fact, rules didn’t exist to serve men...men existed to serve the rules
 - And the more burdensome the rule was, the more the Pharisees felt they were pleasing God by keeping it
 - That’s false religion in a nutshell...
 - When following God feels like a burden rather than a joy, you are doing it wrong
 - If attending church or saying prayers or giving money or doing anything is something you dread or resent, then you are trapped in a false system
 - You’re obeying rules or rituals rather than obeying God, because Christ’s burden is light and joyful, He says
 - Many people associate God and religion with the feeling of shouldering burdens
 - Because they only know rule keeping, they think that the more burdens they bear, the more rules they keep, the happier God is with them

- If that's how you feel, you'd make a pretty good Pharisee
- Notice Jesus says in v.7 that if the Pharisees had truly understood God's word, they would have known He desired compassion not sacrifice
 - That's a reference to Hosea 6

**Hos. 6:6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

- My Bible version says "loyalty" but the Hebrew word is *chesed*
- That word could be translated as lovingkindness or faithfulness
- The Lord says He desires we have hearts of faithfulness and obedience; He doesn't delight in our sacrifices
 - A sacrifice is a work made necessary by sin, and it cannot restore us to God
 - Faith recognizes that Christ made the only sacrifice God requires, and so now we don't need to make our own
 - Jesus was saying that these men were not in a relationship with God by faith, which is why they couldn't understand the Sabbath
- That's why we say true Christianity is not a pursuit of religion or ritual...it's a pursuit of a relationship with God through Christ by His word
 - Christians don't get fixated on the minutiae of rules and regulations
 - We're strive to know and obey God's heart
 - And the word of God reveals those things to us
 - Now of course, the word also gives us rules to obey
 - But we know our relationship with God was established by our faith, not by our rule-keeping
 - And for the same reason, we know that nothing we do for God could ever make us more approved
 - Likewise, nothing we fail to do could ever diminish the Lord's love for us
 - The Father approves of you because His Son did all the work to make you acceptable to God
 - The Father's love for you is based in what Christ did, not what you did, which is why you can't lose what you gain by faith
 - You could choose to never pray, never give a dime to God, and skip church for months, and God would still love you just as much because of what Christ did on the cross
 - Now, the same can't be said for how I would feel about you...[joke]
- These men had no faith; all they had were ritual and rule, and for that reason they missed the Sabbath's true purpose

- Notice in v.6 Jesus says that something greater than the temple has come
 - Obviously, Jesus means He is greater than a stone building
 - And if God's word prioritized the temple above the Sabbath, then certainly the Messiah takes priority over any Sabbath rules
- To a Jew, nothing on earth was more holy than the temple, because the temple held the glory of God Himself
 - Even today, we find devout Jews praying at the Western Wall because of its proximity to a temple that's been gone 2,000 years
 - But Jesus says He was greater than the temple, meaning He was the Messiah
 - And faith in the Messiah is the true fulfillment of the Sabbath, which leads us to Jesus' final point

Matt. 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

- Jesus says He is the Lord of the Sabbath
 - More specifically Jesus says the Messiah (the Son of Man) is the Lord of the Sabbath
 - In a simple sense Jesus was saying that as God, He alone determines what is and isn't a violation of the Sabbath
 - The Pharisees' rules concerning the Sabbath were not binding on God Himself
 - Beyond that, Jesus was also speaking of the ultimate purpose of the Sabbath law: it's a picture of Christ's redeeming work on our behalf
 - As I mentioned in Chapter 11, the Sabbath day was an object lesson on what it means to have faith in Jesus
 - The Jews worked six days each week and rested for one, but that day of rest was very temporary
 - Before long that day was over and work began again
 - In that sense, the Sabbath day reminded Israel that their work was never finished
 - You probably know that feeling, don't you?
 - If you work or go to school Monday through Friday, then you're familiar with that feeling that comes every Sunday evening
 - You know your weekend is almost over, and you feel the pressure of another work week building even before Monday arrives
 - That's why we look forward to retirement so much...it's the permanent weekend that never ends...permanent rest
- The Lord established the Sabbath day for Israel to illustrate for them what it's like working your way into Heaven
 - It's like working at a job where there's no retirement
 - You pray, attend church, give your money, volunteer, and many other things hoping to please God enough to earn Heaven

- It's work, it's burden, it's worry...and it never ends
- There's never a day you wake up and say confidently I've done enough to go to Heaven...I can rest from my works
- For the person trying to work their way into Heaven, every day of life feels like a Monday and that weekend rest is always in the distance
 - And even if you have a particularly good day and feel caught up with God, like a weekend, that rest comes to an end eventually
 - And then the work begins again...that's a miserable and hopeless way to approach God
- The Bible says that no one can enter Heaven by doing works or being "good" or trying hard...you can't be good enough to enter Heaven
 - There is only one way to enter God's rest...by faith in Christ's work
 - Only Jesus was good enough to enter Heaven, so we have to receive His goodness by faith rather than relying on our own
- So in that sense, the Bible calls Jesus our Sabbath; He is our rest
 - Hebrews 4:3 says we who have believed in Jesus enter God's rest, God's Sabbath
 - And Hebrews 4:10 says

Heb. 4:10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

- The one who places faith in Jesus rests from his or her works of trying to reach Heaven
 - Just faith alone in Jesus is required to enter Heaven
 - And God intended that the temporary, weekly Sabbath day would create a longing in Israel for a permanent rest
 - And that longing would lead God's people to place their faith in Messiah's work on their behalf
- The Pharisees condemned Jesus' disciples for failing to accept the Mishnah's burdens even as they failed to recognize God's true Sabbath
 - Don't make the same mistake...don't mistake ritual for relationship
 - Enter God's rest by faith in Jesus, so you may live a life free from the burdens of working for Heaven

- It's been a few weeks since we last studied in Matthew, so let's revisit what's going on in chapter 12
 - Chapter 12 is the turning point in Matthew's Gospel, the chapter where that generation of Israel loses the kingdom
 - By the time we reach the end of this chapter, Jesus will have withdrawn His offer of the Kingdom for their unbelief
 - And He will issue an ultimatum to the nation concerning His return
 - Meanwhile, the nation's rejection of Jesus altered Jesus' entire approach to ministry
 - We'll study those effects later at the conclusion of this chapter
 - But first, we need to finish Matthew's explanation for how and why that rejection moment happened
 - In Chapter 11 Matthew gave us the first major reason, which was the hard hearts of a people committed to pursuing self-righteousness
 - Now in Chapter 12, Matthew is showing us the second reason – one that involved the opposition of the religious leaders
 - That second reason was the Sabbath
 - Or more specifically, it was Jesus' refusal to acknowledge the authority of the Pharisees' endless list of Sabbath day rules
 - For that reason more than any other, the Pharisees conspired to have Jesus killed
- We might wonder why the Pharisees would be so upset with Jesus over something so minor
 - But in Jesus' day (and even still today), the Sabbath observance was something special for Jews; it was the law above all the rest
 - The rabbis called the Sabbath day Israel's "queen"
 - And because the rabbis were so enamored with the Sabbath, they gave it special attention in their rules
 - There were over 1,500 rabbinical rules for Sabbath observance
 - Which turned the day of rest into a complex maze of regulations bringing burden and worry
 - For that reason, Jesus ignored and mocked the religious leaders' Sabbath rules
 - He did so to make clear that the Pharisees' rules weren't God's rules
 - In fact they weren't even in keeping with the spirit of God's law
 - But the Pharisees depended on their system to maintain power over the people
 - So when Jesus openly rejected their Sabbath regulations, he infuriated the Pharisees
 - And ultimately, it became their chief reason to kill Him
 - So with that background, let's return to Chapter 12

Matt. 12:9 Departing from there, He went into their synagogue.

Matt. 12:10 And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” — so that they might accuse Him.

Matt. 12:11 And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?

Matt. 12:12 “How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

Matt. 12:13 Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.

Matt. 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

- When I started this chapter, I mentioned that Matthew has assembled several examples of Sabbaths from among many that happened in the Galilee
 - He wanted to illustrate how absurd the Pharisees’ Sabbath rules were but also how determined Jesus was to ignore them
 - Our second example takes place in a Galilean synagogue, perhaps the one in Capernaum
 - While in Israel, our group stood in this synagogue...probably in the very place where Jesus spoke these words
 - And on that Saturday, Jesus encounters a man with a withered hand, a deformity he probably possessed since birth
 - This type of infirmity was worse than it sounded
 - In that day if a man couldn’t perform work with his hands, he was virtually useless and therefore likely destitute
 - And being unable to work in that day meant a life of poverty and insecurity and stigma as he depended on charity for support
 - The man’s presence in the synagogue on this day was not a coincidence
 - Jews often viewed a birth defect as a sign the person was under judgment from God because of his parents’ sin or his own sin
 - Such a person would be looked down upon and even ostracized
 - So for this man to have secured a prominent seat in the synagogue on the occasion of Jesus’ visit is most unusual
 - Therefore, we must assume he gained entrance by the influence of powerful people
 - In other words, the Pharisees probably planted him in the congregation to entrap Jesus on the Sabbath
 - In fact, Matthew and Luke tell us that the Pharisees were hoping they could catch Jesus violating their rules for the Sabbath
- In Matthew’s earlier example of Sabbath conflict, the Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples

of violating the Sabbath walking through a grain field

- But that confrontation didn't go as they expected, so now they've clearly decided to go after Jesus Himself
 - In v.10 Matthew says the Pharisees ask Jesus if healing on the Sabbath was lawful
 - They were asking Jesus to render an opinion concerning one of their Sabbath rules
 - There was a rabbinical rule that prohibited healing on the Sabbath because it was considered work
 - The Pharisees accused Jesus of violating this rule many times across the Gospels
- In this moment, we know the leaders didn't ask their question out of a sincere interest in Jesus' opinion
 - It's a trap...they've placed a sympathetic figure in front of Jesus and now they're daring Him to heal the man on the Sabbath
 - When Jesus performed the healing, they could declare Jesus guilty of violating the Sabbath
 - Jesus would be discredited before the people and He could be charged with the death penalty under Jewish law
- How does their accusation of breaking the Sabbath stand up against Scripture?
 - Simply put, it doesn't
 - The Pharisees' oral law forbid healing on the Sabbath, but God's Law says nothing specifically about healing
 - So there was no specific prohibition against healing in the Law
 - And when the Law is silent on a specific situation, we must fall back to applying general principles found in the Law
- So that's exactly what Jesus does here
 - He declines to debate the merits of their rabbinical rule against healing on the Sabbath
 - And instead, in vs.11-12 Jesus uses a very traditional *midrashnic* technique of answering a question with a question
 - And by His question, Jesus points the Pharisees' attention back to a principle found in God's Law
- Jesus asks the Pharisees how they would respond if one of their animals was in distress and in need of assistance on the Sabbath
 - Naturally, they would rescue the animal even on the Sabbath as an act of compassion
 - They wouldn't let the animal suffer even for a day, because the Law commands compassion for the weak and vulnerable

Ex. 23:2 “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;

Ex. 23:3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

Ex. 23:4 “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.

Ex. 23:5 “If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.

Ex. 23:6 “You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute.

- The Law instructs Israel to show compassion for the weak at all times
 - It was always the right thing to do even on the Sabbath, even for the sake of an animal...even your enemy’s animal
 - And so Jesus says, surely if God’s law is concerned about the plight of animals, how much more the plight of people?
- Yet when the Pharisees turned from the needs of animals to the needs of people, they became *less* compassionate
 - The Pharisees taught that healing on the Sabbath was permitted only in life-or-death situations
 - So in less critical situations, as in the case of this crippled man, a healing had to wait for the next day
 - They were more focused on holding people to keeping their rules than on ministering to the needs of people
- Here again, we see an example of a principle we learned earlier
 - Any time keeping the Sabbath created unreasonable burdens on God’s people, then the Sabbath restriction was set aside
 - Because the goal of the Sabbath was rest – refreshment – not adding more burdens
- Jesus cites this principle of compassion, or “doing good” as He calls it, to defend his healing work on a Sabbath
 - Jesus says in v.12 that since showing compassion for an animal on the Sabbath was good, then showing compassion for a person is better
 - And making that man wait even one more day longer for his healing wouldn’t be compassionate, not if Jesus possessed the means to heal him now
 - That would have meant enduring one more day of burden instead of rest
 - And this man deserved as least as much compassion as an animal
 - So with that, Jesus orders the man to stretch out his hand
 - And as the man does, it’s restored – meaning it’s returned to a healthy state, a miracle healing
 - The room probably erupted in astonishment as the man celebrated his freedom from his curse

- And all the Pharisees can do at that point is slink out the door
- Before we move on, I want to draw your attention to the faith of the man Jesus healed
 - Matthew described this man's hand as withered, using a Greek word that literally translates as "dry", as in shrunken – a life-long condition
 - No doubt this man must have endured cruel jokes as a child and even as an adult
 - How many times do we imagine this man was taunted by other children who mocked him by telling him to stretch out his hand?
 - Or as an adult, how many times do we suppose this man was cursed or ridiculed by strangers because of his odd appearance?
 - So now imagine what went through this man's mind as Jesus asked him to stretch out his hand in that very public forum
 - I wonder if his mind went back to all that mocking
 - Did he wonder whether this too was a cruel joke?
 - The answer, of course, is no, because the man does as Jesus asks
 - And what led this man to obey Jesus? He had faith to believe that if he obeyed, the Lord would respond in mercy
 - I'm sure he had heard of Jesus' healing ministry and knew of Jesus' power
 - So when Jesus issued that call, the man responded in faith anticipating something good was going to happen
- The point I'm making is this...the man's healing required a response of faith to Jesus' call
 - Ask yourself what would have happened if he had hesitated to extend his hand perhaps out of doubt or fear?
 - What if he had asked for some assurance from Jesus that a healing would take place
 - What if he had waited to see if his hand was healed first before he took the risk of stretching it out
 - I believe the answer is he would have missed the miracle
 - This man's story gives us a second principle to consider in Scripture
 - The principle is that the Lord call us at times to take a step of faith which requires we trust Him if we are to see where He's leading us
 - If we answer that call, the Lord delights to reveal Himself to us in new ways, and in the process our walk is strengthened
 - If we refuse His call, we may never find out what was waiting for us on the other side of faith
- We see examples of this principle at work across the Bible
 - For example, God asked Abraham to take a step of faith...

Gen. 12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;

- The Lord asked Abraham to move away from his home so that he might receive a new land as an inheritance
- Abraham didn’t know where he was going or what he would find when he arrived
- And the only way he could know is if he agreed to go as God called him to do
- He first had to answer God’s call by faith in order to learn the rest of the story
- We might ask how did Abraham even know which direction to begin walking? East? West? North? South?
 - But that question misses the point...the Lord isn’t asking us to determine the path when He calls us to follow Him
 - He only expects us to obey in faith that He’s taking us somewhere we need to go
 - And as we take a step of obedience, He will reveal the rest of the plan
 - Simply put, God can’t steer a stationary object, so I imagine that as Abraham began to walk, then the Lord directed His steps
- Or consider the examples of Noah, Jacob, Gideon, Daniel or many others who God called to do something that seemed impossible
 - Noah had to build his impossibly large boat *before* the rain came if he expected to see God’s mercy in the flood
 - Jacob had to leave his family and land *before* he knew how the Lord would bring him home
 - Gideon had to enter into battle with 300 men against many thousand *before* he could know how the Lord would grant victory
 - And Daniel had to make up his mind to defy the orders of the king of Babylon *before* he knew how the Lord would protect him
- And each of us will have moments in our walk with Christ when we must take a step of faith before we know how the Lord will complete the rest of the sentence
 - I am convinced that every believer lives every day of their life with a call from the Lord in some area of their life
 - That call remains in our heart and on our mind until we obey it
 - Maybe it’s a call to walk away from some sinful habit or a call to begin a new work of service or a call to support a ministry financially
 - Perhaps the Lord is convicting you to become more involved in studying the Bible or in making prayer a bigger part of your life
 - Maybe the Lord is calling you to walk away from your current life as He did Abraham or Jacob so you can serve Him in a new way

- But in every case, God issues the call, then He expects us to take a step of faith knowing He will give us the rest of the plan in time
 - If living this kind of life with Jesus sounds strange or impossible, then let me encourage you to consider it
 - Honestly, you'll never know the miracles you're missing because you're unwilling to take that step of faith
 - Missionary in Kenya...
- So let's say God is calling you to spend more time in study of His word
 - But you hesitate because you think you don't have the time in your schedule
 - Maybe the real problem is you don't have enough faith that God can give you back the time?
 - Bible study example...
- Or maybe you believe you don't have the budget to support that missionary in need or you don't have the skill to get involved in that ministry opportunity...
 - Or maybe God's telling you to put away some sin in your life yet you can't find the self-control to make it happen
 - Be encouraged tonight to put the Lord your God to the test...
- Take a step of faith, show God you're serious about obeying Him
 - And then watch what God does next to move you down that path
 - That's what *walking* with the Lord means...it's a step-by-step journey of obedience in response to God's call
- So back to our story, Jesus has won another battle over the Sabbath, but Matthew says the fight with the Pharisees was just beginning
 - In v.14 Matthew says the Pharisees began conspiring against Jesus seeking to destroy Him
 - They convened a meeting in which they discuss how to bring Jesus and His ministry to an end
 - John describes that meeting this way

John 11:47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.

John 11:48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

- Notice what concerned the Pharisees about Jesus
 - Were they concerned that Jesus might be a fraud? No
 - Were they concerned that Jesus was teaching false things to the people? No
- They were concerned that the people might believe Jesus' claims to be king *because* Jesus' claims were compelling

- And if that happened, Jesus' rise to power would threaten the Romans' and lead to an end to the Pharisees' authority
- Their response proves what we already knew about these men: they were not interested in the truth but only in preserving power
- And therefore, they were willing to undertake any action – even murder – to maintain their system of power
- For that reason the Pharisees are the Bible's poster children for the sin of self-righteousness, which blinded that entire generation of Israel
 - Paul describes the problem this way

Rom. 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

Rom. 10:2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Rom. 10:3 For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Rom. 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

- Paul had a heart to see his countrymen come to faith, but Paul said self-righteousness stood in their way
 - The Jewish people in Jesus' day pursued God earnestly and many had a sincere desire to please Him...
 - But their zealotry was not accompanied by knowledge, Paul says
 - The Greek word used here for knowledge means knowledge of the truth, as opposed to an opinion or an assumption
 - The Pharisees were very knowledgeable, but the knowledge accumulated wasn't of the truth
 - They were experts in their own system of rules
 - Their dedication to that system certainly made them appear pious but that righteous appearance was a facade
 - Paul says they held their beliefs sincerely...but they were sincerely wrong
 - And when you're running in the wrong direction, running faster won't make it better
 - But that's what the Israel of Jesus' day was doing...running as hard as they could in the wrong direction toward self righteousness
 - They believed that adhering to a rabbinical Judaism system would bring them righteousness
 - And Paul says once Israel's leaders had fallen in love with that system, they would not subject themselves to God's righteousness

- Paul means that when God revealed that Israel could receive His righteousness through faith in Jesus, they turned it down
- Here we have the third and final principle for tonight... if you are determined to pursue God the wrong way, you don't get credit for effort
 - Doing things we prefer in place of answering the call of God isn't obedience...it's just serving ourselves
 - We may assume God will be impressed with our self-sacrifice, but He sees it for what it is: self-validation, self-satisfaction, self-righteousness
 - We're like Pharisees, committed to a religious system of our own making rather than to a relationship rooted in God's word
 - Let's face it, there's a seductive quality to systems of self-righteousness
 - Self-righteousness appeals because it places us in the driver's seat and allows us to feel good when we achieve difficult things
 - And the more difficult we can make our system, the more we believe we are worthy of receiving God's praise
 - That's why Pharisaic Judaism was motivated to keep adding rules
 - As they made pursuing self-righteousness increasingly more difficult, they judged themselves that much more worthy of God's praise
 - So when Jesus showed up condemning the Pharisees' system rather than congratulating them for it, the Pharisees couldn't accept it
 - They were convinced the Messiah, when He came for Israel, would have praised the Pharisees for their hard work and pious lifestyle
 - They expected gold stars on their report card, yet Jesus gave them an "F"
 - So as He rejected them, they rejected Him
- But true righteousness which comes by faith understands that the Lord has already done the hard work, a work we could never do
 - Jesus offered Himself as a spotless, sinless sacrifice for us and gave us credit for His sinless life lived on Earth
 - So now that Christ has done that work for us, we have nothing left to contribute...as Jesus said, it is finished
 - That's why our faith in Christ brings us liberty and freedom from the Law
 - Because Jesus kept the Law, so now we have received full credit for keeping the Law through our faith in Him
 - As Paul said:

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- Can you do better than perfection? Can you keep more of the Law than Jesus did on

your behalf? Certainly not

- Can you produce in yourself a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness you received from Christ by faith? Impossible

Gal. 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

- So don't waste time trying
- Don't turn your walk with Christ into a pursuit of self-righteousness
- If you allow your heart be tempted into a pursuit of self-righteousness, you are throwing away the freedom Christ won for you

Col. 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

Col. 2:21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

Col. 2:22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Col. 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- As believers, we need to understand where our righteousness comes from and where it doesn't
 - From the moment of our confession in Christ, we become perfect in our spirit made so by God's Spirit
 - Which is why Paul couldn't understand how the Galatians thought they could improve their standing by works of flesh
 - Are you walking with Christ that way?
 - Do you think God is more pleased with you because you take burdens upon yourself?
 - Maybe you try to keep a Sabbath or observe certain other works of the Law given to Israel
 - Perhaps you observe them for your own edification, which is fine
 - But if you observe them because you think doing so will make you more righteous or pleasing to God, then you are pursuing self-righteousness
 - And if you look down your nose at other Christians who refuse to share in your convictions, then you're thinking like a Pharisee
 - We don't want to rest in our own works of piety, even if those works come straight out of the Bible

- We want to forever rest in Christ's work, knowing that we have nothing whatsoever to offer toward our own righteousness
- That's what we mean here when we say we want to help believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ
- It means helping people learn how to move away from works of self-righteousness and toward greater reliance on Christ's work
 - We want to apply these three principles:
 - We seek ways to relieve burdens and increase compassion, not merely enforce rule-keeping
 - We want to encourage steps of faith in answer to God's call so that we might all experience more of the Lord's grace in our lives
 - And we want to put away any pursuit of self-righteousness that may impede our walk of faith
- That's what growing in the grace of God looks like, and it always looks radical and even threatening to the world – just as it did in Christ's day

- The die has been cast...we've reached the point of no return for Israel and for Jesus
 - Jesus made His best case to Israel as their Messiah Who has come offering them a Kingdom
 - Nevertheless, most of the people remain unconvinced and now Israel's leaders have turned openly hostile toward Jesus
 - Obviously, this impasse can't continue forever
 - Jesus can't offer Himself to Israel indefinitely hoping they will eventually come around to the truth
 - Sooner or later a decision must be made, and that time has now come in Chapter 12
 - Matthew is ready to show us the final straw, the moment that Israel lost the Kingdom in that day
 - And to bring us to that point, Matthew first explains why the offer of the Kingdom couldn't last forever

Matt. 12:15 But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all,

Matt. 12:16 and warned them not to tell who He was.

Matt. 12:17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

**Matt. 12:18 "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN;
MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED;
I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM,
AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.**

**Matt. 12:19 "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT;
NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.**

**Matt. 12:20 "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF,
AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT,
UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.**

Matt. 12:21 "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

- Being fully aware of the Pharisees' conspiracy, Matthew says Jesus withdrew for a time to avoid further conflict
 - Jesus left the synagogue where He had just healed the man and then probably retreated into the hills around the Sea of Galilee
 - Matthew says the crowds followed Him as usual, and Jesus continued performing healing for all of them as usual
 - Jesus knew the time to withdraw the Kingdom offer had arrived
 - But that was all the more reason to heal as many as He could in the meantime
 - Because the time for mass healings was also coming to an end
 - But now notice a new detail that appears for the first time in Matthew's account

- Jesus instructs the crowds not to share His identity with others
- That statement in v.16 is our clue that a change was taking place
- Jesus was beginning His transition from a Kingdom proposal to a Kingdom program
- In the period of the Kingdom proposal, the whole point of Jesus' ministry was to announce Himself to Israel and propose a union of sorts
 - Jesus offered Himself as King bringing the Kingdom, and then He waited to see if Israel would accept that proposal
 - But once they reject that proposal, the plan of God moves forward without Israel, at least for a time
 - At that point, the entire thrust of Jesus' earthly ministry changes to preparing His disciples to assume leadership over the Kingdom program
- Matthew then reminds us this transition was in keeping with prophecy that foretold the Messiah's rejection and the need for Him to take His message elsewhere
 - Isaiah 42 says the Messiah would come to Israel as a Servant, One chosen by the Father
 - The Messiah wouldn't be a man of ego or self-promotion...He lived a humble life
 - And even when the time came to present Himself to Israel as their Messiah, He let the Spirit of God make that testimony
 - The Spirit of God was upon Him, Isaiah says, so that by the anointing of the Spirit, Jesus performed many miracles
 - In that way, Jesus was both humble and yet also glorified by the Father

John 5:36 “But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish — the very works that I do — testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.

John 5:37 “And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.

- But Isaiah goes on to say Israel would reject their Messiah despite the Spirit's testimony
 - Isaiah says in v.19 that Israel wouldn't see their Messiah standing on street corners begging or arguing people to believe in Him
 - Jesus wouldn't quarrel with Israel or try convincing them into accepting Him... Jesus simply went to a new audience
 - Which is why the truth then goes to the Gentiles instead
 - Nonetheless, Israel wasn't going to be forsaken for their rejection...the Messiah will win them over eventually
 - Isaiah uses two euphemisms to explain the Messiah's grace and mercy for Israel
 - In v.20 Isaiah says the Messiah wouldn't break off a battered reed or put out a

smoldering wick

- Both phrases refer to making something out of nothing
 - A battered reed is useless just as is a smoldering wick...we would give up on both and look elsewhere for a replacement
 - And that's what we might have supposed God would do with Israel after they rejected Jesus
- But Isaiah says that Messiah will not break off a battered reed nor put out a smoldering wick...He will make something out of nothing
 - Jesus leads justice to victory, Isaiah says, meaning Jesus will eventually bring the just outcome to God's people
 - In time Jesus will bring Israel into the light, which is just given God's promises to His people in keeping with God's word
- So before Matthew shows us the moment Israel lost the Kingdom in this day, he reminds us that the Bible said this would happen
 - Yet despite Israel's rejection of Jesus in that day, this would not be last word for God's people
 - They might look like a broken reed, a smoldering wick about to die, but the Lord would kindle the flame in a day to come
 - So don't worry when you see this rejection happen...the story isn't over yet
 - But meanwhile, the Kingdom offer has to go somewhere, and Isaiah says in v.21 that it will go to the Gentiles instead
 - That's Matthew's prologue to the rejection moment, so that we understand what is happening and also what's not happening
 - The Israel of that generation is losing the Kingdom here, yes
 - The Israel of the future will still obtain it, however
- So now Matthew is now ready to show us the moment of paradise lost
 - And it begins with another healing...

Matt. 12:22 Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw.

Matt. 12:23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

Matt. 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."

- At some point after the Sabbath, Jesus is presented with a demon-possessed man as many times before
 - We've studied a little about demon possession in past lessons, so let me just remind you of some of the important details

- We learned that demons are angels that fell into sin by following after Satan's rebellion
- They chose to become part of Satan's army, and today they serve Satan in a spiritual war against God
- When demons target human beings for attacks, one of their tactics is inhabiting or indwelling the bodies of unbelievers
 - Just as the Spirit of God can indwell a believer, so too can demonic spirits indwell the bodies of unbelievers
 - And just as when the presence of the Spirit of God in a believer produces new and lasting positive behaviors (fruit)
 - So too when a demon takes up residence in the body of a person, it will bring lasting negative effects on that person
- Over time, the demon's presence in the person degrades a person's mental and physical state leading to increasingly bizarre behaviors
 - The demon speaks to the person constantly, day and night, tormenting them with voices of condemnation and perversion
 - The person experiences growing feelings of fear, dread, anxiety and paranoia
- Eventually, the person's thoughts and emotions may be so disrupted by the demon's influence that he loses touch with reality and becomes incommunicative
 - Notice in this case the man who is possessed by the demon has been made blind and mute by the demon's presence
 - So apparently this man was experiencing the later stages of demon possession
 - And once a demon is finished with a person and ready to move on, the demon will try to make the person take his or her own life
 - As we learned in an earlier lesson, a demon can only leave a human body when the body dies
 - But there is a second way a demon may leave a body...if they are cast out (i.e., forced out) by the power of God
 - In Jesus' day, casting out demons from human bodies was not unknown
 - The Lord equipped some men from time to time by His Spirit to cast out demons as healing ministry
 - We can find evidence of this practice here and elsewhere in the Scripture
 - Notice in v.27 Jesus challenges the Pharisees concerning their "sons" who cast out demons
 - Jesus is referring to some in Israel who were casting out demons from time to time
 - Furthermore, Acts 19 describes Jewish exorcists traveling from place to place removing demons
- So we know the Lord granted certain people power to remove demons but that ability came with certain restrictions

- Think back a few months ago to our study of Matthew 8 when we studied the miracle of Jesus healing a leper
 - At that time I told you that there had never been before in Israel's history an example of a Jew healed of leprosy
 - Yet I also told you that we have an entire chapter in the Law devoted to how to deal with a person healed of leprosy
- The rabbis noticed this contradiction, and wondered what it meant
 - The rabbis concluded the Lord must have reserved the power to heal leprosy for a special occasion
 - Specifically, they concluded that only the Messiah would possess the power to heal a leper
 - So when someone did heal a leper, that meant that man was the Messiah
- This gave rise to the notion of a "Messianic miracle" or a miracle that only the Messiah would be permitted to accomplish
 - Healing a leper was a Messianic miracle, and another was casting out a mute demon
 - Once again, casting out demons was not a unique miracle, since men did this from time to time in Israel
- But casting out a *mute* demon was unprecedented in Israel...like healing a leper, it had never been done before
 - And the reason it had never been done before is because of the unique way exorcists operated in conducting their healing
 - A Jewish exorcist could only cast out a demon by calling on the name of the demon
 - The exorcist would speak directly to the person asking the person to divulge the name of the demon inside
 - Perhaps the demon had shared its name with the person or perhaps the exorcist could coax the demon into divulging it
 - According to rabbinical teaching in that day, this was the only way the Lord granted healing for a demon-possessed people
 - We can see Jesus using this rabbinical method elsewhere in the Gospels
 - For example, in the incident of the demons who possessed a man living in the tombs, notice Jesus' method

Luke 8:28 Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me."

Luke 8:29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by the

demon into the desert.

Luke 8:30 And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him.

- Jesus asks for the demon’s name during His exchange with the man
- There was a group of demons in the man, so they respond to Jesus calling themselves “legion”
- Which brings us back to our moment here in Matthew 12
 - If the exorcist couldn’t learn the demon’s name because the man was made mute by the demon, then the exorcist was stuck
 - There was no way to get the demon’s name, and therefore there was no way to cast him out
 - That’s why a mute demon could not be cast out under ordinary circumstances
 - And for that reason, the rabbis concluded that casting out a mute demon was a miracle reserved for the Messiah alone
 - We can see evidence of that problem in another scene in the Gospels

Mark 9:17 And one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute;

Mark 9:18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.”

Mark 9:19 And He answered them and said, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!”

Mark 9:28 When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?”

Mark 9:29 And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.”

- Notice again Jesus was dealing with a mute demon, and His disciples tried to cast out the demon
 - But because they couldn’t learn the demon’s name, they couldn’t use the normal rabbinical method and so they failed
 - When they asked Jesus why they failed, Jesus says because “this kind” of demon only comes out by prayer and fasting
 - “This kind” refers to a mute demon, which only God can cast out
 - Therefore, it requires prayer (i.e., appeal to God)
- Also notice that Jesus rebukes the disciples and the crowd for being an unbelieving

generation

- Why was Jesus so upset at them? Because they should have realized they were facing one of the Messianic miracles
- And had they believed Jesus was Messiah, they would have asked Jesus to cast out that demon in the first place
- Which brings us back to Matthew 12 and what happened next
 - Notice in v.23 the crowd sees Jesus perform this special miracle and responds by asking, “This can’t be the son of David can he?”
 - They were acknowledging that they had just seen a Messianic Miracle, and they ask if this man could really be the Messiah
 - The term “Son of David” is a special title that Jews used only in reference to the Messiah
 - The term comes from the OT prophecies that say the Messiah will be a descendent of David, a “son” of David
 - But also notice at the end of v.23 their response takes the form of a negative question
 - This *can’t* be the Son of David, can he?
 - Jesus simply didn’t look the part, because He didn’t fit their preconceived ideas of the Messiah
 - He was a plain man from a nothing town...hardly Messiah material
 - And the people of Israel couldn’t wrap their heads around an ugly, plain Messiah, so they ask, this can’t be the son of David?
- They directed their question to their religious leaders, who were the experts in all things Messiah (the people assumed)
 - But now those leaders have a problem, because they too saw the miracle and of course they also recognized its meaning
 - But obviously, the Pharisees do not want to confirm that Jesus is the Messiah
 - Jesus had rejected Pharisaic Judaism and the authority of the Mishnah, the Oral Law
 - So if the Pharisees acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, they would lose their place of authority over the people
 - On the other hand, they couldn’t simply deny the miracle, since everyone saw it and everyone knew what it meant
 - So their solution in v.24 is to claim that Jesus did perform the miracle but He did so by the power of Beelzebul
 - My translation reads “Beelzebul” but the Greek word used here is “Beelzebub,” meaning lord of the flies
 - The Jews adopted that title for Satan as a way of mocking him
 - So the Pharisees said Jesus was working with the power of Satan, which explained why He did something that ordinary people couldn’t do

- The leaders' response and the crowds' willingness to accept the explanation was the precise moment they lost the kingdom
- This leads to the crucial point where Jesus withdraws His Kingdom proposal from that generation of Israel
- We see that moment more clearly in the rest of the chapter, which we examine some today and the rest next time

Matt. 12:25 And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.

Matt. 12:26 “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?

Matt. 12:27 “If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.

- Matthew says Jesus knew their thoughts, but what thoughts is Matthew referring to?
 - The Pharisees' spoke their response to the people, so their explanation wasn't the “thoughts” Jesus knew
 - Everyone knew what they said
 - Matthew is referring to the unspoken thoughts of the crowd as they consider what the Pharisees said
 - Jesus knew the crowd was agreeing with what they heard and, knowing their thoughts, Jesus shows how they were acting foolishly
 - He rebukes the people by exposing the nonsensical nature of the Pharisees' explanation
 - In vs.25-26 Jesus responds saying a kingdom or city or house that is divided against itself will not stand
 - Jesus' metaphor is set in the context of a battle or war, where a kingdom or city or house is battling against a common enemy
 - Winning a war against a determined enemy is hard enough even when everyone is working together
 - But if you start fighting among yourselves, then you have no hope to prevail against the enemy
 - In the metaphor, Jesus is speaking about the spiritual war that Satan wages against God
 - Satan and his demons are waging war, so he can't afford to waste time fighting against themselves
 - So if Jesus were casting out demons with the power of Satan, then it would mean Satan's house was divided against itself
 - Therefore, the Pharisees' argument just doesn't make sense

- Then Jesus makes a second point...in v.27 He asks, if I cast out demons by the power of Satan, what power do your sons use?
 - Jesus is showing the inconsistency of their logic
 - They claim Jesus is using Satan's power to cast out demons
 - But since the Pharisees' sons were exorcists, why not assume they too were working with Satan's power?
 - Why make one assumption for one group but a different assumption for Jesus?
- Finally, Jesus makes His main point

Matt. 12:28 “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Matt. 12:29 “Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

Matt. 12:30 “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

- In v.28 Jesus notes that there is one explanation that these men have refused to consider...the only explanation that actually makes sense
 - Jesus says He casts out demons with the Spirit of God
 - Jesus is referring to the anointing power He received when the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism
- At His baptism, Jesus received the Spirit Who then empowered Jesus for the miraculous works of His ministry
 - Because of His humanity, Jesus was dependent upon the Holy Spirit to accomplish the miracles that testified to Jesus' claims
 - That's why Jesus says He cast out the demon by the Spirit of God
- That Messianic miracle was a testimony of the Spirit of God to the people that the kingdom of God had arrived
 - That's the only reasonable conclusion you can make
 - Yet in their thoughts, the crowd accepted the illogical explanation their leaders told them
- Jesus finishes with a parable to indict their willful ignorance of the truth
 - Jesus asks how could someone enter into a strongman's house to carry off the man's possessions without first binding the strongman
 - The answer is obvious: you can't because the strongman will prevent you from taking his possessions
 - So if someone is able to take what belongs to a strongman, then it must mean the strongman has been bound

- In that parable, the strongman is Satan and Satan's house is this world
 - Jesus is the One Who comes into Satan's home, into the world, to plunder Satan's possessions by freeing people from His curse
 - Jesus brings healing, hope, joy and the promise of eternal life to a lost and dying world...freeing us from the dominion of Satan
 - And in this one example, the demon possessed this man, but Jesus took that possession away from Satan's forces
 - Therefore, we must conclude that Jesus wasn't working with Satan...Jesus had the power to bind Satan, to arrest him
 - And if has the power to bind Satan, then Jesus must be a greater power...He must have the power to replace Satan's dominion
 - Which means Jesus was bringing the Kingdom of God
 - The unavoidable conclusion in that moment was that Jesus performed a Messianic miracle, and therefore Jesus was the Messiah
 - And if Jesus was the Messiah, then the Kingdom had come to Israel
 - And the only reasonable response to the Kingdom is to embrace the king and enter into His reign
 - But instead, the people chose to accept a ridiculous explanation offered by Jesus' enemies
 - They chose to believe that the miracle done by the power of the Spirit of God was actually a work done by the power of Satan
 - As they did, they lost the Kingdom
- Notice in v.30 Jesus says you're either with me or you're against me...you are either on God's side or you're fighting against God
 - There is no third choice
 - And Israel made its choice
 - Next lesson we'll study the consequences of that choice, beginning in v.31
 - But please consider the ramifications of Jesus' statement here...you are for Him or else you are against Him
 - There is before faith and after faith
 - Before faith we are enemies of God because we oppose the One God sent for us – Jesus Christ
 - Someone may be a good person in many respects...perhaps even a devout religious person, even a loving person
 - But until they truly receive by faith the One the Father sent in His name, Jesus says they are an enemy of God
 - That means there truly is no such thing as a seeker, though there are people seeking to know more about God
 - The person who is on the fence when it comes to Jesus may seem themselves as

a neutral party, but God sees them as an enemy

- We are enemies until we are reconciled with God by faith, Paul says

Rom. 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- Until we accept Jesus as our Messiah, we are scattering while God's trying to gather
- That was Israel's choice too...they couldn't have their cake and eat it too
 - They wanted healing, they liked it when Jesus multiplied fish and bread, they enjoyed hearing His teaching
 - They even recognized His power to perform a Messianic Miracle
- But they weren't willing to acknowledge or submit to Jesus' rule and authority as King
 - As Christians, we have come to Jesus' side, and we are no longer His enemy...He calls us friends and a child of God
 - But all the more reason we should obey Him, right?
- The Israel of Jesus' day missed their Messiah because they took their eye off the word of God, and got wrapped up in a manmade religion instead
 - We must do better...remember the words of the writer of Hebrews:

Heb. 10:22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Heb. 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

Heb. 10:24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

Heb. 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- We too are waiting for the Messiah...for Jesus' return
 - And while we wait, the writer says we should draw near to Christ even now with a heart fully assured that Jesus has made us clean
 - And knowing we are forever saved, don't waiver in your confidence nor in your obedience
- While we await Christ, don't let false teaching persuade you to deny the obvious truths of the Bible or become distracted with temporal things
 - Don't waiver in your confidence that the Lord is going to return and that the Kingdom will appear one day

- Time is not an enemy of God...He is faithful, the writer says, because God's word doesn't change with the passing of time
- Instead, let's stimulate one another to love and good deeds in the meantime
 - Don't be satisfied with ritual and rule keeping, as we've discussed here before
 - Live to serve Jesus knowing that's why He's left us here for a time
 - And do it in the company of other believers, making every effort to gather together because that's where real ministry happens
- If we do these things, then we don't overlook Jesus when He comes
 - We don't overlook Him in His word
 - We won't overlook Him in the work He does in us and through us
 - And we won't overlook His commands as He prepares us for His return
 - Because I can assure you we won't miss His return...the question is, will you be ready for it when it happens?

- Let's just pick right back up where we left off last week, at the crucial moment when Israel lost the Kingdom
 - Jesus had just healed a mute, demon-possessed man, which I explained is one of those unique miracles we call a Messianic miracle
 - The crowd immediately recognized the miracle for what it was and for what it meant
 - Notice in v.23 the crowd said, "This cannot be the Son of David, can he?"
 - They asked their religious leaders to rule on the question of whether they should trust what they just witnessed
 - So then the religious leaders responded by asserting that Jesus was operating with the power of Satan
 - In v.24 they tell the crowd that Jesus performed this surprising miracle by the power of the ruler of the demons
 - Jesus responded saying their answer was ridiculous since Satan would never act against his own demons
 - The real answer, Jesus says in v.28, was that He was working with the power of the Holy Spirit
 - And that meant that the Kingdom of God had come to Israel
 - So let's pick up there again tonight...

Matt. 12:31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

Matt. 12:32 "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

- Jesus' words in vs. 31-32 are well known among Bible students, but they are just as commonly misunderstood
 - We call Jesus' statement the "unforgivable sin", and if you've studied this section of Scripture before, I'm sure you've heard many explanations
 - Some assume Jesus was speaking of unbelief, while others suggest specific sins of one kind or another
 - You can even find young people who make a game out of attempting to commit this sin intentionally
 - They utter profane things against the Holy Spirit in videos that they post on the internet, claiming they are now unforgivable
 - Thankfully for the sake of those misguided souls, they have grossly misunderstood this passage
 - We are going to understand the passage properly by allowing the context to dictate our understanding just like for any other passage

- Let's start with a simple definition...blasphemy is diminishing or slandering God's work, words or character
- Blasphemy is a sin, and there are many ways one could commit the sin of blasphemy (e.g., taking the Lord's name in vain)
- But is Jesus' suggestion we can't be forgiven for such utterances? Are those provocateurs on YouTube cut off from God's grace?
- Simply put the answer is no, and there are two reasons we can say this without a doubt
 - First, notice what Jesus says at the beginning of v.31...
 - To make sure we knew that Jesus was not referring to individual sin, He give us this explicit exception
 - He says that *any* sin and blasphemy *shall* be forgiven *people* (or we could say individuals)
 - Jesus said that any sin you or I could commit is forgivable by the blood of Christ...there are no exceptions
 - Which tells us that the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is something else entirely
 - It's not a sin that can be committed by an individual person
 - Simply put, there is no such thing as an unforgivable sin for individuals
 - Secondly, the testimony of the entire Bible confirms this conclusion
 - The Bible teaches repeatedly that the blood of Christ forgives all sin past, present and future

Col. 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Col. 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

- Paul says that in Christ we have been forgiven of "all" our transgressions
- No sin is left uncovered, no sin is unforgiven by faith in Christ
- Furthermore, once we are forgiven by our faith (declared not guilty by God), Paul says that declaration will never, ever change

Rom. 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Paul teaches plainly that the believer never experiences condemnation from God once they place faith in Jesus
 - The righteousness we received by faith was won for us by Christ

- And nothing we could ever do diminishes Christ's righteousness
- Therefore, the one God has justified (acquitted of sin) remains forever acquitted
- And God's declaration of righteousness for our sake will never change

Rom. 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

Rom. 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Rom. 8:33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

Rom. 8:34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

- Once we have been acquitted of our sin, Paul asks who could possibly condemn us at some later point?
- Who is going to overrule God, especially since Christ is interceding for us continually?
- So we know conclusively that every personal sin can be forgiven by the blood of Christ
 - So what is this unforgivable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?
 - The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a term Jesus uses to describe Israel's rejection of Jesus as their King and Messiah
 - Israel blasphemed the Spirit's testimony when they claimed Jesus' miracles were done by Satan
 - Remember Jesus said He accomplished that miracle of healing the mute demon-possessed man by the power of the Spirit of God
 - Then the Pharisees' claimed that Jesus performed His miracle by the power of Satan
 - And Matthew said the crowd agreed with the Pharisees' explanation
 - So both the religious leaders of Israel and the crowd slandered the testimony of the Holy Spirit by calling it the work of Satan
 - That's blaspheming the Holy Spirit, the unforgivable sin of Israel rejecting their King
 - The consequence of that national sin was the nation losing the opportunity to see the Kingdom appear in their lifetime
 - There would be no second chance for Israel to receive the Kingdom
- As a result of that error, the Lord withdraws the offer of the Kingdom for that generation of Israel
 - Remember, I said last week that Jesus wasn't going to walk around Galilee offering the Kingdom forever
 - Either Israel embraces Jesus as Messiah and receives the Kingdom or they don't

- Sooner or later His offer was going to expire, and when Israel blasphemed Jesus' Messianic miracle, time ran out
- And there would be no second chance for that generation...their sin of refusing the King was unforgivable
- In fact, notice Jesus says at the end of v.32 that Israel won't see the Kingdom appear in this age or in the age to come
 - The present age refers to the period of Jesus walking the earth offering the Kingdom to Israel...that opportunity was gone
 - But Jesus adds that Israel's sin wouldn't be forgiven in the age to come either... what is the age to come?
- Jesus can't be speaking of the Kingdom age that comes after Christ's Second Coming, because the Bible says Israel will be present in that age
 - So the age to come is a reference to a period of history after Jesus departs the earth...a time we call the Church age
 - During the Church age, the Kingdom becomes a program of reaching the Gentiles, as Matthew reminded us earlier
 - During this age Israel would continue to suffer the consequences of their unforgivable sin
- Paul describes it this way

Rom. 11:7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Rom. 11:8 just as it is written,

**"GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,
EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."**

Rom. 11:9 And David says,

**"LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP,
AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM."**

Rom. 11:10 "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT,
AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

- Israel's unforgivable sin has resulted in the Lord hardening the hearts of His people for a time
- Which gives opportunity for the Gospel to come to Gentiles
- But let me emphasize, we're talking about a *national* sin with a *national* consequence, not a personal sin that condemns someone to hell
 - Israel's national sin doesn't preclude individual Jews from being forgiven and

receiving salvation by placing faith in Jesus

- We see proof of this clearly in the New Testament
- Think of all the Jews who were part of the nation that rejected Jesus yet still came to saving faith in Jesus later
- Examples include Jesus' earthly brothers (like James and Jude), the Apostle Paul, to say nothing of all 3,000 Jews at Pentecost...
- These Jews were in the nation of Israel, so they were a party to the nation's unforgivable sin of rejecting Jesus as King
 - Like the rest of the nation, they too suffered the penalty of failing to see the Kingdom appear in their day
 - Nevertheless, they could still be forgiven personally when they placed their faith in Jesus
 - And that continues today as Jews come to faith in Jesus
- In v.32 Jesus confirms that personal salvation will still be possible
 - Jesus says that a word spoken against the Son of Man shall be forgiven
 - A word spoken against the Son of Man refers to rejecting the Person of Jesus
 - When Israel spoke a word against the "Son of Man", the Lord was prepared to forgive Israel for that rejection on a personal level
 - Just as when someone rejects Jesus today, they can still be forgiven if they come to faith later
 - The only deadline for individual forgiveness is the death of the body
 - We are appointed to die once, then comes judgment
 - That's why the unforgivable sin can't be repeated today...
 - Because it's impossible to recreate the circumstances of Israel's national sin
- So having declared the end of the Kingdom offer, Jesus now condemns this generation of Israel for having lost the Kingdom

Matt. 12:33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.

Matt. 12:34 "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Matt. 12:35 "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.

- Beginning in v.33 Jesus speaks as a prosecutor making His case against the nation and declaring judgment against them
 - Jesus starts by indicting their poor judge of authority, saying they should either make the tree good or make it bad
 - If Jesus was a man working with Satan, as the Pharisees claimed, then call

Jesus evil and call His work evil

- But Jesus' deeds weren't evil...and the crowd knew that
- They followed Him everywhere begging Him to heal them and they were astonished at His wisdom
- They knew Him to be good, kind, merciful and loving
- Yet when the Pharisees' suggested Jesus was possessed by a demon, the crowd immediately embraced that suggestion
 - But Jesus says you can't have it both ways...bad trees produce bad fruit, good trees good fruit
 - So if Jesus' fruit was good, then He must be a good "tree" and therefore they should have rejected the counsel of their leaders
 - Conversely, the Pharisees' fruit spoke for itself
- In v.34 Jesus uses a phrase first offered by John the Baptist...calling the Pharisees a brood of vipers
 - That was a not-so-subtle way of calling them children of the devil, the serpent from the garden
 - They were evil men who spoke evil and did evil and the people knew that from years of watching those men operate
 - The hypocrisy and pride and greed of these men wasn't hard to see, nevertheless, they sided with the Pharisees over Jesus
- So then Jesus formally pronounces judgment on the nation

Matt. 12:36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment."

Matt. 12:37 "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

- Jesus says that every careless word that people speak will be held against them on the day of judgment
 - Jesus says this generation will be convicted by its statement that Jesus is the devil
 - There is probably nothing they could have said more offensive to God than that statement
 - Jesus is the Name above all Names, the King above all Kings, the Alpha, the Omega, and the Creator
 - Jesus literally made those men and every person in that crowd...He is their Creator
 - Moreover, Jesus is the Salvation of men, the perfect sacrifice, the healer, provider, the light of the world and the perfect love of God
 - On the other hand, the devil is the author of all the evil the world has ever known

- He is great liar and deceiver who brought misery and chaos into God's perfect creation...a murderer from the beginning
- You could not imagine two opposites more diametrically opposed than Jesus and Satan
- So Jesus convicts that generation declaring their careless words would bring judgment upon them
 - Those words might have been spoken carelessly, without much thought, but that did not lessen the offense
 - The nation would suffer great loss over hundreds and thousands of years... because of those careless words
- That's how God's justice works...our sins are ever present even from childhood
 - But in the end we all will be justified or convicted by our words
 - By our confession of Christ we may be forgiven, and by our refusal to repent and confess, we will be convicted

Luke 12:8 “And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God;

Luke 12:9 but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

- Now at this point, the Pharisees try to recover a bit by engaging in a conversation with Jesus about their desire for more proof of His claims
 - In vs.38-50 Jesus denies their request by pointing out they aren't being sincere in their request nor have they lacked for signs
 - We will cover that conversation next week, and it will be a powerful footnote to this moment
 - But for the time remaining today, we need to cover one more interaction that Matthew doesn't record at this point
 - After Israel commits the unforgivable sin, Jesus issues a national condemnation
 - Matthew doesn't record the first time Jesus issues this national condemnation
 - Matthew records the second time Jesus speaks it near the end of His earthly life in Matthew 23
 - But Luke records the first occurrence that happened in this context, which we find at the end of Chapter 13

Luke 13:34 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

Luke 13:35 “Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN

THE NAME OF THE LORD!”

- Jesus spoke these words as a lament against the nation knowing they had just rejected their King and Kingdom
 - Jesus begins with “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem” and we can sense His disappointment for His people
 - The city of Jerusalem represents the whole nation, which the Lord prepared for centuries to receive their King
 - He sent them prophet after prophet with the word of God telling Israel what would come one day, so they wouldn’t miss it
 - And time and time again the nation responded to the grace of God by rejecting the message and assaulting the messenger
 - The prophets were consistently mistreated and even murdered by the very people they were trying to help
 - Hebrews 11 reminds us of how the godly in Israel suffered terribly at the hands of the Jewish people
 - Time and time again Israel responded to the Lord’s grace and love for His people whose evil hearts were filled with malice and deceit
 - Yet all the Lord was seeking was to gather His people together like a mother hen gathering chicks together
 - Jesus chose a perfect comparison, because hens are renown for their mothering instincts

In the first century AD, the Roman historian Plutarch praised the many ways in which mother hens cherish and protect their chicks, “drooping their wings for some to creep under, and receiving with joyous and affectionate clucks others that mount upon their backs or run up to them from every direction; and though they flee from dogs and snakes if they are frightened only for themselves, if their fright is for their children, they stand their ground and fight it out beyond their strength.”

The Renaissance writer Ulisse Aldrovandi described how, at the first sign of a predator, mother hens will immediately gather their chicks “under the shadow of their wings, and with this covering they put up such a very fierce defense – striking fear into their opponent in the midst of a frightful clamor, using both wings and beak – they would rather die for their chicks than seek safety in flight.” Similarly, in collecting food, the mother hen allows her chicks to eat their fill before satisfying her own hunger. Thus, he said, mother hens present, in every way, “a noble example of love for their offspring.”

- Israel was so hard-hearted they failed to recognize Christ’s loving desire to brood over

His children protecting, nourishing, loving them

- After all, that's why Christ lowered Himself
- He left His place in Heaven to take the form of man so that He could present Himself to His people as their King
- But Jesus says Israel would not have it...Israel rejected Jesus and His offer of the Kingdom
 - I wonder what gave them such ignorance...did they not understand what was at risk? Did they not value what Christ was offering?
 - What causes anyone to turn their back on something so great as the love and care of God?
 - In despair Jesus reluctantly accepted Israel's decision, though it pained Jesus to turn His back on Israel
 - Nevertheless, they turned their back on Him first, and justice will be done, because a perfect God can do no less
 - So in v.35 Jesus declares that Israel's house was left desolate
 - Desolate means like a desert, a wasteland, empty and dry
 - And the term house is a reference to both the temple specifically and the nation's place in the land generally
 - So Jesus was promising that as a result of Israel's national rejection of Him, the temple and the land would become empty
 - We know when this happened, historically
 - In AD 70 the Roman army invaded the land to put down a Jewish rebellion
 - When the fighting ended, the city of Jerusalem was in ruins and the temple itself was razed to its foundations
 - We will study more of that moment in Matthew 24
 - In the decades that followed, the Jewish people were pushed further and further out of the land until in AD 134 Jews were barred from the land
 - And in the centuries that followed, Jews were virtually absent in the land of Israel
 - Truly, as Jesus foretold, Israel's house became desolate as a result of their national sin of rejecting their King
- But as terrible as that judgment was for God's people, notice that Jesus leaves open the door of hope at the end of His declaration
 - At the end of v.35 Jesus says "you will not see me until the time comes you say..."
 - Let's understand what Jesus is saying...He's talking to the same nation of people who had just rejected His offer
 - So "you" refers to the nation of Israel, and Jesus says that nation could "see" Jesus again
 - That word see is important, because to see someone indicates they are physically

present

- So Jesus is offering to come to earth again for Israel, to once more be physically present
- And He offers to do so for Israel again at a future time
- Which means all is not lost for the nation...they lost the Kingdom in the present age and the age to come
- But they haven't lost it forever...there is a way that a future generation of Israel can have the Kingdom they were promised
- Jesus says they must say, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord"
 - Those aren't magic words...Jesus is referring to a future moment when the nation reverses their sin of rejecting Jesus
 - Instead of denying the testimony of the Holy Spirit, the nation will accept the Spirit's revelation and embrace Jesus as Messiah
- Psalm 118 is a prophetic script, the words that Israel will declare in a future day when the nation receives Jesus as Messiah
 - Jesus says that when the nation experiences this moment, then He will return for His people
 - And upon His return, Jesus will bring that future generation of Israel the Kingdom that this generation lost
- What we're learning is that Christ's Second Coming and the establishment of the Kingdom as a place, is dependent on Israel's future acceptance of Jesus
 - To put it simply, Jesus departed the earth because Israel rejected Him as King
 - And Jesus returns to Earth when Israel receives Him as King
 - So today we are engaged in the Kingdom program, seeking to recruit men and women to faith in Jesus
 - So that in a future day when the Lord returns and sets up His Kingdom on earth, those Kingdom citizens can walk into the Kingdom with us
 - But now you know that the timing of that fateful day depends on Israel
 - That nation remains at the center of God's plan
 - Because they rejected their Lord, we have our opportunity to receive the Gospel
 - And when the nation eventually receives Jesus as Lord, we will then see the Kingdom appear
 - And in a day to come, the Lord will pour His Spirit on Jewish people so they come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah
 - They will cry out to Him, as Psalm 118 records, and Jesus says He will return to them in mercy and grace
 - And then this age ends and the next begins
 - Paul summarizes this way

Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

Rom. 11:12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

- Does the love of God know any limit, any boundary?
 - He tells us of His plans, He keeps His word, He covers every sin
 - And He chases His people over centuries of time and thousands of miles to bring them to Himself like a mother hen
 - And all He asks of us is a confession, a word of faith to accept in faith what He has revealed to us
 - That's the God we worship
 - Christ is a God we can trust, a God we should obey, a God that loves you beyond time and space...and He's coming back soon

- Today we reach the end of the first half of Matthew...it only took us 18 months
 - That division isn't reflected by the chapter count of the book
 - There are 28 chapters in Matthew but we're only at Chapter 12
 - Nevertheless, thematically the book divides distinctly between Chapters 12 & 13
 - And we'll look at that divide more next week
 - Meanwhile, let's finish the first half where today we find a fascinating exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees
 - Jesus has just condemned the nation for their failure to recognize and accept the signs Jesus performed
 - We've studied that crucial moment for the past 2 weeks, when Jesus gave the nation incontrovertible proof He was the Messiah
 - Then, the Pharisees dismissed Jesus' miracle as the work of Satan, and in doing so, they crossed a line
 - Jesus said they committed the unpardonable sin, a national transgression that results in Israel losing the Kingdom for a time
 - So Jesus withdrew the offer of the Kingdom from His people, and initiates the Kingdom Program
 - This program begins with Jesus training His disciples to carry on the mission of the Church in Jesus' absence
 - Specifically, His disciples will recruit men and women to be Jesus' disciples; citizens of the future Kingdom when it arrives
 - And as we learned last week that Kingdom will also include Israel, as the Lord promised
 - But Jesus will not return to set up His Kingdom until Israel cries out for Him
 - Or as Jesus said last week, you will not see me until you say Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord
 - So since Jesus was rejected by the nation at His first appearing, He demands that the entire nation receive Him before He returns
- That incredible series of events has happened simply because the nation wouldn't acknowledge the Spirit's irrefutable signs
 - Which is particularly ironic when you look at what happens next
 - The Pharisees demand Jesus grant them yet another sign

Matt. 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

Matt. 12:40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY

OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Matt. 12:41 “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- Back in v.37, Jesus told the religious leaders they would be accountable for the careless words they spoke in denying Jesus’ miracle
 - And I imagine that rebuke caught those men off guard, and perhaps they became a bit defensive
 - Perhaps they worried they may have appeared hasty in their judgments, so they try to recover with a question trying to look objective
 - They ask Jesus for a sign that they could know He was telling the truth
 - On its face, such a question would be reasonable and even wise (since false Messiahs were common in Israel)
 - But coming as it did on the heels of Jesus’ Messianic miracle just a moment earlier, their question was a joke
 - They’re implying that Jesus hadn’t done enough to prove Himself so they lacked sufficient proof to reach a conclusion
 - Yet Jesus’ earlier sign was so conclusive that even the uneducated Jewish crowds were able to recognize Jesus as the Son of David
 - So certainly, Israel’s learned religious leaders had seen enough to know the truth
 - No, their issue wasn’t a “skill” problem...it was a “will” problem
 - And Jesus knew it, so He responds to their request more harshly than before
 - He says that an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign
- The first thing we need to notice about that response is that Jesus speaks against that entire generation of Israel, not just these leaders or this crowd
 - This confirms what we learned last week that the unforgivable sin was a national sin, not an individual sin
 - The entire nation fell under judgment for failing to receive Jesus as their Messiah
 - How can Jesus condemn an entire nation for the actions of a few?
 - First, the religious leaders were the representatives of the people, in the same way that our nation’s leaders represent each of us
 - Just as our nation is bound by the decisions that our representatives make on our behalf
 - So as the religious leaders declared Jesus to be Satan, they were acting on behalf of the nation
 - Secondly, as we’ve seen, the nation willingly followed these leaders’ judgments

- When they said Jesus had a demon, the people agreed with that assessment
- There's no evidence in the Gospels that the crowds objected to their leaders' conclusions
- Thirdly, this scene may have involved only a very small percentage of the nation but their actions were indicative of the nation's heart
 - We know that the crowds turned against Jesus at the end of His life
 - And we still see the Jewish people today set against Jesus and Christianity
 - So while this scene involved a small number of people, Jesus knew the hearts of all people and they were against Him
- Finally, if you're still concerned that Jesus was unfair to Israel by condemning the entire nation because of these Pharisees, remember this is a national judgment
 - Jesus condemned the nation for rejecting Him, but that didn't prevent individual Jews of that generation from placing faith in Jesus
 - Jews could and did receive forgiveness and eternal life when they placed faith in Jesus
 - That opportunity has always been available for Israel and still is today
 - The sin of rejecting Jesus was a national sin and the consequence of that unforgivable sin were also a national consequence...
 - Israel suffered the loss of the Kingdom in that day
 - And Jesus declared they would lose their temple ("house")
 - And ultimately, Israel lost access to their land for a time
 - That's why Jesus is speaking here in terms of a generation, because He's pronouncing judgment on the entire nation, not individuals
- And in response to the Pharisees' request for a sign, Jesus says that only an evil and adulterous generation craves or seeks for a sign
 - Now why is seeking for a sign evil? Didn't Gideon seek for a sign? Hasn't God provided men with signs from time to time?
 - Yes, and here's the difference...it's not wrong to seek signs when your intent is to understand how to obey
 - But it is a sin to seek for signs as an excuse for not obeying
 - In the first case, a person (like Gideon) asks God for a sign because he or she is unsure of what action pleases God
 - In the second case, the person (like the Pharisees) knows exactly what God wants, but they act as if they are unsure so they don't have to obey
 - It's like pretending you didn't hear your spouse or your boss
 - Jesus says the real reason they ask Him for another sign was because they were evil and adulterous
 - Evil refers to the Pharisees' general ungodliness...they were unbelieving men who pretended to know God yet were far from Him

- And they have adulterous hearts because they seek for other gods of their own making rather than submitting to the true God
- They made pursuit of God through the Law an idol of sorts
- And when your heart is set on another, you will not love the one you have
- Therefore, Jesus says the only sign He will offer this generation from this point onward is the sign of Jonah
 - Up to this point in Jesus' earthly ministry, the Lord has been performing sign after sign after sign to prove Himself to Israel
 - In addition to casting out the mute demon, Jesus healed lepers; which is another Messianic miracle
 - Furthermore, He's taught with authority, healed multitudes, multiplied fish and loaves, walked on water, etc., etc.
 - Truly, the signs have been everywhere, and the size of Jesus' crowds testifies to their impact
 - But now Jesus says there will be no more signs to the people
 - From this point in Matthew's narrative, Jesus no longer performs miracles strictly for the purpose of proving Himself to crowds
 - From this point forward in the Gospel, Jesus only performs miracles for those who demonstrate faith in Him first
 - And afterward, Jesus ends each encounter by commanding the person not to tell people Who He is
 - And this shift makes sense...
 - Why perform signs to convince Israel He is the Messiah when Israel has committed the unpardonable sin
 - The nation was no longer eligible to receive the Kingdom...the offer had been withdrawn, so giving signs would be pointless
- In v.40 Jesus says there will be only one exception to His "no sign" policy...He will give them the sign of Jonah
 - Jonah was a Jewish prophet sent by God to preach a message of repentance to a city of the Assyrians called Nineveh
 - Jonah opposed God's plan because he despised the Assyrians
 - So rather than obey God's call, Jonah flees from God by hiring a ship to take him far from Israel
 - Eventually, Jonah finds himself swallowed alive by a large fish
 - The Lord leaves Jonah there for a time to convince Jonah to fulfill his appointed mission
 - But Jonah's stubborn...he's so stubborn that it requires three days and three nights inside that fish before he changes his mind
 - Jesus says Jonah's experience in the fish will serve as a picture or a sign of something Jesus would do in His ministry

- Specifically at the end of v.40, Jesus says He will spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth
- In other words, the sign of Jonah refers to the death and resurrection of the Messiah
- Jonah was left for dead yet after three days he walked the earth again, and so it will be for Jesus
- Though in Jesus' case, he will actually die and be raised again
- The resurrection is the one and only remaining sign that Jesus will offer Israel to prove He is their Messiah
 - Some will believe it, and those who do will be saved
 - In fact, believing in the sign of Jonah has become the means of personal salvation for everyone
- Remember Paul's teaching in Romans

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

- Saving faith requires believing in the sign of Jonah, Paul says
- But other than that sign, Jesus would no longer preach the Kingdom to Israel...that time had come and gone
- Which is why in v.41 Jesus says that at the judgment the men of Nineveh, the ones who heard Jonah's preaching, will judge this generation of Israel
 - In the story of Jonah, here's what happens once Jonah finally obeys God and goes to Nineveh

Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

Jonah 3:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."

Jonah 3:3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

Jonah 3:4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

Jonah 3:5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

Jonah 3:6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

Jonah 3:7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water."

Jonah 3:8 “But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

Jonah 3:9 “Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

- Jonah arrives at a great city, a city so large it would take you three days to walk through it all
 - A man could walk about 20 miles in a day, so we’re talking about a city about the same size as our city
 - Imagine walking through San Antonio preaching the Gospel...what impact would you expect to make? Maybe convert a handful?
- In Jonah’s case, he gets barely a third of the way through the city with his message of repentance and it catches fire among the people
 - Jonah’s preaching triggers a city-wide revival...the idol worshippers of that city all turned to God
 - Even the king of the city is converted
- Therefore, Jesus says that city of idol worshipping Gentiles will stand with Jesus at the judgment condemning the generation of Israel that rejected Christ
 - And why does Jesus say they should judge Israel? Because they were willing to receive the message from far less a messenger
 - Consider the ministry of Jonah vs. the ministry of Jesus
 - Certainly, we know Jesus’ ministry was impressive...He was Messiah!
 - Jesus performed unfathomable miracles, taught with awe-inspiring authority
 - Jonah, on the other hand, was an ordinary man of no significance to the Assyrians
 - Moreover Jesus deeply desired to convince His people Israel that He was the Messiah
 - We studied last week how Jesus declared “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how I wanted to gather you...”
 - On the other hand Jonah didn’t even want to go to Nineveh much less to preach to them
 - In fact, after the account of Jonah’s preaching in Chapter 3, we read this in the first verse of Jonah 4

Jonah 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

- Jonah had just participated in the greatest revival in the history of the world up to that point
- And his response to that miracle was to be angry and displeased with the outcome
- So knowing Jonah's heart, how enthusiastically do you think Jonah preached his message to that city?
 - Do you supposed he preached with gusto? Do you think he tried to be persuasive?
 - The text doesn't say, but I'm fairly certain it wasn't the most compelling presentation
- So that's the contrast Jesus is making here...
 - The community that received probably the least enthusiastic Gospel presentation in the history of Gospel presentations, responded with sackcloth and ashes
 - While the privileged nation of Israel received the most generous revelation of God in all history yet dismissed it with careless words
- Moving on, Jesus offers a second comparison

Matt. 12:42 **"The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.**

- This comparison relies on another Old Testament story of a Gentile conversion, this time of a queen from Arabia
 - Her story is recorded in 1 Kings 10, and Jesus summarizes the story succinctly in v.42
 - The queen had heard that Solomon was gifted with extraordinary wisdom by God so she traveled a great distance to hear him
- And like Nineveh, this woman was working off little revelation
 - She had just heard rumors about Solomon – nevertheless that was enough for her to make a journey to know more
 - So at the judgement the queen will be there, clothed in Christ's righteousness, condemning Israel for ignoring such great revelation
- Jesus' point is Israel has received more than enough data, because others have done far more with far less, so they didn't need more signs
 - But there's a lesson for Christians here too...because we too need to be careful about seeking signs and ignoring revelation
 - Christians often ask the question, "How do I know what the Lord wants me to do?" Or "How do I know His will?"
 - In my experience, the vast majority of the time the person asking that question has all the data they need to answer the question
 - They claim to need more signs, when in reality they have already received God's

word, and so all that remains is to obey

- I like to say there is a time to pray and seek the Lord's counsel, and then there's a time to get off your knees and do what you've been told
- We're so good at this game that I think we often fool ourselves at times
 - We believe our own claims of ignorance...and to be fair, sometimes those claims are accurate
 - Sometimes we truly are ignorant of what God has said, because we aren't studying it, but that kind of ignorance is not an excuse
- We need to be careful about playing such games, because the Lord says the more revelation we receive the greater the expectation for obedience
 - So I ask you, who has received greater revelation? The Israel of Jesus' day or us today?
 - Consider for a moment that we have received everything they did, recorded in the Gospels, and we have much more beyond that
 - So who has the higher expectation of obedience?
- We can't afford to handle the word we've received lightly
 - We have to take what we learn and do the right thing with it
 - And I think this is especially true for us, a group of Christians working to establish a Bible teaching community like ours
- As Paul warns the church

Eph. 5:15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,

Eph. 5:16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Eph. 5:17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- Before we move on, there are two interesting footnotes to Jesus' words in v.40
 - First, notice that Jesus says He will spend three days and three nights in the grave
 - The Gospels report Jesus rose from the grave before dawn on a Sunday
 - So if we count backward three days and nights from that point, we find that Jesus didn't die on a Friday as tradition holds
 - Instead, we discover that Jesus died on a Thursday...which is a reminder that we need read our Bibles carefully rather than relying on tradition
 - Secondly, notice Jesus says He spent that time in the heart of the earth
 - Jesus' words confirm that Hell is a real, literal, physical place
 - And the location of Hell is in the center of the earth, below our feet
 - If we could dig deep enough into the earth, we would find the place of burning and torment that holds the souls of the lost
- We end our lesson tonight with Jesus making one final observation about that

generation of Israel

Matt. 12:43 “Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it.

Matt. 12:44 “Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.

Matt. 12:45 “Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”

- In this example, Jesus compares Israel to the body of a demon-possessed man
 - In this scenario, the demon, which Jesus calls an unclean spirit, goes out of a man
 - You’ll remember from past weeks we learned that demons can only leave a body either if the body dies or they are cast out
 - In this scenario the man doesn’t die, so that means Jesus is talking about a demon being cast out by God
 - So Jesus says if a demon is cast out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest
 - To understand what Jesus is describing, let’s define a couple of terms
 - The word “waterless” is the Greek word for dry, so the demon passed through dry places
 - In that day, passing through a dry place meant finding no accommodation, no town, no village, just barren wilderness
 - And therefore, “rest” in this context refers to a new body to indwell
 - So in this scenario, Jesus describes a demon cast out of a body yet finding no new body to indwell
 - So eventually, that demon returns to the only home it had
 - That “home” (meaning the previous body) was swept clean, Jesus says, which refers to the Lord having cast out the demon
 - And in the process, the man was made whole and healthy again
 - The removal of the demon was accompanied by a restoration of normality and proper thinking and behavior
- But ironically, the man’s body has become an even more appealing target for that demon
 - Now that the man is clean and his body is in order, it offers that demon a renewed opportunity to create destruction
 - The demon will return to that body, Jesus says, and with a vengeance he will set up occupation again
 - And now the demon goes to work tearing down the good work that the Lord did

in freeing the man the first time

- In fact, Jesus says the demon will bring friends with him the second time; seven more (which is the number for completeness)
 - In other words, this time the demonic destruction of the man will be complete and he will not recover
 - The second state of that man will have become worse than the first
 - For in the first case, he was demon possessed, but in the second case he was legion possessed
- Now it didn't have to be that way for the man...there was a way in which he could have avoided that worse fate
 - When that first demon was sent out by God and the man's body was swept clean, his vessel could have been occupied
 - A different Spirit, the Holy Spirit, could have set up residence in that man's body
 - If that man believed in Jesus as Savior, then the Holy Spirit would have indwelt him
- And as a result, the Lord would have hung a "No vacancies" sign on the man's body and the demon be barred from entry
 - Because once the Spirit has us, the enemy never can again
 - Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10 & 2 Corinthians 6 that the two worlds do not mix, and the Lord will not share His children with demons
- That's Jesus' point to Israel...He came to Israel offering Himself to them by performing signs – including casting out demons from people
 - So in that sense, Jesus swept Israel's house clean and prepared it to receive Him as their King and Messiah
 - Had Israel done so, then He would have dwelled with them as He promised in His word

Ezek. 37:27 "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

Ezek. 37:28 "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."”””

- That dwelling would have preserved Israel and protected them forever
- But since Israel rejected Jesus, then like the man in His example, the sweeping was useless and temporary
 - Jesus' ministry was of no value to Israel...it accomplished nothing
 - All the great teaching, the miracles, the healings, the exorcisms amounted to nothing
 - The people forgot the teaching and miracles, and the people Jesus healed eventually died or were repossessed

- And eventually that person faced their judgment, which was made worse for having rejected Jesus
- Only if a person came to faith in Jesus did he or she receive the benefit of Jesus' ministry
- And that was also true for the nation as a whole
 - The arrival of Israel's Messiah didn't produce lasting spiritual change for the nation
 - In fact, their future state would be worse than the first
 - Where before Israel had a temple, in the future they will not
 - Where before they lived in their land, though under occupation, in the future they will be denied access to the land
 - Where before the nation anticipated a Messiah, in the future Israel stops caring about a Messiah
 - That's the danger of emphasizing physical, earthly outcomes over heavenly, spiritual outcomes
 - We may feed and clothe and treat people as part of our Christian service, but those activities are not the mission of the Church
 - The mission of the Church is to recruit people to become citizens of the Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ
 - If we only treat the body and not the soul, we have failed them and we have failed at the mission Jesus gave
 - The final state of suffering for those people will be worse than their initial state of suffering on earth was
 - And as a result, their future state will be worse than their prior state

- Israel has rejected Jesus, and He's withdrawn the Kingdom proposal from that generation of Israel
 - He has pronounced judgment and has left Israel's "house" desolate
 - He will leave earth shortly, and He will not return until Israel reverses its collective denial
 - So for 2,000 years and counting, the world awaits Israel's change of hearts so that the Kingdom may finally arrive
 - We'll have much more to say about this in future chapters
 - But for now, the question is what comes next?
 - And the answer is training...Jesus now shifts His focus from persuading the masses to privately training His disciples
 - For the next 16 chapters, Matthew shows us all that Jesus poured into these men in preparation for their mission in His absence
 - And this gives us a lot of opportunity to learn as well, which is why Jesus' training has been preserved in the Gospels
 - And along the way, we will also find moments of humor, because these men just didn't get what Jesus was doing, at least not in the moment
 - They didn't understand that Jesus was going to depart the earth instead of setting up the Kingdom
 - They certainly didn't understand He must die even though Jesus told them that repeatedly
 - So their confusion becomes opportunity for humor on many occasions
 - But make no mistake, this preparation is a serious business, because souls are on the line – both then and now
 - And that's our purpose in studying it too
 - We aren't the twelve, but we're still disciples
 - And all disciples are called to learn from our Master and then implement what we learn
 - So their training program is every bit our training program too
- Matthew introduces the second half of his Gospel with a moment that sets the tone for how Jesus will interact with the people moving forward

Matt. 12:46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him.

Matt. 12:47 Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You."

Matt. 12:48 But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"

Matt. 12:49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My

mother and My brothers!

Matt. 12:50 “For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

- This scene didn’t take place in the immediate circumstances of Chapter 12
 - But Matthew elected to record this event here as a transition into the second half of his Gospel because it captures Jesus’ shifting priorities
 - Mark 3 tells us that Jesus returned home to visit His family in Capernaum about this time
 - Remember Jesus moved His mother and brothers to Capernaum from Nazareth at the start of His ministry
 - In Mark we read this:

Mark 3:20 And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal.

Mark 3:21 When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, “He has lost His senses.”

Mark 3:22 The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.”

- Jesus tried visiting His family at home, but the crowds that accompanied Jesus were so imposing, Jesus couldn’t even share a meal with them
 - And as the family saw this and heard what Jesus was saying, they were in shock
 - Mark says they were ready to take custody of Jesus, which meant to literally forcibly take Jesus home to stop all this nonsense
 - They concluded that Jesus had gone insane
- It’s no surprise that His earthly brothers assumed Jesus was crazy, because we know from John 7 that they weren’t believers
 - Only after the resurrection do Jesus’ earthly brothers come to faith in Him
 - But did you notice Mary joined them in this conclusion?
 - Which surprises us because we know Mary had the revelation of the angel before Jesus’ birth and saw Jesus’ miracle at Cana
 - Nevertheless, whatever she understood of Jesus’ ministry, it hadn’t prepared her for what she was witnessing now
- It’s tempting to look down on Jesus’ family for not having more faith in Him at this point, but don’t we do similar things to other people?
 - When someone’s life is turned upside down by an encounter with Jesus and they become on fire for Jesus, don’t we sometimes wonder about their behavior

- We all have our idea of what the “proper” response to Christ should be
- And when someone’s response falls outside those boundaries, we worry about them
- We might think that the person is strange, “touched”, or worse
- Has anyone in your family ever thought that about you?
- Certainly, people can have mental issues, and sometimes religious zealots need help dialing back their passion
 - But there is another possible explanation for why they make us uncomfortable
 - The problem might not be they are crazy...maybe the problem is we’re lazy
- That person is willing to be a fool for Christ, to put it all on the line, to move heaven and earth to obey Him
 - They’ve reoriented their entire earthly life to serve Jesus
 - Meanwhile, we’ve tried to fit Jesus neatly into our suburban middle class lifestyle
 - We pursue Jesus in ways that still allow us to pursue a nice house, 2 cars and 2.5 kids with time for golf and more
- So when we rub elbows with Jesus freaks, we feel convicted, but we tell ourselves they’ve gone off the deep end
 - Like Mary did...like Jesus’ brothers did with Jesus
 - Jesus lived out His ministry so dramatically that it shocked everyone including the religious leaders
 - If we are His disciples, we can’t be afraid to live like we are...and we certainly can’t be afraid to make sacrifices if He requires
- So that’s the situation here...Jesus’ family (including His mother) have come to take Him away
 - Ironically they can’t get close to persuade Jesus to come home because the adoring crowds were too dense
 - So the crowd passes word to Jesus that His mother and brothers were outside seeking to speak with Him
 - Look what Jesus says to the crowd
 - In v.48 Jesus asks, who are my mother and brothers?
 - I’m sure the crowd must have thought this was a dumb question
 - After all, wasn’t the answer obvious? Maybe Jesus really has gone mad, they wondered. Doesn’t He even recognize His own family?
 - But then Jesus points to His disciples nearby and says, “Behold my mother and my brothers”
 - He says they are those who do the will of the Father in Heaven
 - Now obviously, Jesus was speaking about a spiritual family in contrast to the earthly one that waited for Him outside

- He says in v.50 that those who do the will of the Father are His mother and brothers
- But we need to be careful here that we don't overstate or understate what Jesus saying
 - What does doing the will of the Father mean?
 - We get a more specific understanding in Luke's account

Luke 8:21 But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

- According to Jesus in Luke's account, doing the Father's will means obeying what the Father tells us in His word
- But that's not a general reference to obedience, and we know that because of the outcome Jesus connected to that action
 - He says that obeying the will of the Father is what makes us part of the family of God...it's what makes us saved
 - But we know that it's faith that makes us part of God's family, not our works of obedience
- So that tells us that Jesus was talking about something else here...in fact, He was talking about obeying the Gospel itself
 - Obeying the Gospel is a phrase that the New Testament writers use, referring to accepting the Gospel and coming to faith
 - A believer is someone who obeys the call of the Gospel to believe in Jesus, while an unbeliever disobeys that call

2Th. 1:6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

2Th. 1:7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

2Th. 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2Th. 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

- The context of Jesus' statement in Matthew 12 reinforces this interpretation
 - We know Israel as a nation had just failed to heed the call of the Gospel by rejecting Jesus as their Messiah
 - And as a result the nation committed the unforgivable sin, and as such most have failed to become part of God's family
- But the crowds (and even His unbelieving brothers) were acting as if their earthly

relationships with Jesus was enough

- So when Jesus' family arrives, they assume Jesus would give His family members priority over the strangers in the crowd
- They assumed Jesus would demand that His family be brought through the crowd, cutting in to the front of the line
- We all have earthly family...it's impossible to exist physically on earth without parents
 - Even Jesus had earthly relatives at least in the sense of blood relationships, though Joseph wasn't Jesus' father
 - But blood relationships only last for as long as we live on earth, and in death those bonds are broken
 - At the moment you die, your relationships with earthly parents, earthly siblings, and your spouse all dissolve
 - And any status or advantage those relationships conferred upon us also come to an end
 - Only our spiritual relationships transcend death
 - First and foremost our spiritual relationship with Christ is most important, because it brings us into glory with the Father
 - But along with our relationship with God, we also have spiritual relationships with every other believer
 - Believers in Jesus are our spiritual family, and those relationships will last forever
 - If you've ever wondered why Christians will call each other brother or sister, it's because by our faith in Jesus we have become a family
 - These are the people you will spend eternity with
 - That's why Jesus says that those who do the will of the Father are His brothers and sisters...we are His brethren by faith

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Heb. 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

- So Jesus told the crowd that His earthly relationships with Mary and His brothers were of no significance – which would have shocked the crowd
 - This was a patriarchal culture that held parental authority in high regard
 - After they told Jesus that His family wanted to see Him, they expected Jesus to demand the crowd part like the Red Sea
 - And instead, Jesus showed preference to the disciples who came in faith over the blood relatives who came to oppose Him

- If you have a relationship with Jesus by faith, then you also have an eternal relationship with everyone who shares your faith
 - That community is your eternal family, and those relationships matter now... even more than any earthly relationships you have
 - We need to invest ourselves in those spiritual relationships even more than the earthly relationships we have by blood
- Now, hopefully your earthly relatives are also your spiritual relatives
 - But if not, then if and when the two come into conflict you need to prioritize the spiritual over the physical
 - That's especially true if those earthly relationships impede your obedience to God
- That's what was happening for Jesus
 - We know that Jesus' family was coming to stop Him because they thought Jesus was doing the wrong thing
 - In that moment, Jesus had a choice...obey His earthly mother or obey His Heavenly Father
 - Had Jesus agreed to meet, then what do we suppose would have happened?
 - They would have demanded He leave and then Jesus would have had to say no, dishonoring His mother in public
 - Instead, Jesus was unwilling to even meet with them and in that way He avoided the scene and remained obedient to the Father
 - And when you face similar struggles, don't be afraid to prioritize your relationships with the Lord or other believers over family
 - Yes, we honor parents and seek to be at peace with all people so long as it depends upon us
 - We certainly aren't called to eliminate earthly relationships nor to dishonor them
 - But we don't make those priorities greater than our obedience to the Lord, just as Jesus demonstrated here
 - Knowing this, we should make a priority of converting as many of our earthly family into heavenly family as the Lord may permit
 - That outcome isn't in our hands, obviously, but making an effort sure is
 - And we should make that effort because the Lord may work through our efforts to bring faith to those we love
 - And if He does, those earthly relationships will last for eternity and will become richer and more meaningful even now
- And there's another implication we need to consider here
 - If our spiritual relationships persist into eternity, how are you nurturing those relationships now?
 - Have you considered that the fellow believers in the body of Christ generally are

the ones you will work with in the Kingdom?

- You will know them for an eternity as your spiritual family, and they will know you
- So how are you approaching those relationships now? Are you dealing with them with eyes for eternity? Are you showing them love?
 - Are you forgiving of them? Are you gentle with them? Are you honest with them?
 - How do you want them to remember you in eternity?
 - When you pass each other walking the streets of the Kingdom, how will that encounter go?
- If you struggle in maintaining healthy relationships with your spiritual brothers and sisters, you need to make addressing that issue a priority
 - Don't run from your struggles with people...don't church hop so you can avoid reconciling or repenting
 - Because you can't run forever...one day we stand together in glory with our memories intact
 - We want to enter that place with a good testimony and good relationships that honor Christ
- Elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus teaches a parable about how we should use our money while we are on earth
 - And at one point Jesus concludes this way

Luke 16:9 “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

- Jesus says that we should make friends with our earthly wealth so that when we enter eternity, they receive us well
- Jesus is talking about our brothers and sisters remembering how we treated them while we lived with them here
- So consider how you're building those relationships now, including with your believing spouse
 - Husbands, your believing wife may be under your authority now, but she is also your sister in Christ
 - And in the Kingdom she will *only* be your sister, so you should consider how she will remember your treatment of her now
- And wives, your believing husband is your brother in the Lord
 - So if you are unwilling to respect his role over the family now, how will he remember you later?
 - And the same is true for how our pastors, elders, teachers, counselors, and everyone in the Church remembers us

- So Matthew has now set the standard for how things move forward in Jesus' ministry... Jesus puts priority on those of faith
 - Everything He does from now on focuses on His spiritual family only
 - We will see that change play out in a variety of ways beginning immediately at the start of Chapter 13

Matt. 13:1 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea.

Matt. 13:2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

Matt. 13:3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow;

- Chapter 13 begins with the parable of the sower and seed, which we will cover next week
 - In that parable Jesus teaches on four conditions of people
 - And if you have ever wondered about the meaning of that parable, then don't miss next week
- But our interest tonight is on the mere fact that Jesus is teaching in parables at all
 - You may take that for granted, since everyone knows Jesus taught many parables
 - His parables are some of His best known teaching even among unbelievers
- But if you're paying attention in this study, you will notice that this is the very first parable Jesus teaches to the crowds
 - And that may not seem like a big deal, but it is
 - Because if you've ever found parables hard to understand or confusing
 - Or perhaps you wondered why Jesus taught in such an obscure fashion, you're not alone
- Look at v.10 in Chapter 13
 - The disciples noticed Jesus' abrupt change in teaching style, and they were confused too
 - This was a new thing, something Jesus hadn't done before, and it reflected His new priorities
 - We'll look at this more next week, but for now let me catalog how Jesus' ministry will change moving forward
- First, as we see here Jesus no longer teaches openly to the crowds
 - Since Israel committed the unforgivable sin, the time for openly teaching them has come and gone
 - Instead, Jesus will now only teach those who have faith
 - His spiritual insight is limited for those who can appreciate it and will need to understand it as they serve Jesus in the Kingdom program

- That means Jesus will only teach His disciples in private
 - In public settings, Jesus will obscure the truth by teaching only in parables
 - He begins teaching in code relying on the Spirit of God to explain the meaning to those elected by God to receive it
- Secondly, Jesus will only perform healing miracles for those who demonstrate faith first
 - Up to this point, Matthew emphasized over and over again that Jesus healed “all” who came to him

Matt. 4:24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.

Matt. 8:16 When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill.

Matt. 9:35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matt. 12:15 But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all,

- Until Chapter 12, Jesus used His healing ministry to draw an audience for His Kingdom proposal
- That was before Israel rejected that message
- Now that Israel has rejected Him, there’s no need to draw that crowd...now He’s ministering to His sheep only
- Thirdly, Jesus will no longer openly declare the Kingdom is at hand as He once did
 - Remember how Jesus went about in the first half of Matthew’s account...

Matt. 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matt. 10:7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

- Jesus told everyone in Israel that they could have the Kingdom if they would receive Him
- But after His rejection, He speaks of the Kingdom program only with those who will carry it forward
- Scan down again to v.11 of Chapter 13, and notice Jesus says that only His disciples are appointed to understand the future Kingdom
- Fourthly, in times past, Jesus encouraged His disciples to share the good news with everyone
 - He even equipped His disciples at a point with the power to do miracles so they too could attract an audience for the Kingdom message
 - And He certainly didn't try to silence anyone
- But beginning now, Jesus specifically warns those He heals or teaches not to share what they know about Him with anyone
 - Often these people were so excited by their encounter that they chose to disobey the Lord's instructions, but the point is clear
 - Jesus is no longer seeking to win over crowds or spread the news of the Kingdom
 - He's working with only with those who will serve Him in the Kingdom Program
- Finally, as Matthew alluded to in Chapter 12, the time had come for the Kingdom to reach more than Israel alone
 - Before His rejection, Jesus only ministered to Israel and only taught Israel and only offered the Kingdom to Israel
 - Remember when Jesus sent out His disciples earlier in this book, He gave them these instructions:

Matt. 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;

Matt. 10:6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matt. 10:7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

- It simply wasn't appropriate for Jesus to offer the Kingdom to the Gentiles before it had gone to those to whom it was promised
 - The Lord is in covenant with the Jewish people, not the Gentiles
 - And only after the Jewish people refused the Kingdom did it go to anyone else
- Before Chapter 12 and Israel's rejection of Jesus, the Kingdom was for Israel – but now it will go to a wider audience
 - In fact, Matthew 13 is best known as the Kingdom parable chapter of the Gospels
 - In this chapter, we are going to study parable after parable about the nature of the Kingdom
 - And one of those parables explains that God's plan is to invite all tribes and tongues

and nations into the plan of salvation

- That open door is a direct result of God passing over His own people for a time
- So what's our takeaway from seeing this change in Christ's ministry...well, for me it's the overwhelming confidence in God's sovereign plan for His children
 - As Matthew showed us in Chapter 12, Israel's rejection and the Gentiles' inclusion in the plan of God was foreknown and preplanned by God
 - He told us about it in advance through the prophets, so nothing happening here is taking God by surprise
 - With God, there is no Plan "B"...everything that happens is part of Plan "A"
 - And knowing this, we can take great encouragement in facing the trials and difficulties of our own life
 - Nothing you're facing has taken God by surprise...in fact, He has ordained that it take place in your life
 - And since we know God is good all the time, then we must conclude there is some good purpose in Him placing these things in our life
 - Just as we seek to understand this Gospel account in detail with a full appreciation of what it all means, seek to understand the events of your own life with equal clarity
 - Knowing and trusting that the Lord has good purposes in it all
 - Praise Him for trials, praise Him for suffering, praise Him for disappointments
 - Because when you do, you're praising Him for the good things they will bring in your life even before you know what those things are
 - You may not know the good God is doing in your life until you enter Heaven and get the full story

- Jesus is ready to begin His Kingdom Program training, and we're all enrolled in that class
 - In this training program, Jesus must teach His disciples about the nature, the course and the purpose of the Kingdom Program
 - These men will carry the program forward, establishing the New Testament Church and authoring the NT canon
 - So naturally, they must understand how the Kingdom Program differs from a literal, physical Kingdom on earth
 - Because the work of the Kingdom program will be very different from the experience of living in the physical Kingdom to come
 - So starting in this chapter, Jesus is teaching Kingdom Program 101, about how the Lord will build a spiritual community out of the world
 - That community will be established and grown by God, not by men, yet God will use His disciples to reach people
 - But our work will be opposed by the enemy at every turn, so His disciples must be prepared to suffer in the course of their work
 - We accept these truths plainly, but Jesus' disciples often struggled to understand them
 - And to make matters worse, Jesus taught in a way that concealed the truths from the unbelieving masses
 - Jesus taught the crowds exclusively in parables, which often left His disciples in the dark too
- So what follows in Matthew 13 are a series of parables about the Kingdom Program, and each parable describes some aspect of that program
 - Before we look at our first parable, let's consider the setting in which Jesus delivers it

Matt. 13:1 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea.

Matt. 13:2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

- Jesus gets into a boat on the shore of the Galilee and sits down to teach while leaving the crowd stranded on the beach
- Jesus has placed a barrier between Himself and the crowd intentionally so they can't reach Him physically
- Those crowds were attracted to Jesus principally for one reason: to be healed; most of them held little interest in Jesus' message
 - So Jesus sits in a boat a short distance from the shore to ensure that the crowd has no choice but to listen to His word
 - Had Jesus remained on land, the crowd would have pressed Jesus for healing and prevented Him from teaching

- So Jesus holds them at bay (literally), because He's intent on delivering a more important ministry: His word
- It's a beautiful picture of how Christ prioritizes our spiritual needs over our physical needs during this time on earth
 - As much as the Lord desires to heal our physical bodies, He is far more concerned with healing our souls
 - And the solution for what ails us spiritually is to hear the word of God
- Which is why sometimes Jesus won't give us the materials or physical desires we request, at least not for a while
 - I believe He does so in order to ensure we have incentive to remain engaged in listening to His word
 - And in the long run, His word will heal us and bless us in ways beyond the limited earthly ways we requested
- So knowing Jesus wants the crowd to hear His message, He begins to teach with His first parable

Matt. 13:3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow;

Matt. 13:4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

Matt. 13:5 "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.

Matt. 13:6 "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

Matt. 13:7 "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

Matt. 13:8 "And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

Matt. 13:9 "He who has ears, let him hear."

- Since this is our first parable in the Gospel of Matthew, let's take a moment to understand how parables work in general
 - A parable uses ordinary circumstances from everyday life to represent more complex spiritual truths
 - Being familiar with the ordinary situation allows us to work out the meaning of the deeper, spiritual truth
 - In that way, a parable is a method of packing a lot of meaning into a simple story
 - For those reasons, parables have a paradoxical quality
 - They obscure truth, which is something Jesus was trying to do, but at the same time, they simplify complicated ideas

- And like solving any puzzle, interpreting a parable properly requires making sure that all the pieces fit together
- If they don't, then it means we have gone wrong somewhere
- Turning to our first parable, we notice right away that it's constructed in four parts or conditions
 - Across these four conditions we find some details varying while others remain the same
 - Let's start by considering what stays the same across all four conditions: each condition has the same farmer or sower
 - We don't have four different farmers each sowing a different field
 - No, there's just one guy in the story sowing as he moves along
 - And that farmer is clearly a lousy sower, as sowers go
 - He's throwing seed indiscriminately, randomly, without care or precision, seemingly without concern for where it lands
 - It's as if he has an unlimited supply of free seed
 - Moreover, the farmer does no work to ensure the success of his planting
 - He isn't preparing the ground or watering the seed or pruning or removing weeds, etc.
 - He just leaves the outcome to nature
 - Based on that observation, we quickly conclude that the sower isn't the focus of Jesus' parable
 - A parable about sowing must have a sower, of course, but the sower is incidental to the story, he's not the point of the story
 - The focus of the story is clearly elsewhere and the farmer's lack of care and skill makes that clear
 - Which brings us to the other detail that is consistent across the four conditions: the seed
 - The seed for each condition is the same...every kernel has equal potential to grow, equal ability to produce fruit
 - So if the seed is the same and the sower is the same...then what varies between the four conditions?
- There are two major details that vary from condition to condition: the type of soil and the outcome of the planting
 - In fact, some call this story the parable of the four soils, because that's the most prominent detail of the parable
 - Each of the different soils produces a different result and it's the interplay between soil and outcome that drives the narrative
 - So let's take a moment to examine each soil and its corresponding outcome
 - In the first condition, the seed falls on a hard-packed road

- A seed falling on that kind of ground has no chance to embed itself in the soil
- It just sits exposed to the world and as a result, birds see the seed and swoop down for an easy meal
- There's no growth, and in fact there's no life at all
- In the second condition the seed falls on rocky places, begins to grow but soon withers and dies
 - Rocky ground is a type of soil common in the mountain regions of Palestine
 - It's the same type of ground common to South Texas...thin topsoil atop a layer of limestone rock
- When topsoil is thin it remains loose, making it easier for the seed to enter easily
 - Also, moisture easily penetrates loose soil, so a seed that falls in that environment can easily germinate overnight
 - Notice in v.5 Jesus says the seed sprang up immediately
- But the thin soil and rock conspire to bring an end to the plant
 - Jesus says in v.6 that when the sun rises the plant can't survive the heat of the day
 - Because the root can't go deep and the moisture evaporates quickly, once again we're left without life
- In the third condition, the seed falls on soil that's very capable of sustaining life
 - In fact, it's so accommodating that it's already supporting a host of harmful weeds
 - Jesus says in v.7 that the third soil has weeds and thorns, and as these grow up with the seeds they choke it off
 - To choke off doesn't mean to die, in this context, it means to not produce fruit (which would be more seed)
 - So the third soil is the first condition where we end with a living plant, albeit a plant that is struggling in the midst of competition
 - It may be alive, but all its energy is directed toward its survival
 - Which leaves no energy remaining to reproduce itself
 - Finally, we have the fourth condition, which is clearly the ideal outcome
 - Jesus calls the fourth soil "good" meaning it's loose and deep and free of contaminants
 - As a result the seed takes root, grows and produces a great crop
- We can see how the simple story of the parable is easily understood, but the spiritual meaning is outside our reach, at least at first
 - Yet Jesus expected His disciples in the crowd to understand it, but how could they?
 - Notice what Jesus says in v.9..."he who has ears, let him hear"
 - We first saw Jesus use that phrase in Chapter 11, and I told you then it would become a common phrase

- Jesus is saying that not everyone will understand what He's saying, so He's addressing only those who are able to hear
- And the Lord determines who is able through the ministry of the Spirit

1Cor. 2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Just as your spirit knows your inner thoughts, so the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God
 - And the Spirit is given to us to teach us spiritual truth
 - When we speak spiritual truth to a fellow believer, the information comes in the form of human words, Paul says
 - But in reality, it's a spiritual transmission from God to the teacher to the student and every step is directed by the Spirit of God
- But because unbelievers do not possess the Spirit of God, spiritual truth lies beyond their grasp
 - Notice in 1 Cor 2:14 Paul says that a natural man (unbeliever) does not accept things of the Spirit (spiritual truth)
 - Moreover, Paul says they cannot accept these things because they require the Spirit to reveal them
- So the universal decoder ring of spiritual truth is the Spirit of God, and only the children of God possess the Spirit's insight
 - Which is why Jesus says only those with ears may hear His message...He means only those with the Spirit can understand what He says
 - The unbelievers in that crowd and unbelievers who read Matthew 13 today can't appreciate the meaning of these things
 - While Jesus' disciples in the crowd, and His disciples today, will understand the truth as the Spirit explains it
 - Maybe not at first but in time the truth will be revealed
 - Jesus' obscuring of the truth was a result of Israel's rejection, which Jesus states plainly in the next passage

Matt. 13:10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

Matt. 13:11 Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

Matt. 13:12 “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

Matt. 13:13 “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Matt. 13:14 “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;

Matt. 13:15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’

Matt. 13:16 “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

Matt. 13:17 “For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

- Last week I introduced this chapter by explaining that in the wake of Israel’s rejection of Him, Jesus shifted His approach to ministry in dramatic ways
 - One of the changes was refusing to teach openly, and instead Jesus began teaching in parables exclusively
 - In fact notice in 13:34 Matthew reports that Jesus never taught the crowds without using parables from this time forward
 - This switch was so dramatic that it caught even the disciples by surprise
 - And we see that clearly here, as they felt the need to ask Jesus in v.10 why He has resorted to speaking in parables
 - Jesus responds saying it has been granted to the disciples to know the mysteries of the Kingdom Program but not to the rest
 - God is selectively revealing truth to those who have faith in Jesus while withholding it from those who didn’t
 - Which is why Jesus chose to speak in parables, to keep the truth beyond their reach
 - Notice in v.12 Jesus says that whoever has will receive more until they have an

abundance

- He's speaking about spiritual insight, saying those who received Jesus as Messiah will receive far more revelation as a result
 - While those who did not receive the truth of Jesus would lose what little insight and privilege they already had
- Specifically, the generation that rejected Jesus lost what little revelation and blessing they had received through the Law and prophets
 - They would lose access to Jesus' miracles and teaching in the near future when Jesus ascended to the Father
 - And after that Israel would lose their nation and their temple and their place in the land
 - While the disciples who received Jesus gained much more
 - They received the Spirit at Pentecost followed by greater revelation in the New Testament canon
- The Lord said this would happen through the prophets, specifically in Isaiah 6
 - The prophet warned Israel that when the Messiah came He would speak in parables to them so that they can't understand what He said
 - This happened because Israel's hearts were dull, and they were scarcely looking or listening to God any longer
 - They overlooked their Messiah, committed the unforgivable sin, and so they lost the opportunity to understand the Kingdom
 - In fact, Isaiah says plainly that had the Lord not spoken in parables, had He explained the Kingdom plainly, Israel would have understood
 - And had they understood, they would have returned to the Lord and the Lord would have healed them
 - Now as we read this, we all have the same reaction...why didn't the Lord allow that to happen?
 - And the answer is simple...because of you and me and the millions of other Gentile believers the Lord has saved over the past 2,000 years
 - The larger plan of God for Israel and for the world depends upon Israel rejecting Jesus
 - Which is why the Lord did not allow His people to return to Him having rejected Jesus as they did
 - But in a future day, the Lord will have mercy on Israel
 - He will lead them to call out for Jesus saying "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord"
 - In the meantime, by Israel's transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous, as Paul says in Romans 11
- So now it's time for the Holy Spirit to explain this parable to us, through the word of Jesus

Matt. 13:18 “Hear then the parable of the sower.

Matt. 13:19 “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.

Matt. 13:20 “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

Matt. 13:21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

Matt. 13:22 “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Matt. 13:23 “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

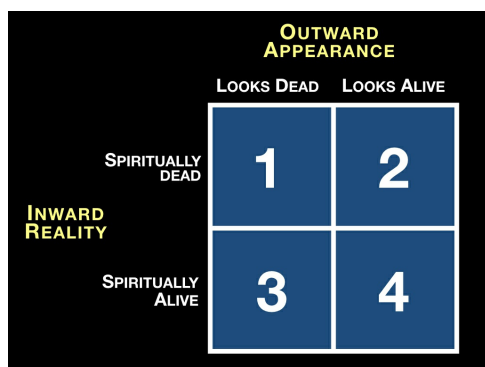
- In v.19, Jesus gives us the key to decoding the parable
 - He says the seed represents the word of the Kingdom and the soil pictures the heart
 - Luke’s version of this parable makes Jesus’ explanation even clearer:

Luke 8:11 “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.

- So the seed represents the spreading or planting of the word of God
 - And that seed is “planted” in human hearts, which is itself a picture of our spirit
 - So planting a seed in the ground pictures the word of God coming to live and grow inside us spiritually
- And therefore each of the four conditions explains how different people respond to the Kingdom program message, which is the Gospel
 - And based on this parable, there are four and only four possible responses to hearing the Gospel during this age
 - All human responses to the Gospel fit into one of these four conditions, so we need to keep that in mind as we interpret it
- So in v.19 the first condition represents someone who has heard the word but does not understand it and the devil removes it from them
 - Luke makes this situation a little clearer in his explanation

Luke 8:12 “Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.

- The problem here is the heart...it's so hard, like hard-packed soil, that the word has no chance to enter much less grow
- And the enemy comes along afterward to remove it from the person's attention to ensure that doesn't change
- In the second condition, the seeds enters the soil easily, and so a person might receive the word of the Gospel with joy, or so it seems
 - But as Jesus says in v.21 there is no root, and without a root, there is no life
 - The faith in the word is merely external and temporary, and the moment that faith is tested by trials or persecution, it dies
 - Like the plant that appeared to take hold in the soil, all was not as it seemed
 - And in time, faith dies like the plant, which is to say it never had a true chance
 - Then in the third condition the word of God takes root in the soil of the heart, and it begins to grow as it should
 - But the deceitfulness of the world and attraction of riches becomes a distraction and drain on the individual
 - Rather than investing energy in their spiritual growth and reproduction, they spend their time and energy on fighting to survive
 - And as a result they are unfruitful, spiritually speaking
 - Remember, in this condition the seed has taken root and lives on in the heart, but it amounts to little or no spiritual benefit
 - Finally, in the fourth condition, Jesus says this person hears the word, understands it, and begins to bear spiritual fruit
 - The Greek word for understand means to have insight
 - It's not merely knowing the plain meaning of the word, but rather it means to appreciate the deeper implications of that truth
 - So that the person conforms their life to that truth and begins to live it out...and in that way they produce spiritual fruit
 - And of course, that fruit is more seed...more spreading of the truth leading to more disciples in their wake
- Now clearly Jesus is taking us to some point here, and it's easy to get distracted by trying to understand the kind of person represented by each condition
 - But if we get too absorbed by that exercise, we will miss the big picture here, and to help us see the larger point, let me suggest a simple diagram
 - It turns out that the four conditions of this parable form a structure similar to a Latin square
 - A Latin square is a mathematical array where two or more conditions are crossed to create a set of unique conditions
 - If you remember, we said there are 2 factors that vary across the four conditions, which results in a Latin square that looks like:



- Let's call this variable the inward reality of the person's heart: after hearing the word, are they spiritually dead or alive?
 - The first variable is the inward reality of the plant...in two conditions we find the plant dead in the end
 - And in the other two conditions, the plant remains alive
- The second variable is their outward appearance
 - And again, in two conditions the person projects a lack of faith
 - While in the other two conditions, the person projects a faith in the word
- And when we cross these two variables to form the four conditions in the parable, we arrive at the full spectrum of possible outcomes
 - In the first condition, we have a spiritually dead person, an unbeliever, and the person looks like it
 - He's the hardened atheist, the person with no interest in God or religion at all, and he's proud of his unbelief
 - There's no confusing this person for a believer, and unfortunately this is a possible outcome when the Gospel is preached
 - Jumping to Condition #4, we find the opposite situation
 - Here's a person who is clearly born again by their faith in the word and they are alive in the Spirit
 - Moreover, they are producing fruit – they are mature
 - They look like a believer, and have become an outward witness of the truth
 - Back in Condition #2 we have the person who responded to the message as if it had taken root in their heart
 - They responded with joy to the message, perhaps attending church or a Bible study...maybe being baptized even
 - But that initial response had no spiritual root...it was a response that came entirely in the flesh and not in the spirit
 - So in time, when persecution or trials came, they quickly changed their mind and fell away

- They ultimately return to who they always were: spiritually dead
- Finally, we have Condition #3, the person hears the word, becomes spiritual alive yet produces no spiritual fruit
 - Jesus tells this parable largely to highlight this particular situation: the Condition #3 Christian
 - We can see that clearly when we look at how Luke ends this parable

Luke 8:16 “Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light.

Luke 8:17 “For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

Luke 8:18 “So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

- After Jesus told the parable, He makes His own application, and as He does He emphasizes only one of these four conditions: Condition #3
 - In speaking about that person, Jesus says no one lights a lamp and then covers it
 - If you go to the effort to light a lamp, you do so with the expectation of receiving its service
 - Likewise, when the Lord illuminates the truth of the Gospel in your heart, He expects you to shine that light as a witness to His glory
 - But when we allow the cares and worries of this world to distract us, we devote all our energy to surviving rather than thriving
 - And that witness is hidden, our light is covered by a flesh of worldliness and we produce no fruit for the one who planted us
 - His point is that we were saved by the message of the Gospel for a purpose, and that purpose was to serve the Kingdom Program
 - And if we are to serve Christ as He expects, we can't allow ourselves to become distracted by the cares and riches of this world
 - You'll know if you're in danger of becoming a Condition #3 Christian if you feel you're barely surviving in this world
 - Are you weighed down by trial and temptation? Do you struggle to follow the basic disciplines of your faith like regular church attendance, Bible study, prayer?
 - Do you make spiritual commitments to yourself or others but then consistently you break those promises?
 - You promise yourself you'll get serious about Christ but before you know it, something comes along causing you break that promise?
- If that's you, Condition #3 Christian, you need to get spiritual wisdom this morning from

this parable

- You need to see these things with spiritual eyes...the enemy is fighting you, pulling you down, choking you off
 - And you're letting him do it
 - The enemy knows that if you ever got serious about following Christ and started keeping all those promises you're making to yourself, you would become fruitful
 - Not only would you find that joy and promise of life that you've been searching for everywhere else
 - But you would finally fulfill your purpose as a disciple...finally, you would be following Christ
- That's the first key difference between the physical Kingdom and the Kingdom Program
 - In the Kingdom to come, we will all be glorified and sinless, obeying Christ and His word perfectly
 - But for now during the Kingdom Program, we will struggle against our flesh and against the enemy
 - And the key to serving Christ successfully during this age is to let the word of Christ grow in our hearts
 - To make living it out our goal, so that we might be that light to the world

- Welcome back to Kingdom Program 101, Jesus' training course for His disciples
 - The Kingdom Program is the Church's mission
 - It's our program of recruiting men and women to become citizens of the Kingdom by placing their faith in Jesus
 - So that in a day to come when Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom on earth, all citizens will enter together with Him
 - This plan is so different from what Jesus' followers expected Jesus to establish at His first coming
 - They anticipated that the Messiah's arrival meant Israel would receive that literal, physical Kingdom in their day
 - And had Israel accepted Jesus' proposal, the Kingdom would have been theirs in that day
 - But Israel refused the Kingdom proposal so Jesus withdrew His offer and in its place, He initiated this program
 - And He spent the final months of His earthly life training them on their new unexpected mission
 - And in this chapter Matthew introduces Jesus' shift in dramatic fashion with seven parables about the Kingdom
 - The parables are coded messages intended only for the disciples, since it involves Kingdom work that only Jesus' disciples can do
 - We play a part in building a spiritual Kingdom, a strange, unexpected, mysterious movement of the Spirit we call the Church
 - It's people around the world called out of darkness, responding in faith to a Jesus they've never seen
 - For those early disciples, this was a mind-blowing shift in how God worked, and if you think about it...it's still mind-blowing
- So the seven parables in this chapter kick off Jesus' training program in dramatic fashion, and we started last week with the first of these parables
 - The Sower and Seed parable, as it's usually called, explains how the Kingdom program will spread and what will propel it
 - The word of God is Christ's tool to move the Kingdom call outward
 - The farmer in the parable distributes seed without reservation, without limits
 - And wherever it lands, it produces a result according to His purposes

**Is. 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.**

**Is. 55:10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,**

**And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
Is. 55:11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.**

- The Lord's word yields a variety of response in the hearts of the world
 - Some will respond in faith while others will not and we're not charged with fixing that problem...for it is not a problem at all
 - Jesus' point wasn't that the farmer should improve his sowing method so as to harvest more
 - Jesus was speaking directly to that plant that fails to produce fruit in response to receiving the word of God
- Christians need to make a goal of living up to the expectations that come with our faith
 - Jesus expects us to join the work of the Kingdom Program
 - We're expected to produce a crop much greater than just ourselves...we should seek to multiply a hundred fold
- Those Christians who do not produce fruit in this way are Condition 3 Christians
 - As Luke wrote, they are those choked off by the worries and riches and pleasures of this life and so failed to reproduce
 - This isn't what Jesus expects of us...He says no one lights a lamp only to cover it over with a blanket
 - In other words, the Lord didn't place His light in us by His Spirit so that we could hide it behind a fleshly, worldly lifestyle
 - Instead, we must let our light shine before men in such a way that they might see our good works and glorify our Father Who is in Heaven
- That was the first thing Jesus wanted His disciples to understand...but it's only the first thing
 - That leads us to our second lesson in the Kingdom program, found in our next parable...

Matt. 13:24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

Matt. 13:25 "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.

Matt. 13:26 "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

Matt. 13:27 "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

Matt. 13:28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him,

‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’

Matt. 13:29 “But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.

Matt. 13:30 ‘Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

- Jesus uses a similar setting for His second parable, so it’s only natural to assume that the symbolism carries over from the first parable
 - One again we have a story of sowing seed, but this time the landowner is central to the storyline
 - The man’s servants sow his field with good seed
 - Then while the man’s servants were sleeping overnight, an enemy enters the land and begins to sabotage the field
 - The enemy of the landowner sowed tares in the same field alongside the wheat plants
 - The Greek word used for tare is *zi’-za-nion*, which means darnel
 - A darnel is a type of European rye grass, and when a darnel first sprouts it looks exactly like new shoots of wheat
 - Obviously the enemy of the landowner wanted to ruin the man’s crop by sowing confusion, literally
 - By planting grass in the field, the enemy wanted to introduce competition for resources leading to a reduction in the crop
 - The grass growing next to the wheat would rob the wheat of water and nutrients from the field to choke it off
 - It reminds us of the third condition in our earlier parable
- In v.27 the slaves awake to notice the rye grass growing in the field
 - So they ask their master how this could be so...that is, how could there be bad plants coming up in the master’s good field?
 - The master explains that an enemy had entered his field at night to sow the tares
 - So the slaves offer to go out and remove the bad plants from the field
 - But the master quickly objects reminding the slaves that the tares are identical to the wheat
 - The master says the slaves would inevitably make mistakes
 - They might pull up the wrong plant, which would only further reduce the master’s production of wheat
 - The landowner was willing to let the tares share the field for a time though it may reduce production somewhat

- At least every wheat plant survives, and in time, the tares and wheat would be clearly known
- At harvest time, the wheat plants would mature to the point of producing seed but the grass never would
- So at the harvest, the wheat plants can be identified easily, taken out of the field and preserved in the master's barn
- While the tares will be removed and burned
- That's our second parable, and as with our first parable, it says something about the nature of the Kingdom program
 - Notice in v.24 Jesus says that the Kingdom program may be compared to a man sowing a field with good seed
 - So based on these two parables, we can already see that the Kingdom will be a program of sowing, growing and harvesting
 - In literal terms, it's a program of recruiting new citizens for the Kingdom by sowing the word of the Kingdom or the Gospel
 - And that program will be opposed by a powerful enemy intent on limiting production
 - Like the first parables, Jesus' disciples couldn't fully understand this parable, so they ask Jesus for an explanation in private
 - That request comes in v.36, and it's followed by Jesus' interpretation
 - But before that moment, Jesus gives us two more parables that build on His teaching of sowing and growing
- So let's look at those additional parables before making sense of this one

Matt. 13:31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; **Matt. 13:32** and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

Matt. 13:33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

- In v.31 Jesus sticks with an agricultural motif, but this time it's a mustard plant
 - Mustard is an herb and there are a variety of mustard in the world
 - The kind of mustard native to the Middle East grows considerably taller than any other herb
 - It towers as much as 10 feet tall which makes a mustard plant like a tree compared to other garden herbs
 - It's so large that birds will make nests in its branches

- But the seed of the mustard plant is quite small, about the size of a BB
 - And it's that contrast between the mustard seed's modest beginning and its impressive finish that form Jesus' focus
 - The mustard plant's small-to-great transformation characterizes an aspect of the Kingdom, but which aspect?
 - Once again, it's not immediately clear what Jesus is saying here
- But Jesus teaches a companion parable in v.33 to help us understand His point
 - He says the kingdom can be compared to leaven or yeast that a woman "hid" in three pecks of flour until it was completely leavened
 - The scene here is very different than the previous three parables but the contrast is similar
 - Yeast is a microscopic plant, and when it's activated by the warmth and moisture of the dough, it begins to reproduce
 - As it does, it gives off carbon dioxide gas causing dough to expand and rise
 - Eventually, the yeast reaches to every part of the dough causing the entire lump to rise
 - So what was small and initially hidden soon spread to every corner and made its presence known
 - So like the mustard plant, this parable starts with something small, insignificant and almost invisible: yeast in dough
 - And like the mustard plant, we end with a disproportionately large outcome in the end
 - As the yeast spreads to every part of the dough it causes all of it to rise thereby making its presence known
- So we have three parables about the nature of the Kingdom program
 - The meaning of each may not be perfectly clearly, though we may think we know what Jesus was talking about...and perhaps we do
 - But if so, it's probably because we have 2,000 years of history helping us make sense of them
 - But imagine yourself in the disciples' shoes, to say nothing of the crowds...they were mystified
 - And again, this was intentional...as Jesus repeats in the next short passage

Matt. 13:34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable.

Matt. 13:35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

"I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES;

I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."

- As I mentioned last week, Jesus only spoke to the crowds in parables after His rejection
- Never again would the crowds hear Jesus declaring spiritual truth in the open
- Matthew says this was to fulfill the prophecies spoken in the Psalms, which promised Israel the Lord would come to them speaking parables
 - Ironically, Jesus spoke to a hard-hearted Israel in parables so that they would *not* understand spiritual truth
 - And yet, speaking in parables was itself another sign to prove to Israel that Jesus *was* their Messiah
- So now let's stitch together the meaning of these parables, beginning with Jesus' explanation of the first

Matt. 13:36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."

Matt. 13:37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,

Matt. 13:38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;

Matt. 13:39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels.

- Here again we see the disciples struggling to follow Jesus' teaching, so they ask for an explanation
 - And Jesus gladly gives them the answer, which tells us that Jesus wasn't trying to confuse His followers with these stories
 - He wants us to understand them and by the Spirit, we can
 - And as with His first parable, Jesus' explanation begins with the most important detail
 - In the Sower and the Seed, Jesus opened with the seed was the word of God
 - As that seed falls on hearts around the world, it produces a variety of results
 - Sometimes it produces new life, other times it won't
 - Sometimes that new life produces fruit, sometimes it won't
 - And now in this parable Jesus emphasizes that the One who sows is Jesus Himself
 - Specifically, the Lord sows good seed, which are sons of the Kingdom (believers), while the enemy sows bad seed (unbelievers)
 - Jesus has taken the focus of His first parable and narrowed it down, essentially zooming into Conditions 3 & 4
 - In the Sower & the Seed, Jesus prepared His disciples to understand that the Kingdom program won't reach everyone
 - And now He's explaining why even among those who receive the Gospel some will not produce fruit

- Furthermore, this parable introduces the idea of a season of time, a period in which the Kingdom program will operate on earth (i.e., in the “field”)
 - Jesus says that the growing must continue uninterrupted until the harvest time
 - And harvest time is a common picture in the Bible of the return of Christ and the judgment He brings to earth
 - We see that clearly here as Jesus says in v.39 the end of this age is represented by the harvest
 - An age in the Bible is a long, finite period of history
 - An age has a beginning and an end defined by major world events dictated by God
 - And as an age comes to an end, a new age will begin
 - The book of Daniel and others tell us that our current age will end when Christ returns to earth
 - And the next age to follow is the age of the literal Kingdom of Jesus on earth
 - So in this parable, Jesus says the harvest represents that moment when He returns to rule and the present age ends
 - At that time, Jesus says He will direct His angels to harvest, that is to separate the wheat from the tares in the field
 - Or in other words, at the end of this age the believers and unbelievers on earth will be completely separated
 - For the first time in history, those who are truly God’s and those who are not will be fully known for Christ will make it clear
- Notice how Jesus describes that moment:

Matt. 13:40 “So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.

Matt. 13:41 “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,

Matt. 13:42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 13:43 “Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- The moment Jesus is describing here takes place at the very end of this age, literally as this age is ending and the next begins
 - At that time, the earth will be in utter turmoil
 - It will have reached the end of a seven-year period of supernatural judgments unequalled by anything the world has ever seen
 - Before that time, the Church will have been removed from the earth while most of those who remained have died in the judgments

- We will learn much more about these circumstances in Matthew 24 (and the upcoming Revelation course)
- Those who remain will be clearly divided into God's people and the enemy's forces, and they will be engaged in a great war
 - And into the chaotic devastation, a light will appear out of the darkness
 - Jesus says He returns to earth in glory bringing with Him His angels, who will carry out His judgment on the unbelieving
- Then and only then will the sons of God and the sons of the devil be fully known and separated
 - But until that time, the two worlds will coexist, and in fact they will be difficult if not impossible to tell apart at times
 - A person's heart can't be fully known...only by their fruit can we gain a limited understanding of their heart
 - And the full measure of that fruit will not be evident until the end of the age
 - In the meantime, these two worlds will mix but will not find common ground, and so spiritual warfare will be the norm
- And I'm sure for Jesus' disciples this would have been the most surprising revelation in this parable
 - Put yourself in the shoes of a first century Jew for a moment
 - For a Jew living prior to Christ, the spiritual "haves" and "have-nots" of the world were always distinct and easy to recognize
 - Jews were God's people and Gentiles were dogs, they believed, and there was no confusing one for the other
 - But now Jesus was saying that God's children and Satan's children would be hard to distinguish
 - Not only would these two groups be hard to identify within the world, they may even rub elbows inside our congregations
 - Remember back in Matthew 7 Jesus said that not all who proclaim "Lord, lord" will be found in Heaven
 - Just as tares look very much like wheat, at least at first, unbelievers can mimic the claims and behaviors of Christians
 - But you find the main point of this parable in v.29 when the Master says do not uproot the wheat
 - Remember, the problem with having tares in the field is that it chokes off production of the wheat
 - And for that reason, under normal circumstances a farmer wouldn't hesitate to remove weeds from his field
 - While he might lose a few wheat plants in the process, the overall effect would be to gain a greater harvest
 - But in this parable, the Master adamantly refuses to allow his servants to remove

the weeds...and why?

- Because the Master was unwilling to lose even a single wheat plant
- In other words, the Master cared more for the life of each of those wheat stalks than He did for the overall production in His field
- You and I are those wheat stalks, and Jesus' primary focus in planting the field of this world is in bringing each of us into the Kingdom
 - As Jesus said in John 6

John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 6:39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

- Jesus is determined to lose none of those the Father gives Him, and that requires tolerating tares in His field for a time
 - But one day He will rectify the situation
- But in the meantime, it also means that Jesus is willing to tolerate less production, and that returns our focus to the Condition 3 Christian
 - Last week Jesus said that those Christians who fail to produce fruit are those distracted and troubled by the world
 - They are those who are weighed down by the worries, riches, and pleasures of life
 - And as a result they neglect their walk with Christ, they fail to devote time and energy to the work of the Kingdom, and they don't produce fruit
- And now we're learning that these outcomes are the direct result of the schemes of the enemy
 - He plants bad seed around us...people who come into our lives, whether personally or indirectly, to create these distractions
 - The ungodly friend who tempts you into bad habits or routines
 - The technology guru whose inventions entrap and distract you, stealing your time and money
 - The Hollywood producer filling your head with vile or lewd images
 - These are all bad seed sown by the enemy in the hope of choking off fruit
- But this is a reality of the Kingdom program...the enemy works to reduce the Lord's yield yet the Lord allows it because He cares for you and will not lose you

- But knowing this truth does not become excuse for our failure to produce fruit
 - We cannot turn to Jesus later and claim that “the devil made me do it”
 - Rather, I think we will be embarrassed when we realize how little we did to resist these schemes
 - Don’t let the enemy win in your life...resist him, the Bible says, and he will flee from you
- In the meantime, Jesus did not want His disciples to worry that the enemy might gain the upper hand in his fight
 - He wanted us to know the enemy will not limit the reach of the Kingdom program despite sowing tares in the field
 - In v.31 Jesus says the Kingdom program will grow much like a mustard seed grows in a garden
 - At first, this endeavor will seem quite small and insignificant – especially in the face of such determined opposition
 - After all, if I showed you a mustard seed, who could imagine that much could come from it?
- And I’m sure the disciples felt very small indeed in the initial days and weeks after Jesus’ departure from earth
 - They were hiding in homes afraid of challenging the Romans and Jews, much less Satan and his forces
 - But in time, the Kingdom program has grown, like a mustard plant, to the point that it towers over the garden
 - Such will be the progression of the Kingdom program despite the enemy’s best efforts to stop it
- In fact, notice the mustard plant has birds nesting in the branches...we first saw Jesus use a bird in a parable in the Sower & Seed
 - And in that parable, the bird represented Satan, and so I believe that imagery is intended to follow here
 - The birds in the tree are like the tares in the field, so as the Kingdom grows it will also attract the enemy’s attention
 - And the enemy will try to make a home for himself into the church but he will not stop its growth
 - In fact, the church’s growth is what invites the enemy to nest in it
- Finally, in v.33 Jesus reminds us of our role in this program...we are called to reproduce so that we might propel the growth of the Kingdom program
 - We are the yeast, the leaven that Jesus hid in the world like the woman hid yeast in her dough
 - We are insignificant in comparison to the world overall in the same way that yeast is an insignificant ingredient compared to the rest of the dough
 - And we are hidden in the world in the same way yeast disappears within the

dough

- Our faith in Jesus is not visible by itself...we can only be known to the world by the effect of our reproduction
- Yeast ultimately makes itself known when it starts to reproduce and spread, and as it does it expands that dough
 - And soon no one could miss the effect of that yeast
 - That's Jesus' call upon our lives...that we be known by our fruit, and our fruit is the seed that results in more production
- The enemy will seek to rob us of our time, talent and treasure so as to limit our production
 - But he will not stop the growth or reach of Jesus' Church...but he may stop your growth and your reach if you allow him
 - The Kingdom program is a work of service to Jesus
 - We aren't accountable for the results of the Kingdom, but we are accountable for our own fruit
 - He who has ears let him hear tonight...

- Have you heard the old saying, “drinking from a firehose”?
 - How many feel like that’s you over the past couple of weeks?
 - We’ve run through about 2/3 of Chapter 13 in a couple of weeks covering 4 of the seven Kingdom parables in this chapter
 - It’s been a lot of information, and perhaps you’re still struggling to make sense of it all
 - If so, you’re not alone, because I’m sure the disciples felt much the same
 - And remember, they had far less than 2 weeks to digest all this...they had barely 2 hours
 - Jesus lays out these difficult concepts hidden in coded language in a short time, so it probably felt like that first day in a college class
 - It was like drinking from a firehose for them too, but Jesus patiently gave them explanations when they needed it
 - So it’s only fair that I take a moment to do the same for us
 - So let’s do a brief review of what we’ve learned so far by recapping the interpretation of the first four parables we’ve studied in this chapter
 - The four parables were the Sower & the Seed, the Wheat & the Tares, the Mustard Seed and Leaven & Dough
 - The four parables all teach us something about the Kingdom Program, which is the way the Kingdom will exist during the Church Age
 - Jesus is introducing how the concept of the Kingdom changes from a proposal to a program now that Israel has rejected Him
- To begin, we have the Sower & the Seed parable to open the chapter
 - First Jesus gave the parable and later He explained it in detail
 - The parable described how the Kingdom Program will be received by hearts in the world
 - And there are four possible responses to hearing the word of God calling us to place faith in Jesus Christ
 - First some hearts will be closed to the message and reject it right away
 - Other hearts will seem to receive it at first, but their interest will be short-lived
 - When that commitment to following Christ is tested in any way, they fall away having no root
 - Some hearts will respond genuinely in faith, and new spiritual life will take root
 - But then the worries and riches and pleasures of this life will choke off any fruit in their spiritual life
 - Finally, some hearts will hear and believe the word, and they will set their hearts on producing a great crop for Jesus
- To arrive at His four conditions, Jesus crossed two variables: inward reality vs. outward appearance forming a [Latin square](#)

- Conditions 1 and 2 are both inwardly dead, while in Conditions 3 & 4 both are spiritually alive; they are born again by faith
 - That detail was pictured in the parable by whether the plant lived or died in each condition (2 died, 2 lived)
 - Then for each pair, one appears outwardly alive while the other appears dead
 - Conditions 2 & 3 had appearances that didn't match their inward reality
 - While Conditions 1 & 4 had outward appearances that matched their inward reality
- All this is interesting, but according to Luke's Gospel, Jesus was primarily concerned with only one of these conditions:
 - Jesus warns the unfruitful Christian, Condition 3 Christian I call it
 - Don't take that light that the Lord placed in your heart and hide it under a blanket
 - Shine your light before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven
- That leads us to the Wheat & Tares, where Jesus explains the spiritual war that will rage during this age leading some Christians to be unfruitful
 - And in this parable Jesus explains that the Kingdom Program will be resisted by an enemy that wants to limit the Church's reach
 - During the Kingdom Program, there will be two kinds of people in the world
 - One group are those who hear and receive the Gospel; these are the wheat, Christ's followers
 - The other group are the unbelievers in the world; those who have not accepted the truth
 - And one group will oppose the other, as directed by our enemy whose unseen hand is manipulating the unbelieving world to do his bidding
 - The enemy sows "tares" around each of us, bringing unbelievers into our circle hoping to steal away our time, money, strength and desire to serve Christ
 - And so the enemy chokes off the production of spiritual fruit among at least some believers
- But lest we worry that the enemy might stop the Kingdom Program, the Lord gave us the parable of the Mustard Seed
 - The Mustard Seed parable reassured us that Satan's schemes won't work
 - No matter what the enemy may do to choke off individuals in the body, he can't hold back the growth of the church overall
 - Regardless of how many Condition 3 Christians there are, the Kingdom Program will eventually reach the world as the Lord appoints
 - Ultimately, the Kingdom will fill the world as it becomes a literal, physical Kingdom at Christ's return
 - Finally, we have the Leaven & Dough parable which brings us back to the main point

- Our goal and responsibility as Christians is to be like leaven in dough
- Like yeast hidden in dough...believers can't be seen except by the effect we have in the world
- We are invisible in the world unless we reproduce, but if we do, we can have a great effect propelling the church outward
- So we leave the big things to Christ...we don't try to figure out other people's hearts
 - We aren't supposed to devise ways to defeat the enemy, we aren't supposed to isolate ourselves from the world
 - The Lord decides where the seed falls, it's His word that changes hearts, and He knows who belongs to Him
 - He has the battle plan for the enemy, and He assures us His Church will prevail against the gates of Hell
 - He only asks us to do one thing...produce spiritual fruit so that we might be part of His Kingdom Program
- Let's summarize the four parables with four statements:
 - Sower & Seed...
 - The Kingdom Program builds a spiritual community of new hearts by the spreading of the word of God
 - Christ's followers are to serve the Kingdom Program by producing fruit
 - Wheat & Tares...
 - Our Kingdom work will be opposed in the world by an enemy seeking to choke off believers' fruit
 - We will endure until the end when Jesus separates the groups
 - Mustard Seed...
 - Despite the enemy's efforts, the Church grows to reach the world
 - He cannot stop God, but the enemy will find "nests" within the Church where he gains a foothold
 - Yeast & Dough...
 - We are hidden in the world, small and insignificant, but as we produce fruit we help propel the Church outward
 - Our responsibility to the Kingdom Program is to bear fruit
- Spiritual fruit – good works in service to Christ – is the way the church is supposed to serve the Kingdom Program to reach the world
 - To put it another way, our primary tool of evangelism is our obedience to God's word
 - The best way to reach the lost is to pursue your own sanctification
 - Or as the old saying goes...preach the Gospel everywhere you go, and when necessary use words

- So it's not (just) what we say that moves the church forward, it's who we become in Christ
 - And that makes perfect sense
 - When someone brings us a new message, something they want us to consider, something that requires our agreement, we always evaluate the messenger, don't we?
 - If someone wants to sell you on a new fitness or weight loss program, don't you consider how fit the salesperson is?
 - If someone says they can be your financial advisor, but they're in bankruptcy, don't we look elsewhere for financial advice?
- The same principle is at work in the Kingdom Program
 - If we are a Condition 3 Christian, what product are we "selling" to the rest of the world?
 - As far as they can tell, we look exactly like them...and if so, what kind of change are we advocating?
 - "Come to faith in Christ and stay exactly the same...only with fire insurance?" That's not a very compelling offer
- If you want to participate in the Kingdom Program, set your heart on becoming Christ-like by yielding to the Spirit as He teaches and convicts you
 - This isn't to say that Christians must be perfect or sinless before we can be useful to building the Kingdom...of course not
 - The issue raised in these parables wasn't perfection...it was production
 - Are you producing spiritual fruit at some level...are you living out your faith in a genuine way?
 - Are you shining your light before men so that they might see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven?
 - Are you learning the word of God, letting it change you from the inside out, living it out even as you speak it to others?
 - Or are we saying one thing while living another way? Are we hearers of the word and not doers?
 - By the spiritual fruit in your life, you become a witness to the truth of the Gospel, which the Lord uses to yield a crop one hundred fold
 - The key here is not allowing the enemy to distract us from our mission by tempting us or frightening us with things in this world, his world
 - Yes, we all have to make a home, earn a living, raise our kids, binge watch a Netflix series...all important things
 - But those things are not the measure of our lives nor are they fulfillment of Christ's purpose in saving us
 - Remember, a farmer plants a crop so that it might produce a return
 - A tall, healthy green plant that doesn't bear fruit is completely useless to the

farmer

- So our obligation to Christ is to make our lives a living sacrifice, placing His priorities above our own so that we might produce a crop
- But let's be honest, the temptation to put other priorities ahead of participating in the Kingdom Program is real, and the Lord knew we will be tempted
 - And because the Lord loves us and wants to motivate us to do the right thing, He has provided a way for us to resist the enemy's temptations
 - Which leads us into the final sequence of three Kingdom parables

Matt. 13:44 “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

- This parable and the one that follows have often perplexed interpreters because they involve transactions
 - They speak of obtaining things of value through some kind of work
 - That detail suggests that the Kingdom comes to us by human works or some transaction between us and God
 - Of course that isn't what Jesus is saying, since the Bible makes abundantly clear that we gain salvation only by faith in Jesus
 - So what detail of the Kingdom is Jesus trying to describe here?
 - Taking a look at the parable...a man finds the treasure, Jesus says
 - In this parable the man wasn't looking for treasure
 - Whatever reason he had for digging in the field, it wasn't because he thought there was a treasure there
 - And we know this because Jesus says he “found” the treasure, which implies it was unexpected
 - And in fact, when he discovers it, he's so surprised that he's filled with joy over it
 - So the parable is picturing some kind of treasure that people don't even know exists until they discover it
- Then the parable takes an unexpected turn, as Jesus says this man then reburies the treasure and goes away to earn enough to buy the field
 - The man obviously doesn't own the land, which explains why he reburies it and leaves
 - Presumably, he was a farm laborer working in another man's field on that particular day
 - As he goes about his work on that day, he discovers this buried treasure, but the treasure doesn't belong to him
 - So naturally, he reburies it to hide his discovery

- And if he left the treasure exposed, the current land owner might discover it too and then claim it as his rightful property
 - But if the laborer reburies the treasure, he's done nothing wrong...he's left everything exactly as it was before
- But the man has learned something that now changes the entire trajectory of his life
 - One minute he's just a day laborer working to earn a minuscule wage
 - Now he's a man with great riches...but those riches are not yet his to enjoy
- He first must go away and earn them
 - Jesus says the man goes away to earn enough money to return and buy the land
 - Once he buys the land, then the treasure will also become his to enjoy without dispute
- Now what aspect of the Kingdom Program is Jesus describing?
 - There are some answers we can rule out quickly
 - For example, we know the treasure can't represent our salvation or Heaven because salvation cannot be purchased or earned
 - The Bible is very clear that salvation is only obtainable by placing faith in Jesus as our sacrifice...no work brings anyone into Heaven
 - Furthermore, the treasure can't be the Gospel message itself
 - Because we are not called to bury or hide the Gospel message after we discover it
 - That would be exactly the opposite to the Kingdom Program
 - So the treasure must represent some other aspect of the Kingdom Program
 - It's something we can discover now yet it must remain hidden until we have earned it
 - It's something a believer can discover in the field of the world, something that once we discover it, it changes the course of our lives
 - But it's something we may obtain only after great sacrifice
 - Notice the man in the parable had to sell all that he owned in order to obtain the treasure
 - So the value of this treasure is so great that nothing we already possess is equal to this hidden treasure
- So what feature of the Kingdom matches this description?
 - What kind of treasure awaits us in the future? One we cannot possess now, one we earn, one that's worth sacrificing everything to obtain?
 - Well consider these statements in the NT:

Luke 12:33 “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief

comes near nor moth destroys.

Luke 12:34 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

Col. 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

- Treasure is the Bible’s term for the affections of our heart, whether things on earth or in the Kingdom
 - And the Lord knew Christians would be tempted to put the Kingdom Program work on our back burner
 - The enemy is a powerful adversary and he has a million schemes to tempt us to pursue this world instead of pursuing Christ
 - The enemy tempts us to become Condition 3 Christians, to arousing the passions of our flesh to seek after the world’s pleasures
- But our Heavenly Father loves us and He wants to incentivize us to make sacrifices for His Kingdom Program
 - And He does so by offering us a reward in Heaven if we serve Him now, greater treasure than anything we can obtain here
 - That reward is *not* our salvation, and in fact it’s only available to those who are already Heaven bound by faith in Jesus
- The treasure that man discovered in that field pictures our eternal rewards, a treasure awaiting us in Heaven
 - That treasure is hidden in the sense that we can’t see it now
 - It’s awaiting us in the next life, to be revealed after we die and enter into the presence of the Lord
 - But we can discover it now...
 - Like the man in the field, we can learn about this hidden treasure as the Lord reveals its existence to us in His word
 - And now that we’ve learned about its existence, the choice is ours...are we willing to set aside our pursuit of this world so we may earn treasure in the next?
 - We earn it by serving the Lord with our good works
 - And those works we do in obedience to Christ now will form the basis for how Christ assigns us rewards in Heaven
 - As Paul explains

2Cor. 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- Paul says that our lives should be directed to one – and only one – goal: pleasing the Lord
- What's the goal of a Christian's life? Pleasing the Lord
- And we should all live according to that goal, Paul says, because all believers will appear before Christ for a judgment moment one day
 - That judgment isn't assessing our salvation...our salvation is never in question
 - If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are born again, and immediately and forever saved from the penalty of sin
 - But having been saved, we now become accountable to Jesus for how we serve Him
- And so we will face a judgment moment before Christ, Paul says
 - In that moment, Paul says, Christ evaluates our works so He may recompense or reward us for our deeds whether good or bad
 - A good work is any Kingdom Program service we gave to Christ as prompted by the Spirit
 - While a bad work is anything we did in our flesh, something we did for the purpose of gaining things of this world
 - These bad works go uncompensated...because as Jesus says elsewhere, we've already gained our reward for those works here
- So the parable of the hidden treasure teaches us that the Lord has provided an incentive for His children to make sacrifices for the Kingdom Program
 - He's told us that we have the opportunity to receive reward for those sacrifices of service
 - And in the final parable for today, Jesus teaches what a disciple does when he or she learns this truth

Matt. 13:45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,
Matt. 13:46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

- This parable is very similar to the earlier one, except for one key difference
 - In the parable of the man in the field, he wasn't looking for treasure
 - He stumbled upon it in the field, and once he learned about it he changed his entire life to obtain what he discovered
- But now in this parable, we have a merchant seeking fine pearls
 - He's already seeking treasure, and in fact his whole way of life is focused on buying

- and selling treasure
- So he's always got his eye out for that rare find, that exceptional pearl
- And Jesus says when he comes across that perfect pearl, he recognizes it because he's been trained in what to look for
- He's knows opportunity when it comes his way
- This parable is a compliment to the earlier one, obviously
 - It pictures the attitude and lifestyle of a believer who has learned the truth about eternal rewards
 - That believer will set his or her mind on looking for opportunity to serve Jesus, to finding that pearl of great price
 - We're always on the look-out for where we can please the Lord in serving the Kingdom
 - And when opportunity comes our way, we've trained ourselves to recognize it and seize
 - In fact, we're ready to walk away from everything we have, if necessary, to please the Lord and obtain His reward
 - So when the Lord offers us the opportunity to enter the mission field or to teach that Bible class or give that donation, we're ready
 - Or maybe the Spirit points out that stranger at the airport or in the mall and asks us to present the Gospel message
 - When we reach those moments, we need to be like that merchant...we need to have our hearts trained
 - We need to understand this heavenly economy, that the opportunity for treasure is on the line
 - But more than that, we need to be on the watch for these moments, like a merchant trained to spot a pearl
 - Otherwise, we may pass them by, giving in to the worries and pleasures and riches of this world
- The Lord has called each of us by the word of His grace to become part of His body by faith, and by our faith we have received the assurance of salvation
 - And He has always called us to participate in the Kingdom Program
 - The enemy doesn't want us to answer that call and he will try to choke off our fruitfulness
 - Which is why the Lord tells us about the opportunity to receive Heavenly rewards if we produce fruit
 - So the question now is what are you willing to do now that you have discovered this treasure?



Matthew - Lesson 13E

Chapter 13:47-52

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- Today we will finish the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13
 - Jesus is introducing a radical new form of the Kingdom, one that will exist until His return
 - So far we've covered six of the seven parables in this chapter
 - In those earlier weeks, our study of those parables formed a comprehensive overview of how the Kingdom works in this age
 - We learned how the Kingdom will be established: by spreading God's word
 - And who will oppose it: the enemy and unbelievers
 - When it will conclude: at the end of the age with a great separation
 - And ultimately, what our service to Christ during this time should be: to produce fruit in our lives
 - Then last week we studied the 5th and 6th parables, the parable of the treasure in the field and of the pearl of great price
 - Together they revealed the Lord's incentive program to encourage believers to produce fruit in the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus taught we should be motivated by the prospect of earning treasure in Heaven
 - As believers serve Christ and the Kingdom Program, He takes note of our self-sacrifices and perseverance and He will reward us later
 - Those sacrifices include both acts of service as well as personal pursuit of holiness
 - So the more service we offer Christ now and the more godliness we exhibit now, the more eternal gain in a day to come
 - So the six parables moved from general to specific...from explaining the world's response to the Gospel to the believer's response to Christ
 - But we still have one more Kingdom parable to cover
 - And even after that, we have an eighth parable to end the chapter
- First, let's study the final Kingdom parable...

Matt. 13:47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind;

Matt. 13:48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.

Matt. 13:49 “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,

Matt. 13:50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- Notice this parable begins with the term “again” which connects it to the prior parables as part of the chain of seven
 - And this parable is very similar to the second parable of the wheat and the tares

- In the earlier parable wheat represented believers and tares unbelievers
- They would exist together for a time, until the harvest, when a great separation would take place
- This parable also focuses on the moment when Christ returns to judge at the end of the age
 - But this parable differs from the earlier one in emphasis
 - That earlier parable used a farming setting to emphasize patience during the sowing and growing period in this age
 - The landowner in the parable told his servants not to separate the two groups before the harvest
- So the point of the parable was believers must live side-by-side with unbelievers in the field of the world during this age
 - The Kingdom Program *isn't* a time of judgment...it's a time of recruitment
 - This is a time for sowing and growing...and we won't be in a position to judge results before the harvest – both for the unbeliever and for the Church itself
 - So we leave the results to God
- Richard Halverson said it well:

“...we have become bottom-line conscious in the institutional Church and in parachurch organizations. We cannot raise money to support our ministries unless we can quote statistics concerning how successful we are. We have to be able to measure results. We want to evaluate the harvest day after day after day so that we can use the information in our fund-raising endeavors. And we forget that the real impact of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world is immeasurable. We will only know what it is at the harvest, which is the end of the age.”

- But now in the seventh parable the scene has changed entirely and so has the emphasis
 - This parable isn't about sowing and growing in a field...it's about harvesting fish in a net
 - Dragnet fishing on the Galilee involved fishermen tying one end of a huge net to the shore and the other end to their boats
 - Then they sailed parallel to the coast sweeping across a large section of the lake with their net
 - The net would engulf a huge quantity of fish, which were then dragged to shore
 - Dragnet fishing caught many varieties of fish, including some which couldn't be sold
 - So the fishermen gathered around the net on shore to separate the desirable fish from the undesirable
 - One of the consequences of dragnet fishing was that all the fish caught in the net were deprived of oxygen and died

- So the undesirable fish couldn't be returned to the water...they were just thrown away
- Jesus uses fishermen sending undesirable fish to their death as a picture of the judgment that ends the age
 - After this age has run its course, the Lord will return
 - And at that moment those who are not His by faith are "caught" and condemned to Hades
 - And of course, even before that moment, those who die without faith in Jesus are already confined to Hades
- Jesus ends the Kingdom parables emphasizing the judgement that awaits unbelievers to provide a contrast to the earlier parables about reward
 - While believers should look forward to the end of the age for reward in glory, unbelievers will experience fierce judgment
 - As we said earlier, the world is filled with two kinds of people
 - And therefore there are two very different outcomes awaiting each
 - One kind of person, the believer, is set on a path of reward, while the other person is on a path of destruction
 - One receives mercy, the other receives punishment
 - But the main reason Jesus ends focused on the fate of unbelievers is to give believers another reason to serve Him in the Kingdom
 - For example, I find eternal rewards is a great motivator in situations when I can't see how my service is advancing the Kingdom Program
 - Like when you're cleaning the toilet in the church, stacking chairs, printing bulletins, dropping your check in the offering box...
 - Or when you're struggling to raise godly children that respect and obey you
 - Or when you're fighting to hold your marriage together...
- In those moments, you know you're doing the right things, but still you may feel like nothing you're doing matters for the Kingdom
 - You might feel like you're toiling away in obscurity, unnoticed, unappreciated
 - Meanwhile, you see other believers traveling to distant places to do impressive mission work or building huge ministries
 - And you feel unimportant and unappreciated by comparison
 - And so you may be tempted to give up in those moments, to think that your contribution simply doesn't matter
 - We all can do more as a body to encourage others by telling them how much we do need and appreciate their service
 - But we can also find motivation to persist in service by remembering that the Lord is watching and sees your work
 - Just remember, your Father sees you serving in secret, as Jesus promised

Matt. 6:3 "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing,

Matt. 6:4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Matt. 6:6 “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- The prospect of reward is a universal motivator to stick with difficult, tedious, unappreciated and unnoticed work
 - Reward also motivates us to deal with our own sin, to discipline our flesh so we can live a more godly life
 - In fact, Paul himself cited the prospect of eternal reward as his main motivator in pursuing his own sanctification

1Cor. 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

1Cor. 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

1Cor. 9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

1Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- So rewards is a powerful motivator to serve Christ, but the prospect of personal reward won't always be reason enough
 - There will be days when we come face to face with the heart of the Kingdom program, when serving Christ becomes very personal
 - We're not talking about cleaning toilets or sweeping floors...
 - We're talking about concern for the eternal fate of an unsaved loved one
 - Perhaps you're growing weary and losing hope praying for a wayward child or a hardhearted spouse or friend...
 - Perhaps you're worried about how to talk to them about the Gospel...will they fight back? Will they be offended? Will you lose their friendship?
 - In those moments, the expectation of heavenly rewards probably won't motivate you but a loving concern for a person's eternal fate certainly will
 - Because ultimately, the Kingdom Program isn't about obtaining gain...it's about preventing loss...the loss of souls
 - Jesus wanted to motivate us by the eternal fate of the lost so we would engage in the hard work of winning hearts, as the Lord permits
- So now we have two reasons motivating us to serve Christ: eternal rewards and the reality of a coming judgment

- And biblically speaking, either motivation is good reason to serve
 - The Apostle Paul testified that he was motivated by both eternal reward and by the prospect of saving souls
 - Earlier, we read Paul saying he disciplined his body to ensure he received his prize, but he also said this:

2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2Cor. 6:1 And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain —

2Cor. 6:2 for He says,

**“AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU,
AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.”**

Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION” —

- Clearly, Paul was motivated both by rewards and saving souls, and Jesus knew we needed both sources of motivation
 - And for the same reason, the enemy works hard to blind Christians to these truths
 - Because he knows that if we remain ignorant of eternal rewards or lose sight of the coming judgment, we lose incentive to serve
- I’m sure it won’t surprise you to hear me say many Christians today are completely unaware of the Bible’s teaching on eternal rewards
 - I routinely hear people tell me they’ve never heard of this teaching before
 - And that’s despite the fact that the concept of eternal rewards can be found on virtually every page of the NT
 - And even among those who have heard of eternal rewards, some struggle to accept that truth because it seems selfish
 - But the Bible says that understanding that truth is an essential part of pleasing God

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- In Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith, the writer says that it is impossible to please God without faith
- We all know that verse, but notice the writer says that pleasing Christ involves a faith that recognizes God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - That reference to reward is not speaking of our salvation because the Bible never calls our salvation a reward...it’s a free gift

- Our reward is that which awaits us in Heaven, which we receive for serving Christ now sacrificially
- And in Hebrews 11 the writer lists saint after saint who made earthly sacrifices because they expected a heavenly reward
- So serving Christ well in the Kingdom Program depends at least in part on having a biblical appreciation that God is our rewarder
 - Which is why the enemy has worked very hard to remove this truth from your understanding
 - That's one way he chokes off our fruit; causing us to be less motivated to serve Christ
- And have you also noticed how hard the enemy has been working lately to undermine the Bible's teaching on Hell and judgment also?
 - So-called Christian pastors are writing books declaring that Hell isn't a literal place and that God doesn't send people there forever
 - The enemy is raising up those liars specifically to diminish the believers' motivation to seek for the lost
 - Because when we stop caring about the fate of the the lost, the Kingdom Program becomes little more than a vanity project
 - If there is no Hell, then the Church's mission is pointless
 - We're just building a monument to ourselves...pretty buildings with rock climbing walls, coffee bars, and potlucks
 - That's not what Jesus told us in these parables
 - He said that at the end of it all, the Kingdom Program is really about seeking and saving the lost
 - We know that God is the One Who saves, not us, but we also know that He has called us to serve Him in that program
 - So serve Him now knowing you may be rewarded in the Kingdom to come
 - But never forget that the reason He calls for our service is so that we may bring more citizens with us into that Kingdom
- That's the Kingdom Program in a nutshell
 - And it's the mission of the Church, it's our calling, and every believer in Jesus Christ should know these things
 - In fact, this teaching was so important that Jesus felt the need to confirm that His disciples understood it

Matt. 13:51 “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes.”

- Jesus asks the twelve did they understand these seven parables, to which the twelve answered “yes”
 - Now there are two possible ways to hear their answer
 - We could take their statement at face value...that is, they totally understood everything Jesus just said

- And if that were so, it would be remarkable because it was probably the only time Jesus' disciples completely understood anything Jesus said
 - Time and time again these guys missed the forest for the trees
 - Do you remember the scene when Jesus tries to explain to His disciples that Lazarus has died?

John 11:11 This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep."

John 11:12 The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."

John 11:13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.

John 11:14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,

- Given how often they didn't understand Jesus, I find it hard to believe they fully appreciate the meaning of these seven parables
 - So I think they said "yes" without thinking, either because they were too afraid or embarrassed to say otherwise
 - Which is why Jesus followed with an eighth parable in this chapter which they probably didn't understand either
- Jesus explains why it's important that His disciples understand the Kingdom Program teaching

Matt. 13:52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

- This parable is not part of the earlier group of seven
 - Most of the other seven parables in this chapter began with the phrase "The Kingdom of heaven is like..."
 - But this time Jesus says this parable is about a scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven
 - So this parable isn't focused on the nature of the Kingdom itself but on the nature of a certain disciple in the Kingdom: a scribe
 - In Jesus' day a scribe was someone who studied and taught the law of God to others
 - The closest equivalent to a scribe today would be a pastor or Bible teacher or seminary professor
 - Jesus said "scribe" rather than teacher or pastor because that was the term his disciples would understand in their day
 - But Jesus is talking about those in the Church who lead others principally in teaching the word of God
 - And Jesus compares such disciples to a head of a household

- The phrase “head of a household” is a single word in Greek
 - That same Greek word was used in Jesus’ earlier parable of the wheat and the tares, where it was translated “landowner”
- In Jesus’ day, a head of household (or landowner) had tremendous authority in his home
 - He was responsible for the servants in the house
 - And he was responsible for the crops in the field as Jesus’ earlier parable demonstrated
 - And he’s ultimately responsible for making sure that those crops produce a good harvest, which is the source of his wealth
 - So Jesus compares a landowner’s responsibilities to disciples leading the Church during the Kingdom Program
 - Of course, Jesus is the Good Shepherd and He rules over all His Church
 - But He will also raise up men and women – under-shepherds – to guide and feed the sheep in His Church
 - Like a landowner running a household, these men and women have responsibility for watching over the house of God
- And for the disciples who lead as scribes, those who teach the word of God to the Church, in that way we operate like heads of a household
 - We are to care for the servants of God, providing for them spiritually
 - We watch over the field in which the Lord plants and assigns into our care
 - We aren’t responsible for the planting, but we are called to ensure a good crop of seed
 - Pastors, teachers, ministry leaders, small group leaders...everyone who plays a part in guiding and feeding the sheep share in this responsibility
 - Leaders are called by Christ to help everyone produce fruit
 - As Jesus told Peter: if you love Me, feed My sheep
- And when leaders do their part to teach, the wheat produce fruit and both will profit in the end
 - The writer of Hebrews says this:

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you

- To the members of this flock, the writer says make it easy for your leaders to serve you by obeying them
 - Doing otherwise would be unprofitable, the writer says
 - When leaders do their jobs properly, the body grows spiritually
 - And as you grow, you please Christ more, and so you stand to gain more in eternity

- And to ministry leaders, the writer of Hebrews says we must give an account to the Lord for the souls entrusted into our care
 - Knowing that, we should put the needs of those in our care above our own interests
 - We sacrifice our own time, talent and treasure to invest in the spiritual growth of others
 - And as we do so, we will be rewarded too
- So it's a win-win for everyone
 - As the flock obeys the leadership, they will be better prepared to receive reward from Christ
 - And as leaders care for those we serve, we earn opportunity for our own reward
- But the final thing Jesus says in this parable is the key...a scribe must be prepared to bring things out of his treasure both old and new
 - In the parable, a landowner's treasure was material wealth he used to care for those under his authority
 - Some of the landowner's treasure would have been old things, family heirlooms handed down from generation to generation
 - Other wealth would have been acquired more recently, as when he sold the prior year's harvest, for example
 - So as a landowner provided for those under his care, he would bring out treasure both old and new
 - But what treasure does a scribe or teacher have to give out?
 - Clearly, a teacher's treasure is revealing the truths found in God's word
 - It's a treasure that holds the key to godly living
 - And Jesus says His disciples must be prepared to "bring out" both old and new treasure from God's word
 - Old refers to the Kingdom truths revealed in the OT, the things the law and the prophets said about the Kingdom
 - The OT tells us of a literal Kingdom on earth, a real place where we live and Christ rules from Israel in a day to come
 - Jesus says His teachers must bring these truths to His people
 - But a disciple must also teach the new principles of the Kingdom Program that Jesus has revealed in these parables
 - We must understand that the Kingdom Program will exist for a time before the literal place appears
 - And during this time, the work of serving Christ will take the form of recruiting citizens for the coming Kingdom on earth
- Jesus disciples' had to understand the new Kingdom Program so they could teach it properly to the Church
 - But ironically, the church has come to suffer from the opposite program in recent centuries

- In many places, the church moved away from teaching the old things and *only* teaches the new
- Many believers only ever hear teaching from the New Testament, as if the promises of the Old don't matter anymore
- So as a result, many Christians have little or no understanding of the literal Kingdom on earth
 - Some have even concluded that there won't be a literal Kingdom and that our world today is the Kingdom Jesus promised to Israel
 - God forbid this would be the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom, because if so, it's a pretty disappointing Kingdom
- That's why Jesus wanted His disciples to teach the whole counsel of God's word, the old and the new, because it all fits together
 - And that's why I teach the Bible in the way I do...it's in obedience to this command
 - And because I have to give an account for the souls under my care
 - And when I stand before Jesus for my judgment, I want to have a testimony that I fed His sheep
 - And I want you – those under my care – to have testimonies that you were moved to serve Christ and to produce fruit
- As Paul taught us

Eph. 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

Eph. 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Eph. 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

- With the Kingdom parables behind us, we're ready to move into new things
 - And as we do, we're moving into a new section of Matthew's Gospel
 - The section we just finished covered Jesus' rejection and the transition of the Kingdom proposal into the Kingdom Program
 - And it ended with a series of eight parables that explained various aspects of that program
 - Including why it was necessary and important for the disciples to understand the program and teach it to others
 - Now the section we move into tonight runs from the end of Chapter 13 until the beginning of Chapter 19
 - It bridges us into the final two sections of Matthew that cover Jesus' last days of earthly ministry and His crucifixion and resurrection
 - And therefore, this is an important section of Matthew's book because it explains how Jesus went from hero to zero among the people
 - And it's easy to understand that transition when you remember how Jesus' ministry changed following His rejection
 - He went from teaching openly to teaching circumspectly
 - Rather than healing everyone, He only healed those few who professed faith in Him
 - He no longer declared the Kingdom was at hand but instead spoke of coming persecution, judgment, and His own death
 - Given those changes, it didn't take long for the crowds to turn against Jesus, and of course, the leaders were always against Him
- So let's start that journey with the first of those negative receptions involving Jesus' earthly family and friends in Nazareth

Matt. 13:53 When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.

Matt. 13:54 He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?"

Matt. 13:55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"

Matt. 13:56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

Matt. 13:57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."

Matt. 13:58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

- We learned in earlier chapters that when Jesus began His three-year earthly ministry, He moved His family from His hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum

- Capernaum was located on the Sea of Galilee and along several major roads, which made it ideal for conducting an itinerant ministry
 - The Scriptures say Jesus prompted His family's move
 - Since Jesus was the first born son of the family, that detail suggests Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, had died by that time
 - Therefore, Jesus decided the family should relocate
- But prior to that point, Jesus spent nearly three decades living in Nazareth, which was a very small town in the hills
 - Nazareth was small even by ancient standards, so it was the kind of town where everyone knew everyone
 - People knew each other's families, and the children grew up knowing every other child in the town
 - So Jesus and His family would have been very well known among everyone who lived there
- Now a year or two after Jesus had taken His family away, Matthew tells us that Jesus goes home for a visit
 - And on the Sabbath He enters the local synagogue for service
 - Matthew says in v.54 that Jesus was teaching that day
 - The custom in Jewish synagogues of the day was to invite visiting men to teach during the service
 - Every Jewish man was expected to know the Scriptures and to be able to teach when called upon
 - And certainly a favored son, like Jesus, would have been invited to speak upon the occasion of his return
 - Moreover, the citizens of Nazareth have certainly been following with great interest all Jesus had been doing in the Galilee
 - So Jesus accepts the invitation to teach, but this will be the last time Jesus agrees to do so in any synagogue
 - This is the final time in Matthew's Gospel that we see Jesus teaching openly to a crowd
 - And it's the final time Matthew reports Jesus entering a synagogue
 - This is in keeping with the change in ministry that followed Jesus' rejection
 - From now on Jesus will teach only His disciples, and as a result He increasingly shuns the normal circles of orthodox Jewish life
- So Jesus takes His seat in the service, and teaches, but Matthew doesn't record what Jesus taught on this day
 - Probably because it really didn't matter...because whatever Jesus taught, it was rejected out of hand
 - And the reason the crowd dismissed Jesus' teaching might surprise you

- Notice in v.54 the crowd was astonished at Jesus' teaching
- The meaning of that Greek word is amazement and even panic...the room was in pandemonium as Jesus spoke
 - Jesus was teaching new and even revolutionary ways of understanding Scripture
 - He was turning conventional thinking on its head, because conventional wisdom was wrong
 - The Pharisees had long distorted the Scriptures for their own gain
 - So when Jesus taught them properly, it was shocking to Jewish society
 - Then when Jesus performed miracles in their midst it only served to amplify their amazement
- So the crowd asks, where did Jesus get such wisdom and power?
 - That expression may sound complimentary when we read it, but that's not how you should hear it
 - Read it as an expression of doubt, because they were saying it was inconceivable Jesus could be so wise
 - And His power to heal only served to make them more suspicious, as if His power was from an evil source
- Why did they doubt what they heard? Notice in v.57 Matthew says the people in Nazareth took offense at Him
 - In Greek that phrase should be literally translated "they stumbled at Him" or "they sinned because of Him"
 - It wasn't the message they rejected...it was Him, the messenger...they stumbled over Jesus
- In v.55, the people look at one another and ask, isn't this the carpenter's son?
 - Isn't this the son of Joseph who worked among us?
 - Wasn't His mother Mary, who we saw collecting water at the well every day?
 - Isn't this Jesus the brother of James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, who were just ordinary lads in our town?
 - Mark records that they also asked "Are not His sisters with us?", meaning Jesus' sisters had married and remained in the town
 - And as an aside here, it's remarkable to consider that Jesus had no less than four brothers and at least two married sisters by the time He entered ministry
 - Which by the way denies the Catholic false teaching
 - Catholics maintain that Mary remained a virgin her whole life...a completely unbiblical and altogether unnecessary invention
 - But in noting these things, the people are saying, "Isn't Jesus just like us?"
 - That is, Jesus is just an average guy, way too normal to be viewed as an authority figure in their lives

- Nazareth had known Jesus His whole life and what they knew about Jesus couldn't be reconciled with what He was saying and doing now
- They couldn't reconcile the familiar with the extraordinary, so they judged the two to be incompatible
- In other words, the Jesus they knew back then invalidated the Jesus they saw before them now
- Jesus responds to their unbelief in an interesting way, by explaining that their response is the result of a natural bias present in the heart of every unbeliever
 - Jesus says that a prophet receives no honor in his own hometown and in his own household
 - By prophet Jesus means generally anyone empowered by the Lord to speak or do remarkable spiritual things
 - And by hometown or household Jesus means generally those people who know us best, those who might see themselves in us
 - *E.g.* Your unsaved family & friends, that next-door neighbor, your elementary teacher, your high school coach
 - Those unsaved hearts that know you so well that they look upon you with suspicion should you come to them one day preaching spiritual truth
 - Some of you may have experienced this bias in your own life
 - Like when you try to explain to your mother how to go to Heaven
 - But she reminds you that she helped you find your shoes before school
 - When you share with your childhood friends about the Jesus Who has given you a new view of eternity
 - But they can only remember the silly things you did and said when you ran together in junior high school
 - Like Jesus in Nazareth, unbelievers who know us well judge the message by the messenger and that leads to a bias against us
 - And the driving force behind this bias is the oldest sin in the world: pride
 - A prophet is not received among those in his or her own hometown because pride gets in their way
 - The better we know a person, the more closely we will identify with that person
 - And when we identify with someone – seeing them as someone like us – then we will be offended if they try to assume a position of authority over us
 - A prophet or teacher who comes speaking spiritual truth naturally assumes a position of authority over someone
 - And that will challenge the unbelieving heart when it comes from someone they believe to be no different from themselves
- Accepting spiritual truth from another person always requires humility, even if the messenger is a complete stranger
 - So how much harder is it to demonstrate humility in response to a message brought

by someone we know well?

- They ask themselves, “Who does he think he is?”
- That was the case for Jesus...the citizens of Nazareth all knew His story well
 - Jesus was the child who played in the dirt streets
 - He was the young man who studied Torah and learned carpentry under His father
 - He was the modest and unremarkable young man who lived a quiet life at home
- Moreover, they knew Jesus *didn't* come from a family of great spiritual learning and privilege
 - He didn't attend a rabbinical school nor was He trained by prominent rabbis
 - Jesus wasn't even especially bold or outgoing in His personality
 - He was by every definition...ordinary!
- Which, by the way, reminds us that living sinlessly doesn't turn a person into a freak or living robot, or even draw attention to Himself
 - We know Jesus was sinless as a child and as a teenager and as a young man...He was always sinless
 - Yet somehow during all that time, no one noticed
 - No one realized that Jesus never sins, which would have certainly been big news to Jews
 - And it also tells us that Jesus never tried to draw attention to Himself either
 - Jesus was accepted as an ordinary kid so much so that when He began teaching with power and authority, it was unexpected
- This bias is present in all unbelievers, so the Lord works to mitigate against this bias in the way He brings the Gospel
 - Since people are prone to rejecting spiritual truth brought by a familiar messenger, He often sends strangers instead
 - We see this pattern throughout the Bible
- In the Old Testament, the Lord often called prophets to go to unfamiliar people and places
 - He would send a prophet from one region of Israel to another
 - Prophets from the north went to the south and prophets from the south went to the north
- Or He sends the recipient to the prophet from a long distance like He sent the Queen of Sheba to Solomon
 - Or He sends the prophet to the recipient over a long distance, as when He sent Jonah to Nineveh
 - And even when the prophet comes to his own people, the Lord will find creative ways to create a sense of unfamiliarity
- The Lord took Moses away from the Jewish people for 40 years before sending him back

to free them from Pharaoh

- And He put John the Baptist in the wilderness for many years before bringing him back to the people of Judea
- And the Lord separated Saul for several years from the church before bringing him back as Paul to minister in a fresh way
- These are merely examples, but they demonstrate the love and grace of God in overcoming our biases against Him
 - And He will do the same with our witness too...bringing us to strangers where we will have opportunity to share the truth
 - In fact, this principle explains why we usually send missionaries to other places
 - And it should heighten our readiness and willingness to preach to strangers knowing that this is an approved method of God
 - And at the same we shouldn't be surprised when our unsaved family and friends reject us out of hand
 - And one more thought...we need to be careful not to allow this bias to creep back into our thinking as believers
 - Because pride never goes away
 - And even though we have Christ and the Spirit, we can still harden our hearts to truth when it comes by someone we know well
 - So we need to guard against that bias and not let familiarity with the messenger give us reason to ignore the message
 - Nor should we require the messenger be sinless before we're willing to consider the truth of their message
- As we finish this moment, notice at the end of v.58 Matthew says that as a result of the crowd's rejection, Jesus did not do many miracles there
 - This is the first time we've seen this statement in Matthew's Gospel, and it's a reminder of Jesus' shift into the Kingdom Program
 - As a result of being rejected, Jesus now performs miracles only for the benefit of those who believe
 - And since there were few in Nazareth who received Him there, He performed only a few miracles there
 - Matthew records this moment in His Gospel to show us how those who knew Jesus best, rejected Him too
 - Which tells us that if Nazareth wouldn't receive Jesus, it's no surprise that the nation as a whole didn't either
 - We're learning that Jesus' opposition occupied every strata of Jewish society, including His family
- And to emphasize this point further, Matthew now jumps to the other end of the spectrum

Matt. 14:1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus,
Matt. 14:2 and said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

- Herod the Tetrarch refers to one of the sons of Herod the Great
 - Remember, Herod the Great was the one who tried to have Jesus killed by slaughtering all the young children around Bethlehem
 - He died in 4 BC and his sons received pieces of his kingdom
 - His son, Herod Antipas, received the northern region of the Galilee, and that's the Herod in view here
 - Herod Antipas lived primarily in Tiberias along the western shore of the Galilee
 - So naturally Herod heard the news of what Jesus was doing in the region, and he too reacts in the wrong way
 - While those who knew Jesus best in Nazareth underestimated Jesus' spiritual credentials, Herod made the opposite mistake in a way
 - Herod, who didn't know Jesus at all, exaggerated Jesus' spiritual identity
 - Herod believed Jesus to be a resurrected John the Baptist
 - And that detail is Matthew's subtle way of introducing the news that John had been killed by this point in Jesus' ministry
 - Matthew then explains how John died

Matt. 14:3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.

Matt. 14:4 For John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”

Matt. 14:5 Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet.

Matt. 14:6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod,

Matt. 14:7 so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

Matt. 14:8 Having been prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.”

Matt. 14:9 Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests.

Matt. 14:10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison.

Matt. 14:11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

Matt. 14:12 His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.

- The exploits of Herod's family was a soap opera so sordid it could cause HBO to blush
 - In v.3 Matthew mentions Herod Antipas and Herod's wife, Herodias
 - Herod Antipas, like his father Herod the Great, was a nominal Jew (in name only)
 - His father had multiple wives and therefore he had children by different mothers
 - So in addition to Antipas, Herod the Great also had a son named Philip and another son named Aristobulus
 - Aristobulus had a daughter called Herodias, which is the woman mentioned by Matthew
 - So Herod the Great's son, Antipas, married Herod the Great's granddaughter by another wife, Herodias (his great niece)
 - But before marrying Herod Antipas, Herodias had married Antipas' brother, Philip
 - And in between those marriages, she had been a mistress to a step-uncle
 - So she was guilty of multiple adulteries and incestuous relationships
 - Our world today is accustomed to the misadventures of the rich and powerful, so we might shrug our shoulders at such behavior
 - But in Jesus' day, these things were truly scandalous, and John the Baptist fearlessly said so
 - In v.4 Matthew says John was condemning the tetrarch for having taken this woman as a wife
 - Since John had gained a reputation as a prophet, his word mattered among the people
 - And so it threatened an insecure king who was worried about holding on to power
 - So Herod arrested John intending to kill him, but fearing the crowds might revolt, he simply held John for a time
- And in the meantime, Herod came to like hearing John as Mark tells us

Mark 6:20 for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.

- Herod made a sport of listening to John the Baptist
 - What do you suppose John was telling Herod each time they met?
 - I can only imagine that John told Herod much the same thing he told those who gathered at the riverside
 - He probably told Herod his sins would condemn him apart from repentance and

faith in the Messiah

- But Herod wasn't moved by what he heard
- But there was another enemy of John who was determined to see him killed, and that enemy was working behind the scenes to bring it about
 - I'm talking about THE enemy...Satan
 - Satan was at work to bring John the Baptist to death, and since Herod wouldn't act, he begins to move among the women
- Matthew says that on a fateful evening Herod had a feast at his palace with guests in attendance
 - And on the occasion of Herod's birthday, Herodias' daughter danced for the king, probably in a lewd fashion
 - Since this young girl is not Herod's daughter, he probably lusts for her
 - And to impress her, the king promises her anything
- Mark says he promised her up to half his kingdom, which makes me think Herod was either very drunk or demonically influenced or both
 - You might think that she would have asked for half the kingdom, but she doesn't
 - Under the influence of Satan, Herodias instructs her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist
- Since Herod gave his word, he must agree since to say no would mean breaking his oath in public, which was a great humiliation
 - So despite his fear of the people, he agrees to kill John and this is the end of John's ministry
 - Then John's disciples came and informed Jesus
- Why is this story in Matthew? Because it shows the other end of the spectrum from the events in Nazareth
 - Jesus' family was against Him, and the Roman authorities were against Him or any who stood with Jesus like John
 - And it foreshadows how Satan will ultimately bring Jesus down too
 - He will use the evil hearts of those in the Roman and Jewish governments to conspire and act against Jesus
 - So Matthew includes this story immediately after Jesus' rejection to make clear where this story is going
 - In other words, what happens to John will happen to Jesus
 - Now what do we take from this account? It reminds us that the Kingdom Program itself will have two sources of opposition
 - On the one hand we have our friends, and on the other hand, we have our enemy and both will oppose us at times
 - Our unbelieving friends and family may oppose us because they can't accept that God is working through us

- They may question your calling, doubt your sincerity and ultimately reject your spiritual insight
 - They know you too well, so they judge you according to our old nature
 - And therefore, they underestimate how much spiritual change has taken place in your life
- How do we respond to that challenge? With grace...remembering we were once in their shoes
 - Follow Jesus' example...Jesus just moved on and waited for another time
 - And in that next opportunity, Jesus won some converts
- How do I know that? Well, this was not the first time Jesus returned to Nazareth to teach in the city
 - Luke tells us of at least one earlier occasion, at the very start of Jesus' earthly ministry, when He visited Nazareth
 - In that earlier account, Jesus taught and was rejected also
 - And in fact the people got so angry they tried to kill Him by throwing Him off a cliff
 - There is no record that even a single person followed Him in faith in that earlier visit
 - So Jesus just left them without a fight or argument

Luke 4:28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things;

Luke 4:29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.

Luke 4:30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

- But now we see Jesus has returned...He gave them another opportunity despite the fact that they tried to kill Him before
 - And again He taught them just as He did before
 - But look what happened in His second visit? This time some believed and were saved
- How do I know that? Because Matthew said that Jesus did not do many miracles (which means Jesus at least did some)
 - And we know Jesus was only doing miracles for those who believed at this point
 - Which means at least some believed and were blessed with healing in that second visit
- That's your encouragement in the face of friendly opposition to try again
 - Your message may not be received today, but it may be received tomorrow

- Don't engage in argument or conflict, just graciously step aside and wait for the next opportunity
- And what about our enemies who act against us under Satan's control...what should we do about them?
 - Do what John the Baptist did...when his enemy took him captive, he used that opportunity to preach the Gospel to him every day
 - That became his ministry until such time as the Lord allowed John to go free or to lose his earthly life for Christ
 - Sometimes the answer will be one and sometimes the other
 - But hey, we're all going to die one day, and better to die in service to Christ if you ask me
 - As Paul said...

Phil. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- The same opponents Jesus encountered when He taught the Kingdom Program will oppose us as we continue that program
 - That program isn't just a work of winning hearts...it's also program of enduring opposition and even persecution
 - Serving Christ is a sacrifice...but a small one compared to the one He made for us

- One of the more frightening consequences of Israel's rejection of Jesus was the prospect of Jesus turning the Kingdom Program over to His disciples
 - Because those men were simply not ready to assume responsibility for the Church
 - None of the disciples were trained as ministers or rabbis
 - None had been seeking for that role, at least not before they met Jesus
 - And most importantly, none of them could possibly appreciate what would be required of them in service to the Kingdom
 - Nevertheless, that's the plan...hand over leadership of the Church to a fisherman, a tax collector, and a teenager
 - Now, obviously Jesus is head of the Church and by His Spirit He directs His church and every leader over it
 - And that's why it really didn't matter whether these guys were competent or not
 - In time, the Lord would make them equal to the challenge
 - As I say, the Lord call unqualified people to serve Him, but He won't leave them untrained
 - Therefore, one of the important themes in this section of Matthew is how the Lord prepares His disciples to serve Him in the Kingdom
 - Jesus will teach these men many things about ministry and about recruiting others to do the same
 - His work will be made all the more difficult because so much of what these men thought they knew about ministry was wrong
 - They grew up under Pharisaic Judaism, and so their training focused on the Mishnah and the rituals of Jewish life
 - Which lead to a very legalistic and unloving approach to ministry
- Now Jesus was going to turn all their experiences and training on its head by replacing it with an approach to ministry they had never seen before
 - Today as we study this section of the Gospel, Jesus' lessons may not sound revolutionary, because we understand the Kingdom Program more or less
 - But remember, what you know of that Program came through the writing of these disciples in the New Testament
 - So they learned it first, and we learned it from them
 - The first day of their training began with perhaps Jesus' most extraordinary miracle

Matt. 14:13 Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities.

Matt. 14:14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

Matt. 14:15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

- Matthew says that after Jesus heard of John’s death, He withdrew from there
 - “There” refers to somewhere on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, but we don’t know Jesus’ exact departure point
 - We know He had just been in Nazareth
 - And we know that later when He returns, He walks back to Capernaum across the water
 - So perhaps He departed from Capernaum
 - In any case, the reason for His departure according to Matthew was at hearing of John’s death
 - But Jesus takes this journey for more than just an opportunity to mourn over John privately
 - Jesus travels to perform the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand
 - We know this because we have the benefit of considerable context for this moment given in the other Gospels
 - This miracle is unique in the New Testament, because it’s the only one of Jesus’ miracles reported in all four of the Gospels
 - Which tells us what an impression it made on all the disciples...truly this was a lesson none of them every forgot
 - And because it’s recorded in all four Gospels, we have a lot of background information to help us understand why it happened
- First, Mark tells us in Chapter 6 that Jesus and the disciples were exhausted from ministering to so many people

Mark 6:31 And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)

Mark 6:32 They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.

- So the Lord told His disciples they would get away for a while to rest from the burdens of ministry
- That’s why they chose to sail to the eastern side of the Galilee
- Earlier in Matthew I explained how the territory around the Sea of Galilee was divided into Jewish and Gentile regions
 - The Jews occupied the western side of the lake while the Gentles occupied the eastern side

- We last saw Jesus in this region when He visited Gerasa and freed the man in the tombs from the demons
- Jesus ventured periodically into the Gentile region primarily to escape the Jewish crowds that pressed on Him 24/7
- Jews rarely if ever ventured into the Gentile territory, so when Jesus went there by boat, the crowds wouldn't follow
- But this time Jesus chose to journey to a spot located on the border between the two regions
 - Luke tells us that the secluded place Jesus went was located near a small fishing village called Bethsaida
 - Bethsaida was the dividing point between Jew and Gentile communities on the northeastern corner of the lake
 - Which meant the crowds were willing to follow Him this time
- Assuming Jesus departed from Capernaum, He sailed about 3-4 miles
 - Which means the crowds walked about 5 miles, which took about 2 hours, meaning they probably arrived shortly after Jesus
 - That wasn't much of a break for Jesus and the disciples, and it suggests Jesus wasn't trying to avoid the crowds entirely
 - He's working a different plan...He's preparing to teach His disciples a lesson
- We get confirmation from John's Gospel because John tells us this happens at Passover which is our final clue to explain why Jesus took this journey
 - Passover is a memorial of the Exodus, when Moses led a group of Jews through the Red Sea and into desolate territory without food or water
 - When they arrive, Moses ascends a mountain, leaving the people down below
 - Eventually the people required food, so Moses called down manna from Heaven and the people were fed miraculously
 - So now Jesus takes this journey so He can use these circumstances to establish a picture showing Himself as the fulfillment of the Passover
 - Like Moses, Jesus will cross a body of water to reach a desolate Gentile territory with a large crowd of Jews following behind
 - Jesus also retreats up a mountainside leaving the crowd gathered below
 - And when they seek for food, He will feed them miraculously with bread from Heaven
 - So Jesus made this journey to invite comparisons to the Exodus
 - Jesus orchestrates this experience like a living parable to show the people He is the bread of life come down from Heaven
 - And Jesus sets this scene to teach His disciples that they must come to Him for their supply in ministry
 - So knowing all these details, let's understand Jesus' lesson

- In v.14 we're told that Jesus sees the large crowd below and has compassion on them and healed their sick
 - This verse introduces an important caveat to my earlier explanation of how Jesus' ministry changed after His rejection
 - After His rejection by Israel, Jesus stops offering miracles for everyone who comes to Him
 - He now begins requiring faith as a prerequisite for healing
 - And we'll see this shift confirmed time and again throughout the second half of Matthew's gospel
 - But there will still be occasions when Jesus chooses to act against that pattern by healing large numbers of people
 - On occasion in times of great need as we have here, Jesus will have compassion for the people, we're told
 - And in those moments, He will act contrary to the general pattern by healing people without demanding faith
 - Those exceptions only serve to prove the rule
 - The statement "Jesus had compassion" will be Matthew's clue to us when Jesus is going against His normal practice
- And as evening approached, the disciples look upon the huge crowd and make the obvious conclusion that there is no way to feed so many
 - They are probably concerned about discontent or even riots, so in v.15 the disciples propose a way to solve the problem
 - They suggest that Jesus should make the crowds go into the nearby towns to buy food for themselves
 - Notice their choice of words: they say "send the crowds away..." which means order them to leave
 - Their thinking reflected the attitude of Pharisaic Judaism in that day
 - Putting it in my own words, the disciples were saying, "Look at all these people...they're so much trouble"
 - "They are a burden upon us...help us Jesus...tell them to stop being a burden and to go find their own food"
 - Who were the disciples thinking about when they said those words?
 - At first it may sound as if they have concern for the people
 - But the truth was they only had concern for themselves
 - They were forgetting why the crowds were even there in the first place
 - They had come hoping for Jesus to minister to them in one way or another
 - They did nothing wrong...they came with hope and desire and needs, and that's what all good ministry is founded upon
 - Nevertheless, the disciples could only see a crowd of people bringing burdens

and getting in the way of Jesus' ministry

- Their attitude reminds me of those rude clerks who treat customers as if they are an intrusion or interruption in their day
 - The clerks should recognize we are the very reason they exist
 - It's because of the customer that a business is even in business
 - And it's because of the flock that shepherds have reason to shepherd
- A shepherd's heart doesn't hold a flock's weaknesses or needs – or even their mistakes – against them
 - Instead, shepherds recognize those weaknesses as the very reason we have opportunity to minister
 - In fact, did you know that the Bible teaches that the more needs exist in our body, the better it is for us?
 - Paul says it this way:

1Cor. 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

1Cor. 12:22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;

1Cor. 12:23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,

1Cor. 12:24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it.

- Paul says those members of our corporate body that seem to be weaker than us are actually the most “necessary”
 - Weaker refers to brothers or sisters who are hard to love...the less spiritually mature, those who carry a lot of sin baggage
 - They may irritate us, or they always seem to say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing, or they have messy lives
- Paul says they are not problems to be sent away...they are necessary and they are due even greater honor
 - Receiving greater honor means receiving a greater share of ministry service within the body
 - It's an honor to have someone minister to us, because they are investing self-sacrificially in our spiritual growth
 - And that investment will pay us dividends in eternity because it brings us into the Kingdom with greater opportunity for reward
- Those weaker members of the body are necessary, Paul says, because they give purpose to our spiritual gift
 - The weaker members in our body are our customers and we're the clerk assigned to

serve them spiritually

- They aren't a burden, they're the reason we're here...they are the ones who need our service the most
- They may seem to be weaker, but they are actually God's gift to us, and He will use them in our lives to teach us
- In fact, we will gain far more from serving those weaker members than they receive from our service
- Because when you minister to people who have rough edges, you truly learn how to love someone the way Christ loves you: self-sacrificially
 - And I need to share a little secret...sometimes we're the unlovable person with rough edges that others have to serve
 - So let's all be grateful that Christ required his ministers be servants who lovingly care for those who bring burdens
- This is not how Pharisaic Judaism perceived their role as ministers to the people
 - A Pharisee saw his job this way: he said to himself, "I am the model Jew"
 - "I sacrifice, I study, I tithe, I devote endless hours to purity and holiness
 - "I'm God's representative to the Jewish people"
 - "Just as men are blessed to receive God's fellowship, so are the Jewish people privileged to receive my ministry"
 - "Just as the Lord receives praise and honor for His glory and wisdom, so should I receive praise and honor among the people"
- The Bible calls this attitude "lording" over people
 - The word lording means to exercise dominion over someone while expecting them to respond with homage and obedience
 - In speaking against this mentality, Jesus says this later

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

Matt. 20:26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,

Matt. 20:27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;

Matt. 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

- We will cover this passage in greater detail when we get there, but for today it's easy enough to see Jesus' point
 - Ministers are not to be lords over people but rather servants to the people
 - In fact, the Greek word translated as minister here is *diakonos*, which can also be

translated slave

- So pastors, elders and other ministers are as slaves to God's people, but it's important to understand what Jesus meant
 - Jesus wasn't suggesting to the flock that they have authority over their elders or pastors
 - Nor does He mean that elders and pastor are supposed to do the bidding of the flock
- Jesus was addressing the Church's future leaders when He spoke those words
 - And He used the term slave to emphasize to leaders that they cannot adopt a haughty, self-serving attitude in ministry
 - Men (and women) who assume ministry positions in the body can't use our positions of authority to serve our interests
 - We must maintain an attitude of humility and sacrifice remembering we're here to serve *you*...not the other way around
- But these disciples grew up under Pharisaic Judaism, so they naturally saw the Pharisees as their ministry role models
 - So they assumed that being in Jesus' inner circle meant they would have a place of power and authority and privilege over the people
 - And you can detect that sense of entitlement in their response...tell the people to go find food for themselves
 - So Jesus teaches these men what ministry truly requires by giving them perhaps His most powerful example of ministry

Matt. 14:16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!"

Matt. 14:17 They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

Matt. 14:18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me."

Matt. 14:19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds,

Matt. 14:20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets.

Matt. 14:21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.

- Jesus opens with an astonishing rebuke telling the disciples the people do not need to go away...*you* give them something to eat
 - A more literal translation of the original Greek would read, "They have no need to go away – you feed them!"

- Jesus puts the burden right back where it belongs: on the shepherds of this flock
- Now in fairness to the disciples, how could they have expected to feed so many people?
 - As we heard in v.21, there were thousands of people present that day
 - In fact, the disciples tell Jesus there were only five loaves and two fish available
 - In John's Gospel we learn that Peter's brother, Andrew, was the first to notice a young boy selling the loaves and fish
 - But just as quickly Andrew says they could not possibly satisfy the demand with so little
- But Jesus wasn't expecting them to come up with the solution by themselves...He was asking them to set their minds on ministry
 - If our first response to a ministry need or opportunity is to ask "how?", then we are doing ministry completely wrong
 - Our first question when considering any ministry opportunity should be "does the Lord desire for us to minister in this way?"
 - If the answer to that question is yes, then we move ahead in confidence that the Lord will direct us in the "how" over time
 - But if we begin every ministry effort with the question "how?", we will never do anything worthwhile for the Lord
 - Because ministry is fundamentally about doing things that are impossible, humanly-speaking
 - So when we try to answer the question "how" before accepting the challenge, we inevitably substitute our own plans for God's plan
 - Just as Andrew searched for a supply of food in a vain effort to find a human solution to the problem
 - When he couldn't find enough he threw his hands up and declared, I guess we can't minister to these people
 - Jesus didn't save us and call us into serving Him so that we could solve problems for Him
 - He gives us ministry opportunities so He can solve problems through us...and in us
 - Because as we obey Him and allow Him to do the heavy lifting, not only does the work get done but He also grows us
 - And then the Lord rightly receives glory for both accomplishments
- The disciples were so focused on solving the problem in their own power that they forgot Jesus was standing next to them
 - So Jesus sets to work reminding them of how shepherds are supposed to work... shepherds feed sheep
 - The sheep aren't supposed to locate their own supply of food
 - If sheep were capable of feeding themselves, there would be little need for shepherds

- So shepherds are supposed to feed sheep, but at the same time, shepherds aren't required to produce food for sheep
 - Shepherds don't cause the grass to grow on the hillside
 - Shepherds lead sheep to the places where the Lord has already prepared fields with grass
- Likewise, we are not the source of another person's spiritual supply
 - We shepherd people by feeding them, yes, but our source comes from the Lord
 - We are conduits bringing the Lord's supply to the people
 - And the Lord orchestrates this well-known miracle to make that point clearly
- And notice, once Jesus set the disciples' minds on feeding the crowd, Jesus begins to show His disciples "how" to do it
 - First, Jesus instructs the people to sit in the grass
 - In Mark's Gospel we're told they sit in groups of hundreds and fifties, which simply means into small, manageable groups
 - We can easily imagine practical purposes in why Jesus asked them to sit down
 - If hungry people see food coming their way, they tend to rush toward it to make sure they get a share
 - Making them sit ensures orderliness and also imparts confidence that there is a plan to ensure everyone is fed
 - But those practical reasons are not the main reason Jesus seats them down in grass
 - The main purpose relates back to Psalm 23
 - The Shepherd is the One Who causes His sheep to lie down in green pastures
 - The Shepherd cares for His sheep and makes sure they receive their rations
 - So Jesus' instructions were part of testifying that He is the Shepherd of Psalm 23, the One who cares for us
 - Next, Jesus gives thanks for the food and the miracle that's about to follow, then He begins to break the bread and divide the fish out
 - Jesus then begins to distribute the food through the hands of the disciples
 - Jesus handed the food to each disciple who then carried it down the mountainside to the people in a basket
 - And as this process continued, the groups of people ate their fill, no one was left wanting
 - You have to wonder what was going through the minds of the disciples as they moved up and down the mountain filling their baskets
 - They knew Jesus started with only a little food, but because they are acting as waiters, they aren't present to see the miracle
 - They can't see the food miraculously reappearing
 - They just return each time to Jesus, to have their baskets filled and go back

down

- Jesus was teaching His disciples what serving Him in the Kingdom Program will be like every day
 - First, Jesus taught that He supplies miracles to His people through the hands of His servants
 - That's why Jesus required each disciple returned to Jesus many times to refill their baskets
 - If Jesus' priority had been efficiency, He would have walked down the mountainside and miraculously produced a buffet line
 - He is intentionally distributing the food in an inefficient way, through the hands of His disciples, to make His point
 - Secondly, each disciple's personal success in ministry depended on continually returning to the Lord so He could fill the basket
 - If the disciple returned, he had come back with something to offer the people
 - If he didn't return to Jesus, he would soon run out and have nothing and be useless to the people
 - So not only were the disciples unable to find a solution on their own in the beginning, neither could they sustain the ministry once it began
 - Even after Jesus gave them a solution and the work began, they did not possess the power to perpetuate the work
 - Ministry always requires we abide in Jesus – the lesson of John 15
 - We go to Him to receive that which is valuable, and then we bring it back to the people one nugget at a time
- Thirdly, in the course of our service, the work we do in serving Christ won't seem like a miracle in the moment
 - Each time the disciple's basket was filled by Jesus, it didn't appear miraculous to that disciple
 - The sense we get from all four Gospels is that Jesus multiplied the food out of the sight of the disciples
 - They just saw Jesus putting food in their basket...a very ordinary moment
 - The miracle was that it happened over and over again
 - Likewise, when we serve someone in a moment with a prayer or a teaching or an encouraging word, it won't seem like a miracle took place
 - But when we step back and see the cumulative effect of all those moments of service, we will see a miracle
 - We will see a multitude the Lord fed through our hands, and Jesus will rightly receive the glory for it
 - Fourthly, Jesus was teaching the disciples that ministry is hard work
 - How many times did they have to walk up and down that hillside that day?

- Do you supposed that some of them might have been complaining under their breath?
- Can you hear Peter suggesting to Jesus, “Why don’t You come down here so we don’t have to make this climb so much?”
- Ministry is hard work...and there are a lot of days when you wonder to yourself why am I doing this? There has to be an easier way to live
 - Serving Jesus in ministry is a great privilege, and generally speaking, it’s a joy
 - But there are times when it’s very lonely and difficult and gut wrenching just plain hard work
 - And if you aren’t prepared to give Christ your best effort and to endure the challenges, then don’t put your hand to the plow and look back
- Finally, there was one more lesson for the disciples and the people
 - After the crowd had been fed (which must have taken several hours), Jesus ordered the disciples to collect the excess food from the people
 - The Lord could have simply multiplied more food for each disciple
 - Instead, He insisted that the disciples’ food come from what had already been handed out to the people below
 - The Lord had literally given away the disciples’ food, and then He required disciples to go back to the people and ask for it back
 - I imagine some in the crowd probably wanted to keep those extras for themselves
 - Which means the disciples probably had to do a little petitioning, a little begging, and a little fund raising so to speak
 - The disciples’ provision came in the form of excess given to the people, so they could be blessed by blessing those who served them
 - Notice that the amount collected was exactly twelve baskets, reflecting the 12 apostles who had served the people
 - Everyone is being blessed through the hands of someone else yet the supply is all from the Lord
 - Matthew ends his account with a punchline: there were five thousand men in the crowd plus women and children beyond that
 - That number puts Jesus’ miracle into perspective
 - Who among those disciples would have supposed in advance that they could find a way to feed so many people?
- But the number 5 in the Bible is the number of grace
 - And that’s the fundamental difference between how Pharisees ministered and how Jesus wants us to minister
 - Our service to Christ begins and ends with grace
 - It begins by the grace of God in our salvation and our equipping and call into ministry

- And then it continues in the way we minister to others, not holding their faults against them, not viewing their needs as unnecessary burdens
 - Rather we seek out the weak because they give us the blessed opportunity to serve in our spiritual gift
 - And we serve in grace that Jesus supplies to us, knowing we only have something valuable to offer someone else if we obtained it from Jesus
 - And we ourselves depend on the grace of God through your hands for our own supply
- Think about the power and reach of a Christian community that truly lived out that style of grace-oriented ministry?
 - It would truly be a miracle

- Last week we studied what I proposed was Jesus' most powerful lesson on the nature of ministry in the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus miraculously fed five thousand men plus women and children through the hands of His disciples while on a hillside of the Galilee
 - And by the way He did it, Jesus was teaching the disciples a number of lessons about serving God
 - Jesus taught them they must be prepared to serve people in need, not holding their needs against them
 - They must return to Jesus for their spiritual supply, abiding in Him both direction and sustainment in the course of their work
 - He showed them that miracles would come to pass in the by-and-by of their work, yet miracles wouldn't overshadow their labors
 - On the contrary, their ordinary labor would typically be the only thing the people saw
 - Yet behind the scenes, the Lord would be at work producing unseen miracles by the hands of His disciples
 - So that in the end, the work would get done and everyone would be blessed, and the Lord receives the glory
 - That opening lesson forms the foundation for all that Jesus will teach His disciples on the Kingdom Program
 - And of course, we should assume the disciples understood and internalized that lesson, right?
 - Well, not so fast...because as we see in today's passage from Matthew, they actually missed it entirely
 - In fact, they didn't just fail to understand Jesus' lesson, they came to resent it

Matt. 14:22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.

Matt. 14:23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

- As the miracle ends, Jesus tells His disciples to get back into their boat and cross the sea to Capernaum
 - As I explained last time, the miracle of the five thousand happens in a mostly uninhabited region on the NE corner of the lake
 - It was near a small fishing village called Bethsaida
 - The miracle took place as nightfall was approaching, and now that the feeding has concluded, it's become dark
 - And at that point, Matthew says Jesus instructs His disciples to return to Capernaum by boat without Him

- Jesus' order was a little strange, first because generally speaking people didn't travel at night
- And traveling across the Galilee at night was not the norm, and there doesn't seem to be any compelling reason to leave now
- And secondly, Jesus doesn't travel with these men, but this is the only boat they have
- And once more the other Gospels are immensely helpful in giving us the context we need to understand what Jesus is doing here
 - First, we go to John's account, where we read the following

John 6:14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

John 6:15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

John 6:16 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,

John 6:17 and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

- John tells us that at some point during the feeding, the crowd realized that a miracle had just taken place in their midst
 - I assume they didn't know that Jesus started with just five loaves and two fish
 - But even so, it wouldn't require a genius to notice that thousands of people had just been fed on a desolate mountainside
 - And Jesus wasn't sitting next to a warehouse of food
- So eventually the murmurs begin and before it's over, the people are calling Jesus the promised Prophet, the one Moses said would come
 - As we learned last week, this was a re-enactment of the Exodus story with Jesus playing the part of Charlton Heston
 - Jesus set out with His disciples to cross a body of water leading a large group of Jews into a desolate place
 - When they arrived, they cried out for food, so Jesus fed them miraculously with bread from heaven
- The crowd recognized that picture so they conclude Jesus is the prophet Moses promised would come one day in Deuteronomy
 - Moses said the Lord would raise up another prophet like Moses one day
 - And the people now see Jesus as that promised prophet
 - But based on the bad teaching of the Pharisees, the people expected the Prophet to conquer Israel's political enemies
 - So they think Jesus has come to set them free from Roman tyranny just as Moses set Israel free from Egyptian slavery

- So the people are ready for revolution
 - John says they were preparing to take Jesus to Jerusalem and install Him as their king
 - We know the time for Jesus to become King had passed, so of course Jesus can't allow that to happen
 - So He retreats further up the mountainside to prevent the crowds acting
- And then Matthew says in v.22 that Jesus sends the crowds away as He retreats to pray
 - So if Jesus planned to send the crowds away, why does Jesus send His disciples away too?
 - And why send them away at night, alone without Jesus?
 - And doesn't Jesus know it's not good to go out in the water on a full stomach?
- This mystery deepens even further when we consult a map of the scene
 - Capernaum is located only a short distance from Bethsaida, as the crow flies, directly across the northern tip of the lake
 - Last week we learned that as Jesus and the disciples set out by boat to reach Bethsaida, the crowds were able to follow on foot
 - In fact, the crowds arrived in Bethsaida more or less at the same time that Jesus arrived
 - When we look at a map, we can see why that was possible
 - The two locations are very close together, easily within walking distance
 - And in fact, the distance is so short that a boat sailing that route would never be more than a short distance off shore
 - Understanding the geography makes us wonder why did Jesus take the effort to sail at all?
 - And the answer is obvious...Jesus chose to travel by water as part of the lesson He wanted to teach these men
 - We know Jesus crossed the water on the way to Bethsaida to draw a connection to Moses crossing the Red Sea in Exodus
 - And now He's sending His disciples back by water – alone and at night –because He wants to teach them another lesson
 - No, actually Jesus is going to teach them the *same* lesson again, because the disciples didn't learn it the first time
 - To understand what I mean, let's remember what that lesson was all about
- Back in v.15 the disciples told Jesus that the hungry crowds were a problem, so Jesus should send them away
 - And I told you that the disciples' thinking was upside down
 - They had a Pharisaic perspective on how to do ministry
 - Ministry was a position of honor, so they expected to have a place above the

people

- And they perceived the people themselves as a burden
- But Paul taught we are called to bestow greater honor on those who are spiritually weaker within our body
 - Instead of resenting those who come with needs, we should honor them with our spiritual service
 - Their weaknesses give purpose to our spiritual gifts, because if someone in the body needed us, how could we do ministry?
- That was the lesson Jesus wanted to teach these men...that ministry is by definition an act of selfless service
 - Ministry isn't some reality TV show you win by popularity
 - And ministers aren't rock stars among the people, primping and posing on stage to impress and receive an ovation
 - We don't roll up in our luxury cars and ride our private elevators to the penthouse suite while people kiss our rings
- That's lording over people and when God's people forget this truth and let the flesh take control, pride kicks in and ruins ministry
 - We have an excellent example of this problem recorded in the letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth
 - That church body fell into the trap of lording
 - They thought ministry meant receiving honor and privilege rather than bestowing honor on others
- So at one point in his letter, Paul begins to mock the Corinthians' self-importance by reminding them how the apostles conducted ministry

1Cor. 4:7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

1Cor. 4:8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.

1Cor. 4:9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

1Cor. 4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

1Cor. 4:11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

1Cor. 4:12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

1Cor. 4:13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the

scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

- Paul asked the Corinthians, who regards you as superior? What did you have that you didn't receive?
 - What a great line...the church was so prideful because they thought they knew so much about Christ
 - They took pride in all their knowledge and (ironically) their supposed spiritual maturity
 - Yet nothing they had came by itself...it was all delivered by someone
 - Someone taught them the truth, exhorted and corrected them to follow the truth, and modeled the truth
 - Whatever the Corinthians had in terms of spiritual maturity, they must have received it from someone who had it before they did
 - And those "someones" were none other than the apostles
 - Men like Paul and Barnabas and Peter visited the city at various times and imparted spiritual knowledge to the Church
 - How honored were those believers to be ministered to by such great men?
 - Yet Paul says that church saw itself as distinguished and worthy of honor even as those who taught them were being martyred
- So Paul asks the church to consider how distinguished were their teachers?
 - Did Paul roll up in a Mercedes chariot?
 - Did Barnabas demand the Caesar Suite in the Corinthian Hyatt?
 - Did Peter require the people to carry him on their shoulders and lavish him with comfort and splendor?
 - No...Paul says the apostles were the least among all men
 - They were fools for Christ, without honor, exhibited as spectacles before men and angels
 - At times they went hungry and thirsty, were poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, and made to toil with their hands
 - When they were reviled by those they tried to serve, they blessed them in response
 - When they were persecuted, they endured it without resistance
 - When they were slandered, they sought to reconcile
 - In short they became as the scum of the earth, refuse of the world
 - And why? Because that's the job of ministry...to serve the weak, the immature, the unlovable
 - Because that's exactly what Jesus did for us first
 - That was the lesson Jesus was trying to teach the disciples on that mountainside
 - Jesus made those men feed five thousand people to make a point that ministry

is serving others, not ourselves

- And after such a vivid demonstration, surely the apostles got the message right?
 - Well, this may surprise you, but no, they didn't learn the lesson
- In fact, the entire experience turned them even more against the people
- So as they say, there's an easy way to learn a lesson and a hard way...and the disciples are about to learn it the hard way

Matt. 14:24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.

Matt. 14:25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

Matt. 14:26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

- Matthew gives us a rather brief description of the disciples' experience in the boat
 - He says they were already a long distance from the land when this incident took place
 - Having seen the maps, we know they couldn't have been that far from the land
 - That means Matthew was speaking from the perspective of the men inside the boat...they felt they had rowed 3-4 miles
 - They assumed they were blown off course, a long way from the shore because of the darkness and the weather
 - Mark tells us that the disciples were straining at the oars against a wind that was opposing them in the journey
 - In fact, they are going so slow, that it's now the fourth watch of the night, which is between 3-6 AM
 - Normally, these guys should have made that journey in less than a couple of hours of rowing
 - But because of a head wind, they've been rowing for 6 hours or more and they still haven't reached Capernaum
 - Furthermore, the Sea of Galilee is hundreds of feet below sea level, which makes the air heavy and hazy
 - Even in broad daylight, it can be hard to see across the lake though it's only a few miles wide
 - So at night it can be like sailing in fog, and these guys are hopelessly lost and worn out and worried by the storm
- And then out of that foggy darkness comes Jesus walking on the stormy water
 - Jesus couldn't have made a more dramatic entrance, and it has the desired effect on the disciples

- At first they don't know it's Jesus but think it's a ghost in the fog
- They assume it must be a ghost because they know flesh can't walk on water, and this just frightens them all the more
- But then as Jesus gets closer they recognize Him, yet that doesn't comfort them
 - Mark says they are terrified at the sight of Jesus walking on the water
 - But Mark says something else that's critically important to understanding Jesus' purpose in this experience

Mark 6:48 Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.

- Mark says the men were straining at the oars, and the wind was against them and it was late...and then Jesus comes into view
 - But Jesus wasn't walking *toward* the boat...He was walking *by* the boat
 - What was He trying to accomplish by walking past them?
- Jesus has set these guys up...He's put them on the water at night, together, in a tough situation
 - They've been working on their own, getting nowhere fast
 - Then, just when they needed someone to help them, Jesus appears
 - And they are afraid of Him because His supernatural power is overwhelming and unexpected
- Then they notice Jesus isn't looking at them...He's walking by as if they weren't even there
 - They realize Jesus isn't going to stop or help them
 - So the men cry out to Jesus partly out of fear and partly out of desperation
 - They're in trouble, and they need help...if only Jesus would take pity on them in their time of need
 - But what a burden they are!
 - Jesus doesn't have time for their problems...He's cruising above the waves on His way to Capernaum
 - So they cry out to Jesus in fear, Matthew says
 - And in response to their fear, Jesus turns aside and comes to their aid
 - It's obvious from the circumstances and the geography that Jesus has placed them in this storm to teach them a lesson
 - And that lesson is closely connected to the prior lesson
- In fact, this is the same lesson, only it's being taught in a different way because they didn't get the point the first time

- How do I know this? Because Mark tells us so

Mark 6:50 for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.”

Mark 6:51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished,

Mark 6:52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

- Mark’s footnote to the whole episode is the key detail to explain why this incident happened
 - In v.52 Mark says “for”, meaning as a result of or because
 - In other words, Jesus brought about these events because the disciples had not gained insight from the incident of the loaves
 - And why didn’t they get the message? Because Mark says they had hard hearts
- A hardened heart means a stubborn refusal to repent from sin, to learn a lesson and choose a different path
 - Originally, they wanted those crowds to leave and feed themselves
 - Then Jesus demanded the disciples feed the crowd, and Jesus provided the food
- But those guys were still upset that they had to be waiters for 5,000+ people on that mountainside
 - They trekked up and down that hillside for a couple of hours, feeling unappreciated
 - Perhaps they thought such work was beneath them, or perhaps they resented the way Jesus made them beg for leftovers
- Jesus wanted them to understand that true ministry is about service not status
 - It was supposed to show them that greatness in ministry, that is true honor, is found by serving others not being served
 - But they didn’t get the message; instead, they got their feelings hurt
- So after the feeding, I think Jesus thought to Himself...”OK boys, you can learn this the easy way or the hard way...let’s try the hard way...get in the boat”
 - And so Jesus puts those privileged “ministers” in a difficult position of their own, where their needs will become the issue
 - He traps them on the water, in a small boat, by themselves, at night, weary and lost and scared
 - They are as lost sheep bleating for a shepherd to rescue them
 - They have now become the burden
 - Then to increase the pressure, Jesus stirs up the waves, gives them a headwind, puts them in a little fog...
 - And then He starts walking toward them, on the water no less, displaying His

- power and authority
 - The point should be obvious...Jesus is the One with power and privilege; He's the One worthy of honor
 - They need Jesus! Jesus doesn't need them...Jesus doesn't even need a boat!
- So now that the sandal is on the other foot, and suddenly these guys are the ones who need the help, Who do they cry out for?
 - Naturally, they cry out to Jesus expecting Him to rescue them
 - John tells us that when Jesus turned aside to help them, they were "willing" to receive Jesus into the boat...I bet they were!
 - They had hard hearts toward others in need, but when it was their turn to need ministry, they gladly received Jesus' help
- That's why Jesus intended to pass by...He wanted to remind them of two things
 - First, He wanted them to appreciate how it feels when a shepherd shows no concern for the flock
 - When a minister displays an unloving, hard-hearted attitude toward a flock in need, it's the opposite of ministry
 - It's incompatible with serving Jesus in the Kingdom Program
 - Now obviously, Jesus did have concern for them...Jesus was merely pretending to have no concern to make His point
 - Secondly, Jesus wanted them to remember that everyone has needs, especially Christ's ministers
 - We all sin so we all need Christ's forgiveness, and each other's forgiveness
 - We all have weakness, so we all need Christ to give us spiritual strength, and usually it comes through others in the body
 - And we all benefit from an opportunity to serve in our spiritual gift, and Jesus will put people in need around us for that reason
- In fact, Jesus will create trials in people's lives specifically to make opportunity for ministry to happen, as He did in this situation
 - And speaking of which, there was one disciple in particular that needed to appreciate this lesson, perhaps more than the rest

Matt. 14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Matt. 14:28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

Matt. 14:29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

Matt. 14:30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Matt. 14:31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and

said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Matt. 14:32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

Matt. 14:33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”

- Anyone who has listened to my teaching for any length of time will know that Peter is my favorite apostle, and in some ways he’s my hero
 - I think I’m a lot like Peter...and in a good way
 - Peter was famous for being the apostle known for his shoot first, ask questions later style of ministry
 - And among Peter’s many notable moments in the Gospels, this is one of my favorites
 - But it’s also one of the most perplexing to me, I struggle to understand what was going on in Peter’s head at this point
 - Peter sees Jesus on the water and he hears Jesus say take courage, it is I
 - In Greek, Jesus actually said “I am” which is the calling card of God
 - Now Peter and the rest of the disciples recognize Jesus, but still Peter is worried that this is a trick
 - Remember, they thought they are seeing a ghost
 - So to verify that they are witnessing the real flesh and blood Jesus and not a ghost, Peter contrives this test
 - He tells Jesus to command him to walk to Jesus on the water
 - What were the other disciples thinking at this point? “Oh, that’s a good idea Peter...you should try that.”
- And I can understand why Peter thinks this is a good idea
 - He’s assuming that if he couldn’t walk on water, then it would reveal the apparition to be only a ghost and not really Jesus
 - And I’m sure Peter wasn’t planning on leaping into the water...I’m sure he planned to test the water carefully with his toes
 - If his foot sank in the water, he wouldn’t step out further and the fraud would be exposed...something like that
 - So the point here is to make sure it’s truly Jesus before allowing this person to enter the boat
 - But Peter hadn’t really thought out where this was going because as soon as he steps on the water and begins moving to Jesus, he freaks out
 - Peter sees the wind, meaning he sees the rough seas and probably more importantly, he sees that he’s no longer in a boat
 - And I think in his mind he’s saying to himself “now what?”
 - It’s like the dog that chases the car...if he ever catches it, then what will he do

with it?

- Then we get to the most fascinating part of this account...Peter begins slowly to sink into the water
 - And Jesus rescues Peter by reaching out a hand, chastises him for having little faith and brings Peter back into the boat
 - Now if we don't read this carefully, we would assume that Peter's rising and falling was in proportion to Peter's faith
 - As if Peter's ability to walk on water was a direct reflection of the degree of Peter's faith in Jesus
 - Certainly, it's easy to draw that conclusion, but if we do, it's only because we didn't think about it deeply enough
 - First, how much faith did Peter have in this situation before he stepped into the water?
 - I would say zero faith given that he felt the need to test Jesus' identity
 - So Peter's faith isn't what put him on the water in the first place...ironically it was his doubt in Jesus that put him on the water
 - Then ask yourself this question...when Peter began to sink, was he any less walking on water than when he was completely above the water?
 - When the water was above his ankles or knees or thighs, what was supporting the rest of him?
 - Walking on water is a binary state...either you are or you aren't
 - Or in Yoda's words... do or do not, there is no try
- Peter was walking on water the whole time he was out of the boat, so what changed and why?
 - Well, remember Peter was the one who proposed this extravehicular excursion
 - Had Peter said nothing, Jesus would have simply entered the boat and the lesson would have ended there
 - In fact, the other Gospel writers say only that...only Matthew mentions this experience with Peter on the water
 - But nonetheless, Jesus chose to incorporate this moment into the larger lesson He was teaching the disciples about abiding in Him
 - Remember, back on the mountainside Jesus made the disciples feed the crowd by distributing baskets of food to small groups
 - That method required that the disciples march back up that hill over and over again to renew their supply from Jesus
 - If you were in that crowd that day, you couldn't help but get the point...the guys feeding us depend on Jesus supplying them
 - But the disciples missed that point, so now they are in a boat needing Jesus
 - But Peter says to himself, if you are truly Jesus, then command me to do what you do

- And as he steps on the water, Peter receives the proof he desired...now he knows Jesus is real
- And he starts to walk on water, and once he gains that ability, he begins to operate as if he's on his own again, forgetting who His supply is
 - Peter sees the water whipping up and probably says to himself, now what? Where am I going? What am I doing out here?
 - Just as if a disciple failed to return to Jesus with his empty basket, he was no longer in business...he became useless
 - So are we going to fail if we think that we can serve others apart from Jesus serving us
- So Jesus knows Peter's heart, and so He allows Peter to begin to sink, just a little, just enough to get worried
 - This is where we sometimes get this story wrong...we see Peter's position in the water as if it were a thermometer of his faith
 - As Peter's faith waned, so his power to walk on water waned too
 - But that doesn't make sense, because if faith was required to stand on water, he never would have stood in the first place
 - And if his faith was a requirement for walking on water, he would have plunged all the way down instantly
 - In reality, Jesus let Peter drop slowly so he could experience the lesson Jesus was trying to give the whole boat of men
 - Which is that just as My flock will always be in need of your care, so you will always be in need of Me
 - But if you abide in Me you can perform great works in My name
 - As Jesus says in John 15:

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing

- So here's what we have learned in observing these men and Jesus
 - Ministry is about being a pipe, a channel of blessing, in which we deliver spiritual supply from Jesus to others
 - Ministry centers on service to others in need, and at times we are the one to serve and other times we are the one in need
 - We gain honor when we render service *and* when we receive service
- And today we learn there is an easy way to learn this lesson and a hard way
 - The easy way to learn about ministry is to engage in the work, serving others as Christ calls us to serve
 - And as we do, we learn important lessons like humility, self-sacrifice, persistence,

patience...most of all dependence on Jesus

- But the Lord loves us so much that if we fail to learn this lesson the easy way, He will go the extra mile with us to ensure we learn it the hard way
 - He will put us in a place of need, a trial or difficulty, where we cry out to Jesus and someone comes to our aid
 - And maybe we receive that help, but then we tell Jesus “Thanks for the kick start but I got it from here...”
 - And then He lets us sink a little to remind us there is never a time “we got it from here”

- Today as we end Chapter 14 and enter into Chapter 15, we find something familiar and something new
 - The something familiar comes first tonight, and it takes us back to the beginning of the feeding of the five thousand
 - Take another look v.14 of Chapter 14

Matt. 14:14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

- When I covered this verse I explained that this moment was an exception to Jesus' general pattern of healing after Chapter 12
- In Chapter 12, the religious leaders of Israel rejected Jesus' claims to be Messiah and in doing so, they committed the unpardonable sin
 - As a result, Jesus withdrew the offer of the Kingdom, and He stopped teaching openly and healing the masses
 - From now on Jesus only teaches His disciples and He only heals those who demonstrate faith first
- But this new pattern has its exceptions and v.14 was one of those exceptions
 - On occasion, as an act of compassion, Jesus would still heal crowds without requiring faith
 - That's what we saw happening in v.14: a compassionate Jesus going against His normal practice
- But now as we leave Chapter 14, Matthew shows us that the new rules are still very much in effect

Matt. 14:34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

Matt. 14:35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent word into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick;

Matt. 14:36 and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured.

- Following their night crossing of the Sea of Galilee, we suppose Jesus and the disciples probably rested somewhere for a time in Capernaum
 - But eventually, the men begin traveling by foot again headed south along the Jewish (western) side of the lake
 - Until they came to a region near a fishing village called Gennesaret
 - That village still exists today along the shores of the Galilee
 - It's called Ginosar, and it has a kibbutz and is also the departing point for tourist boat rides on the Galilee
 - As Jesus and the disciples enter the town, the men of the town recognize Jesus,

reminding us how well-known Jesus was

- Quickly the word spreads in and around the region, and naturally people come flooding to see Jesus for healing
- In a time when sickness was a fact of life for so many, the opportunity to obtain relief was worth dropping everything
- As they come to Jesus for healing, notice how it happens in this case
 - Matthew says in v. 36 that the people “implored” Jesus to allow them to just touch His garment
 - The people were literally begging Jesus to heal them, and that’s our indication that Jesus is withholding healing again
 - Jesus wasn’t healing the crowd freely as He did back in v.14, because He first requires the people to demonstrate faith in Him
- In an effort to persuade Jesus, some in the crowd ask Jesus if they may touch the fringe of Jesus’ cloak
 - Jesus allows this request, and as many as touched His garment were cured, Matthew says
 - Now where did that come from? This sounds like a strange, superstitious practice, so why did Jesus allow it?
 - And why did Jesus heal those who were willing to touch His cloak?
 - The answer is faith...those who reached out for the hem of His garment were acting in faith believing that Jesus is Messiah
 - In Jesus’ day, men wore two garments: a light inner tunic, like underwear, and a heavier outer garment worn over the tunic
 - The outer garment is called a *tallit*, and the Lord told the Jews how to construct that garment in the Law

Num. 15:37 The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying,

Num. 15:38 “Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue.

Num. 15:39 “It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot,

Num. 15:40 so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.

- At the corners of the tallit were tassels of knotted thread called *tsitsityot*
 - These tassels were knotted five times to represent the 5 books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
 - Over time, these tassels had become a very important symbol within Jewish society

representing a person's character

- Ancient tablets have been found with the impressions of a man's tassels used as his signature on a document
- And cutting off the hem of a tallit was considered a personal disgrace
 - Under rabbinical law, a man could divorce his wife simply by cutting off the hem of her tallit
 - And in 1 Samuel 24, David sneaks up behind King Saul in a cave and quietly cuts off the hem of Saul's tallit to humiliate him
- And the Old Testament prophet Malachi taught that the tassels of the Messiah would have even greater significance

Mal. 4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

Mal. 4:2 “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

- In verse 2, we hear that the “sun of righteousness” will rise with healing in its wings
 - The phrase sun of righteousness is a reference to the Son of God, the Messiah rising (or appearing) on earth
 - The word “sun” sounds like “son” but that is merely a happenstance of the English language
- So Malachi tells us that when the “sun of righteousness” rises, He will have healing in His “wings”
 - Wing is another euphemism in Hebrew which refers to the corners or tassels on a man's outer garment
 - In fact, back in Numbers 15 the word “corner” was the same Hebrew word we find translated as “wing” here (*kanaph*)
- So the Jewish Scriptures taught that when the Messiah appeared, He would have healing in the tassels of His tallit
 - That's where faith comes into the picture here in Matthew 14
 - The crowd begged Jesus for healing, but He withheld it
 - But those who had faith in Him as Messiah didn't let that stop them, because they believed the promises in the word of God
 - They remembered the prophecies of Malachi concerning the Messiah's power to heal in His wings
 - So they reached out to touch the corners of Jesus' tallit confident that it would result in healing

- They took Malachi's promise literally, with child-like faith
 - With faith in God's word they acted, and by their actions they gave evidence of their faith
 - And because of their faith, they were healed, as Matthew says in v.36 – as many as touched Jesus' hem were healed
- I really appreciate moments like this in the Gospel because they remind us what true faith is all about
 - Faith is a conviction in the truth of something, and conviction is a powerful force directing our actions...or it should be
 - You hear people say sometimes that they have "faith", but so often they don't complete that sentence
 - They say, "I have faith..." but they don't tell you what they have faith in...they don't put an object at the end of that sentence
- Faith by itself is meaningless – it's like someone saying, "I have trust..."
 - Obviously, that person doesn't trust in everything and everyone
 - So if they say I have trust, you would naturally ask them to finish the sentence: "...you trust in what?"
- Similarly, when someone says they have faith, we must ask "faith in what?"
 - Faith by itself isn't the cause of anything...faith is just a trusting in something that we believe is worthy of our trust
 - So faith's value is found in what we place our faith in
 - For example, we can't say we have "faith" in winning the lottery
 - The odds of winning the lottery are infinitesimal...it's been said that the lottery is a tax on people who are bad at math
 - In reality, we mean we wish we win the lottery, and wishing isn't faith...wishing is meaningless and powerless
 - And there is a false and powerless form of wishing masquerading as faith in the church today
 - False teachers will tell us that if we have faith in receiving something we desire from God, our faith will make it come true
 - For example, if we have faith that God will heal us, we will be healed
 - If we have faith God will make us rich, then He will give us a great "harvest"
 - That's not biblical theology...that's Disney theology
 - It turns God into a genie in a lamp, as if we can control God by our desire
 - In reality, that's not faith...it's really wishing and it's powerless
- Take another look at the men and women who reached out for Jesus' hem...what was their faith rooted in?
 - They weren't merely wishing to be healed

- They weren't trusting in their desire to bring them healing
- Nor were they trusting in some superstition about Jesus' garments
- They were acting out of faith in the testimony of the word of God concerning Jesus as the Messiah
 - They believed what Malachi told them about the Messiah's healing ministry
 - And they believed Jesus' own testimony that He was that long-awaited Messiah sent to Israel
 - That crowd had faith in the testimony of the written word and in the testimony of the Living Word
 - They trusted that God wasn't a liar, so they took His word to the bank
- That's how faith works in a Christian's life...it begins by trusting in the testimony of the word of God, correctly interpreted
 - But it moves to acting in confidence according to our belief
 - Faith isn't found in substituting our own promises or wishes for what God's word says
 - That's just trusting in ourselves instead of in the Lord
- But even after coming to faith, if we fail to act according to our faith, then as James says, our faith is dead – meaning useless and by itself
 - It does us no good nor does it bring Christ glory
 - We can believe and be saved by our faith yet fail to experience the blessings of faith that Christ has for us in the meantime
- Remember....virtually every Jew in the crowd that day knew Malachi's prophecy because they all studied Scripture from childhood
 - They all knew the promise concerning the Messiah's healing power, yet only a few touched Jesus' hem that day
 - And only those who *acted* in faith received the benefits thereof
- And speaking of substituting our thinking for God's word, it's time for the something new in today's lesson
 - Matthew takes us into a new conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over invented rules vs. the word of God

Matt. 15:1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,

Matt. 15:2 “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

Matt. 15:3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?

Matt. 15:4 “For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.’

Matt. 15:5 “But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,”

Matt. 15:6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Matt. 15:7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:

Matt. 15:8 ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

Matt. 15:9 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’”

- Conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel is a major theme in all the Gospels, and those conflicts usually centered on the Mishnah
 - The Mishnah was the rabbi’s rule book in Jesus’ day consisting of rabbinical commentary and regulations
 - These rules covered virtually every aspect of Jewish life and Jews were expected to follow these rules as they would Scripture
 - In fact, by Jesus’ day the rabbis had come to view the Mishnah as *more* important than the Bible
 - But it wasn’t Scripture... and as a result Jesus largely ignored what it said, which infuriated the religious establishment
 - Jesus was undermining the rabbis’ source of power over the people, and He was allowing His disciples to do the same
 - We’ve already seen conflict over the rabbinical rules concerning fasting and the Sabbath, and now they contend over washings
 - Next to the Sabbath, there were more rules on washing than any other area of Jewish life
 - The Law of Moses called for ritual washing under certain circumstances
 - But the Mishnah took those requirements to a whole new level
 - Mark explains this with a couple verses of helpful background

Mark 7:3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders;

Mark 7:4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

- Mark says the religious leaders were scrupulous about how they washed before meals
 - They cleansed themselves publicly through an elaborate process involving numerous steps
 - And they didn’t just wash themselves, they also washed the cups, pitchers and pots

used for the meal

- Notice that Mark emphasizes these rituals were the traditions of the elders, not the commandments of God
 - The phrase “traditions of the elders” is the New Testament way to describe the Mishnah
 - Mark says these rituals came from the Mishnah...rules that the leaders invented...worthless burdens that God never required
- And therefore, Jesus paid these rules no regard when He walked the earth
 - And of course, the religious leaders didn’t like it
 - In v.2 the Pharisees ask Jesus why His disciples were allowed to break the traditions of the elders?
 - Specifically, why did they not observe the ritual washings required by the Mishnah before eating bread
 - But Jesus avoids getting trapped in a conversation about the value of the Mishnah, and instead He asks them a question
 - In v.3 Jesus asks why the Pharisees violated the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions?
 - Jesus is referring to how the Pharisees elevated the authority of the Mishnah above the authority of Scripture
 - The Pharisees viewed a violation of the Mishnah as more serious than a violation of the word of God
 - In fact, Pharisees lived in Jerusalem, so they would have traveled three days just to get to Jesus so they could accuse Him
 - The fact that they are in the Galilee shows us how much they valued their Mishnah and hated those who violated it
- But Jesus tells the Pharisees they are honoring their own rules while willfully violating God’s rules
 - And in v.4 Jesus chooses as His example the fourth commandment to honor parents
 - In v.4 Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the Law requires honoring parents and imposes severe penalties for failure to do so
 - Jewish culture understood that honoring parents includes caring for them in their later years when needing assistance
 - And just as it is today, caring for elderly parents involves spending money
 - But the Pharisees were lovers of money, the Bible tells us elsewhere
 - So out of a desire to hold onto their wealth, these men invented a creative way to avoid meeting their obligations to their parents
 - And their solution was classic Pharisaic thinking...
 - They created a rule that prohibited them from giving money to non-Pharisees
 - In v.5 Jesus refers to this rule when He quotes the Pharisees saying that their

resources were given to God

- The Pharisees' rule was called *corban* in Hebrew, which means an offering or dedication
- Mark gives us background on this rule

Mark 7:9 He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

Mark 7:10 “For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’;

Mark 7:11 but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’

Mark 7:12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

- The Pharisees declared that they and everything they owned was under the Corban, meaning it was set apart or dedicated to God
 - Since they were dedicated to God, everything they owned could only be given to God
 - According to this rule, a Pharisee could choose to keep his wealth
 - But if he decided to give it away, he could only give it to the temple
- Obviously, this was simply a ploy to avoid their financial obligations to their parents or the poor or anyone else
 - So if anyone asked a Pharisee for money – a beggar, a friend, a parent – he would point to the rule of Corban and say I can’t
 - His hands were tied...his money was dedicated to God, he would say
- How convenient and how hypocritical! God doesn’t need our money for His own sake... only human beings need money
 - When the Lord asks us to give money, it’s not like our money floats up to Heaven to be stored in God’s piggy bank
 - Our wealth is shared with other people, whether in the church or elsewhere
 - We’re giving to God in the sense that we’re putting our money to work in furthering the work of God
 - So when a Pharisee said he couldn’t honor their parents or give to the poor because God needed the money, he was being a hypocrite
 - Out of greed, they refused to let their money be used by God
 - Notice in v.7 Jesus says they are hypocrites fulfilling the words of Isaiah, and in v.8 Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13

Is. 29:13 Then the Lord said,

“Because this people draw near with their words

**And honor Me with their lip service,
But they remove their hearts far from Me,
And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,**

- You've heard the term "lip service" but did you know that phrase comes from the Bible?
 - That's the Lord's term for hypocrisy
 - Hypocrisy is serving the Lord with your words but not with your deeds
- The Jewish people favored a particular form of hypocrisy in which they followed traditions rather than the word of God
 - It was hypocrisy and lip service because it involving claiming to be obedient while in reality giving themselves license to sin
 - They changed the rules to suit their selfish, sinful desires and called it obedience to God
 - Meanwhile, they ignored or dismissed the commandments of God whenever it suited them
- The Pharisees may have fooled the people with their little game, but they weren't fooling God...Jesus certainly wasn't fooled
 - But it is easy to fall into this trap, because obeying the word of God is tough at times
 - It requires we crucify the desires of our flesh, and our flesh hates doing that
 - The Bible says our flesh is opposed to God in everything...our flesh always wants the opposite of what God wants
 - So our pride is continually seeking ways to get around the rules without having to admit that we are breaking them
 - And if someone tells us that there's a way for our flesh to get what it wants while still obeying God, then we're all ears...
 - Jesus says I must honor the marriage bed but if someone else says I can sleep with my girlfriend while still being a good Christian, please *tell me more!*
 - If Jesus says I can't serve two masters, but you say I can pursue earthly riches while also earning treasure in Heaven...*sounds good to me!*
 - If Jesus says I can receive grace and forgiveness for all my sins, but something inside me says I'm supposed to judge others for their sins, then *sign me up!*
 - That's hypocrisy and it's living in the flesh rather than walking by the Spirit
 - It's practicing evil while calling it good
 - It's how the enemy tempts us into self-righteousness and away from sanctification
 - We become comfortable judging behavior according to our own rules so we don't have to consider the reality of our own sin
- There's another word for this kind of thinking: legalism, and we all know that word...but

perhaps you didn't realize the connection between legalism and hypocrisy

- Legalism is the process of establishing rules for ourselves and for others that God Himself didn't place upon us
 - Legalism helps us feel more holy and more pious because we can point to all the rules we keep as proof of our righteousness
 - But in reality the opposite is generally true...legalism is an attempt to avoid obeying God's word
- It's a bait and switch strategy...legalism substitutes our rules for the commandments of God
 - The rules we invent will always be easy to follow because we like them...*that's why we invented them*
 - And we use them to replace the rules God has given in His word, rules we don't like, rules that demand we change our behavior
- So our meaningless, obscure rules become equivalent to Scripture in our thinking, because we give them equal or even greater priority in our life
 - Then we inspect others to see if they follow our rules, and when they don't, we hold them accountable calling it sin
 - Meanwhile, we neglect the hard work of our own sanctification by avoiding God's rules
- I call legalistic Christians "splinter inspectors"
 - They are preoccupied with fixing everyone else's sins while ignoring the logs projecting from their own face
 - It allows the person to feel more holy, but ironically it actually makes them less holy
- Rather than taking every thought, word and deed captive to the obedience of Christ, they judge themselves according to their own rules
 - They move the goal posts closer so they will always win the game, at least in their own mind
 - But Jesus calls it what it is...lip service, and He commands the crowd to do better

Matt. 15:10 After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand.

Matt. 15:11 "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

- Jesus challenges the crowd to hear and understand the truth...it's not what enters a mouth that defiles a person but what comes out of the mouth
 - Jesus is teaching a fundamental spiritual principle using a simple example of the dietary rules found in Israel's law

- The law placed severe restrictions on what a Jew could eat
- And the purpose of those restrictions was to unite and isolate Israel from the rest of nations
- In the process, the laws were also intended to teach Israel how sin separates us from God and that it must be cleansed
- But along came the Pharisees and their Mishnah, and before long they had made these laws a means of establishing self-righteousness
 - No longer were the dietary laws just a picture of sin and holiness
 - Instead, the Pharisees taught that the dietary laws made Israel righteous because they kept bad things out of their bodies
- Jesus explains this was all wrong...it's not what you put in your mouth that makes you righteous or unrighteous...it's what comes out
 - In other words, we are not sinners because we sin...we sin because we are sinners
 - We are inherently unrighteous beings, born sinful and living sinfully in our corrupt bodies
 - The evil present in our hearts is coming out of us all the time...in our words, thoughts, and deeds
 - We have a spiritual birth defect that we can't escape and we can't fix on our own
- Therefore, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves righteous
 - There is no rule, no list of do's and don't's that can fix what's wrong with our heart
 - Because as long as the heart is sinful, it will produce sin in the members of our body
 - And therefore, guarding what goes into our body is useless, because the enemy is within us
 - Inventing new rules is not only pointless, it makes matters worse
 - Because besides not fixing the problem, it suggests that rules are a means to pleasing God and becoming righteous
 - But the word of God teaches that the only way to please God is to accept by faith God's gift of righteousness found in Jesus Christ
 - Jesus is the only One Who is perfect, righteous and pleasing to God
 - And when we place our faith in Him, Christ's righteousness is credited to us, the Bible says
 - Thank you, Jesus, for Your grace and mercy and for Your righteousness

- We're in the middle of a teaching that Jesus delivers on the errors of legalism
 - Our scene is set in the Galilee, where Jesus has been confronted by the Pharisees over His failing to observe the rules of the Mishnah
 - And in this section of Matthew, Jesus is training His disciples on how to serve Him in the Kingdom Program
 - And one of the most important lessons they must learn is that the religious experts of the day were not experts at all
 - In fact, most Pharisees and other rabbis didn't even know God...they were wolves in sheep's clothing
 - This particular fight centered on rules of ritual washing
 - Pharisees required Jews to engage in elaborate washing routines before meals, which was a tradition handed down by the rabbis
 - These traditions were recorded in a book called the Mishnah, but they were not rules given by God
 - Nor did they promote greater holiness or obedience to God
 - They were a means to self-righteousness, so Jesus rightly ignored them and told His disciples to do the same
 - Let's pick up again in this dispute in v.10 as Jesus responded to the Pharisees' criticism

Matt. 15:10 After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand.

Matt. 15:11 “It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”

- Jesus gives the crowd a parable to explain the error in the Pharisees' teaching
 - Using dietary restrictions as His example, Jesus says that what enters our mouth cannot defile us
 - Instead, it's what comes out of our mouth that defiles us
 - Obviously, what goes in the mouth refers to food, and what comes out of the mouth refers to speech
 - But as I told you last week, Jesus was teaching on a much broader principle, on the very source of sin itself
 - And if we're going to prevail in the war against sin and self-righteousness, we first must understand our enemies
 - And Jesus says our enemy, sin, isn't something that happens to us
 - It's something that is a part of us, living inside us, looking for every opportunity to exert control over us
 - As Jesus began to explain to the crowd about the true nature of our enemy, once again He spoke in code, as a parable

- This was in keeping with His new pattern of obscuring His teaching from the ears of the crowds
- In fact, look at v.15 and we see that Peter recognized that Jesus was speaking in code again because he asked for an explanation
- And in the next passage Jesus is going to explain the parable in detail, so we will look at His explanation in a moment
- But before that, Jesus warns the disciples about how to handle men like the Pharisees
 - That begins in v.12 when the disciples come to Jesus over concerns about His teaching

Matt. 15:12 Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?”

Matt. 15:13 But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted.

Matt. 15:14 “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

- In the Gospel of Mark we learn this conversation took place in private after Jesus and the disciples moved into a nearby home
 - In v.12 they ask Jesus if He was aware that His words to the Pharisees had offended them
 - Jesus had just said that the Pharisees violate the word of God by failing to honor their parents
- Such a public challenge of the Pharisees’s honor was simply never done
 - Pharisees were the prosecutors, judge and jury in Israel...they could impose the death penalty on Jews for violating their rules
 - In fact, the last man to openly criticize a powerful leader was John the Baptist, and he ultimately lost his head for it
- So the disciples were understandably nervous over the things Jesus was saying to these men
 - The disciples assume Jesus didn’t know He offended those men, because who would invite such danger?
 - And like all Jews, the disciples would have had a degree of respect for these men given their position in society
 - And of course, they feared the consequences of opposing them
 - Therefore, the logical assumption is that Jesus didn’t realize He was offending, so they come asking Him to tone it down
 - Can’t we identify with the disciples’ feelings?
 - Our culture is deteriorating, but for now most people still expect respect for authority and civility toward one another in public

- So when someone violates this social norm around us, it makes us feel very uncomfortable
- Especially if we're closely associated with them, we shrink back
- But there are times when that instinct to avoid conflict can be wrong and actually plays into the enemy's hands
- Jesus knew these men would be offended, but He wasn't concerned, and He explains His lack of concern using another parable
 - In v.13 Jesus, speaking about these men, says that every plant the Father doesn't plant shall be uprooted
 - He's making reference back to the parable of the wheat and tares that He taught in Chapter 13
- In that parable, the Father sowed good seed in the field while the enemy sowed bad seed
 - The good seed were believers, Jesus said, while the bad seed were unbelievers
 - At the harvest, the good plants were placed in the barn while the bad plants were burned
 - Which meant believers entered the Kingdom while unbelievers were uprooted at the end of age and cast into Hell
- So in speaking of the Pharisees, Jesus says they are due to be uprooted
 - So clearly Jesus is calling these men unbelievers, and that's not surprising, because their lack of faith was obvious
 - But the next thing Jesus says about them is what's important
- In v.14 Jesus commands His disciples to let them alone, or we could say "ignore them"
 - Is Jesus suggesting that unbelievers are to be ignored or even rejected because they are unbelieving?
 - Not at all...after all, reaching unbelievers is the focus of the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus is speaking specifically about unbelievers who claim to be spiritual teachers
 - When unbelievers portray themselves as experts in God and godliness, Jesus says we ignore these imposters
 - Unbelievers can never be your spiritual leaders or teachers, because they are speaking of things that they themselves cannot understand
 - Spiritual truth is only available to those who possess the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is our teacher

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for

they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Those who are “natural” lack the spiritual capacity to understand spiritual truth because they don’t have the Teacher themselves
- Therefore, we must ignore them, paying no attention to what they say
 - Nor do we worry what they think or how they will respond to us when we speak spiritual truth that contradicts them
 - We simply ignore them
- Jesus describes an unbeliever who tries to lead others to God as a blind person leading the blind
 - Blind people who go on a journey will eventually fall into a pit, and when the guide falls, so do those who blindly follow him
 - That’s a not-so-subtle reference to stumbling into Hell, which is the fate of all unbelievers
 - The Bible calls such blind guides “false teachers”
 - A false teacher isn’t someone who merely teaches falsely...a false teacher is a teacher who IS false, meaning not a believer
 - In 2 Timothy 3:5 Paul describes false teachers as those who hold to a form of godliness although they deny its power, Jesus
 - They are always learning, Paul says, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth
 - They can appear very wise and knowledgeable, but despite all that learning, they never come to the truth
 - Like the Pharisees who had memorized the entire Old Testament yet understood nothing of God
 - Which is why Jesus says ignore them, and Paul says in 2 Tim. 3 that we should avoid such men as these...
 - Have nothing to do with anyone who claims they can guide you into the truth while demonstrating that they lack it themselves
- And how do we know if someone is a False Teacher?
 - When we evaluate our teachers and leaders, we must consider more than what they say, we need to consider who they are
 - And in fact who they are is even more important, because words are cheap and easily faked
 - But how we live day in and day out is a much tougher standard to fake
 - And in fact it’s impossible to live a truly godly life without Christ’s sanctifying power residing inside us
 - So we look for the fruit of the Spirit in the life of a person claiming to offer us spiritual truth

- Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;
- Of course, perfection isn't the standard for these things, for if we only received perfect teachers, we wouldn't have any teachers
- But we should expect to see evidence of godliness and grace and love increasing in a person's life over time
 - If that's true (and assuming their teaching is sound), then we accept that person and their teaching
 - We learn from them and we respect their authority in our lives
 - But if a teacher's life consistently departs from Scripture in major ways, then we need to be careful not to follow
 - Because where that person goes, we go with them
- This is what the Bible means when it tells us to judge a tree by its fruit...we evaluate our teachers by more than what they say
 - If we follow this standard, we may be surprised to discover that some of our teachers don't even know the Lord himself or herself
 - Such people are a danger, so avoid them
- And more than that, we should not fear them, and neither should we hesitate to speak the truth in the face of their lies even if it upsets them
 - The enemy, Satan, the father of lies, has two basic weapons at his disposal for his war against the church
 - Satan spreads lies and he suppresses the truth
 - These tactics are two sides of the same coin, because if he can achieve either one he's winning
 - If he can get someone to buy his lies, then they stop looking for the truth
 - And if he can suppress the truth, those who seek for it can't discover it – or so Satan hopes
 - Satan has used both tactics through his influence on the Pharisees
 - Pharisees were constantly inventing false theology, substituting their traditions for the doctrines of God, as Jesus said
 - So that by the time of Jesus, Israel only knew their false teaching, and they had no idea what was truly Scripture any more
 - The enemy used their Mishnah as a smokescreen and he still does that today
 - The enemy invents new religions every day because he loves to confuse us with choices
 - The more false religions, the better, because there is only one way to Heaven
 - Moreover, Satan tempts true churches to establish meaningless rules in the hope of triggering self-righteousness
 - Remember the old saying? "I don't drink, dance or chew, or date girls that do..."

- That's a great example of sneaking false teaching into the church in the hope of tempting self-righteousness
- That attitude says I'm more righteous because I have my little rules
 - And I won't accept fellowship with anyone else who doesn't follow my little rules too
 - This tactic blinds unbelievers, and it divides and confuses Christians
 - It provokes pride and self-righteousness and it pushes grace and love out the door
- But even when the truth does break through, the enemy works to suppress it
 - That's what we see happening here...Jesus gives the crowd the truth, so the enemy comes against Him and the disciples
 - Using the threat of persecution, the enemy intimidates the disciples into trying to silence Jesus
 - The enemy used fear to get the disciples to do his bidding
 - Threats of persecution or public rejection is the enemy's favorite tool of suppression
 - Around the world, Satan uses governments to suppress the truth by intimidating believers into silence
 - And even in religiously tolerant cultures, he brings pressure against the true Christian to stay silent at work or school
 - And if the Christian remains silent, where does the truth come from?
 - Jesus said if we don't speak the truth, the rocks will cry out, but if that happened, it would be to our shame
 - Certainly, we need to be savvy about how best to witness under those circumstances...we don't want to invite persecution
 - But neither do we want to do the enemy's bidding by remaining silent and suppressing the truth
 - Jesus tells us to ignore the unbelievers who contend with you over the truth... we don't have to fear them
 - Just serve Christ faithfully and trust Him in the outcome
- So after Jesus exposes the Pharisees as unbelievers, Peter speaks up to ask Jesus to explain the earlier parable

Matt. 15:15 Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us."

Matt. 15:16 Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also?"

Matt. 15:17 "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?"

Matt. 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt. 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,

fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Matt. 15:20 “These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

- In Mark’s Gospel, we’re told only that the disciples asked this question but Matthew said that it was Peter specifically who asked
 - This is a moment of humor in the Gospels, because we know Peter was the source for Mark’s Gospel
 - So it seems Peter didn’t want to people to know he was the one who asked this question
 - And that makes sense, because we know from Acts that Peter struggled more than most disciples to embrace this truth
- In fact, notice that before explaining the parable, Jesus chastises Peter for not understanding it already
 - Then Jesus moves to explaining what the parable meant
 - And as I said earlier, Jesus is explaining that sin is not a physical problem, meaning it’s not the result of what we do
 - Sin is a spiritual problem...it’s a part of who we are by nature
- Jesus explains simply that food has no effect on our spirit...it just passes through our body one way or another
 - But what comes out of us – meaning the things we think, say and do – are a reflection of our inner being, our spirit
 - And those actions defile us because they are the markers of sin
- But notice, Jesus says these things come from within our heart, which is the Bible’s way of describing our spiritual nature
 - If you commit a theft, you sin, but that sinful action didn’t start at the moment you began to act
 - Jesus says it had an earlier beginning...in your heart
 - That is before you acted to steal, you thought about taking that action
 - The act of stealing was merely the last link in a chain of sin that started in your heart when you first decided to take that action
- I summed it up last week by saying human beings aren’t sinners because we sinned...we sin because we are sinners
 - Sin is present in us from before we take our first breath
 - And it’s our sin nature that leads us to act sinfully
 - David describes his own beginnings this way:

Psa. 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.

Psa. 51:3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.

Psa. 51:4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

Psa. 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

- David says his sin was ever before him, meaning there was never a day in his life when sin wasn't present in him
 - David acted sinfully when he slept with Bathsheba and killed her husband in battle, but that was hardly David's first sin
 - David sinned when he lusted for Bathsheba
 - And even before that, David confessed he was sinful from birth, having been conceived in sin
 - David means that as he was formed in his mother's womb, sin passed from his parents and into him
 - David was constantly aware of sin's presence in his life because he never knew a time when it wasn't present working against him
 - Paul says it this way:

Rom. 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Rom. 7:19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Rom. 7:20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Rom. 7:21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

- Paul says evil (sin) is ever present in us leading us to do wrong things, things that we know in our spirit to be wrong
 - Yet despite knowing that something is sinful, nevertheless we still chose to do it at times
 - And Paul says that force inside us is evidence to us that evil dwells within us, causing us to choose sin
 - We are still culpable for our sin, because our sin nature is still part of us and we are still responsible for how we respond to it
- But that's why we need Jesus...we not only need someone to pay for our sin, we need a

longterm solution to the source of our sin

- And Jesus solves both...He paid the penalty for our life of sin on the cross removing our condemnation
- And He promises to resurrect us into a new, sinless body so when this body dies, we'll be free from the effects of sin forever
- That's why our Savior had to be born of a virgin, so that He would not inherit Adam's sinful nature and perpetuate the problem
 - Adam was not Jesus' father...the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus
 - So by not having an earthly father, Jesus wasn't conceived in sin, and that allowed God to break the chain of original sin
- The Bible calls Jesus our Second Adam because Jesus restarted the human race, spiritually speaking
 - Just as we were all born the first time in the sinful nature of Adam
 - So by faith in Jesus Christ, we may be born again in the perfect, sinless nature of Jesus
- So Jesus says righteousness isn't found in what we do...what we eat, say, think, or for that matter in what we *don't* do
 - No set of rules has the power to create righteousness in us, because sin infects our very body
 - Trying to cure sin by following rules is like trying to get dry by moving to a different part of the swimming pool
 - No matter where you go in that pool, you are equally wet
 - And no matter how many rules you adopt for yourself, you are equally sinful apart from Christ
 - That's why Paul says that righteousness is found apart from the Law
 - The Law is a set of rules, and those rules are good and holy, but they are also powerless to solve your sin problem
 - The only thing rule following does is expose just how sinful we truly are

Rom. 3:20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Rom. 3:21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

Rom. 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- It's not what we put into our bodies that determines if we are sinful or not...it's what comes out of us that shows we are sinful

- And that's why the solution to sin couldn't be found in something outside us like laws
- Righteousness comes from changing the problem inside us, changing our spiritual nature by faith alone in Christ alone
- That's where the idea of Christian liberty comes from...that we have freedom from keeping the Law as a means of righteousness
 - Paul says it this way:

Col. 2:16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day —

Col. 2:17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- A shadow is a faint representation of a person, but when the actual person comes into view, we ignore their shadow
- Likewise, the rules of the Law were given to shadow or picture the greater righteousness of Jesus
- And now that God has revealed the way to true righteousness by faith in Jesus, He tells us we no longer need the shadows
 - Rules about food or drink, observing feasts or festivals, even keeping a Sabbath day...these were just pictures of Jesus
 - And now that we have Jesus, we let no one judge our behavior in these areas
- We are already righteous by faith alone, so we don't need other people's rules to tell us how to be righteous
 - We have a law written on our hearts that directs us to live righteously and produce spiritual fruit
 - For example, I don't need to keep the Law of Moses to know I shouldn't lie or steal or murder
 - Christ's spirit inside me is telling me not to lie, steal, or murder
- But even more than that, the Law of Christ written on my heart also directs me in ways that the Law of Moses never did
 - The Mosaic Law says nothing about lusting or cutting people off in traffic or being rude on the phone or a million other things
 - But the Law of Christ convicts me when I do those things
- So my faith in Jesus makes us 100% righteous in our spirit, and our righteous spirit works in us over time to reduce our sinful actions
 - The Bible calls this process sanctification, becoming more holy in our behavior
 - Again, it's from the inside out, not from the outside in
 - That's why Jesus says righteousness is not found in what we do with our hands...it's found in what happens in our heart

- Legalism, and the hypocrisy it produces, is deadly to a church community, especially a new one that's still forming
 - Legalism stunts spiritual growth...it confuses new believers and discourages mature believers
 - The Jews of Jesus' day couldn't recognize Jesus as their Messiah because the Pharisees had blinded them, the Bible says
 - And legalism divides the body, because rules naturally become litmus tests for righteousness
 - When someone refuses to adopt another person's rule for righteousness, then they are labeled apostates and pariahs
 - And that happened in Jesus' day also...when Jesus failed to keep the Pharisees' rules, it became cause for the religious leaders to label Jesus a heretic
 - And once that happened, people began to take sides
 - And most of them sided against their Lord
 - We are a church of the Bible, yes...but we are not a church of rules for the sake of righteousness
 - We are a church of grace...we receive the grace of Christ by faith
 - We study about the grace of Christ from His word
 - And we live in the light of that grace, not seeking our own righteousness by rule keeping nor judging others by our rules
 - We forgive one another when we fail, we recognize that we all have sin living inside us
 - And we grow in that grace and in our knowledge of Jesus Christ until the day we see Him face to face, when finally we will be like Him

- Our scene is moving away from the Jewish side of the Galilee to a new region, a place Jesus hasn't visited as yet
 - In fact, our story today involves two different journeys, to two out-of-the-way places, so Jesus can teach a new lesson to His disciples
 - Both of these places are important to correcting another misconception these men had about Kingdom Program ministry
 - And yet this lesson also raises old issues that Jesus' disciples have yet to appreciate
 - And if they've had trouble embracing the previous lessons, this new one is going to be even harder to accept
 - The lesson that prompts Jesus' journeys today may be the most difficult Kingdom Program truth for a Jew to accept
 - Last week, Jesus challenged His disciples to ignore the Pharisees because they were imposters
 - And we know that would have been difficult to accept, because the Pharisees were greatly esteemed and feared by Jewish culture
 - But now Jesus will show these men that they must rethink one of their strongest and most dearly held beliefs
 - They held to a uniquely Jewish bias that was incompatible with ministry in the Kingdom Program
 - And because this thinking was so entrenched, Jesus must bring the men face-to-face with their prejudice
 - Into locations that were out of the way and rarely visited by Jews...

Matt. 15:21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Matt. 15:22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."

Matt. 15:23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us."

Matt. 15:24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Matt. 15:25 But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

Matt. 15:26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Matt. 15:27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Matt. 15:28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

- Our previous scene took place near Gennesaret along the western side of the Sea of Galilee
 - But now Jesus withdraws, Matthew says, into a far northern, Gentile area of Judea
 - You remember I told you that sometimes Jesus would retreat into Gentile areas to escape the Jewish crowds
 - Previously, Jesus traveled to the eastern side of the lake which was dominated by Gentiles
 - But this time Jesus travels northwest by the coast and into a region of the Phoenicians
 - Matthew says Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon
 - Tyre and Sidon were ancient Phoenician cities along the Mediterranean Sea (present-day Lebanon)
 - This region was best known as the home of Jezebel, the evil wife of King Ahab
 - By Jesus' day, Rome had made Phoenicia a part of their Syrian province so the territory was accessible to Judeans
 - But historically this region was an enemy of Israel, because the land was part of the grant God gave to Israel
 - The Jewish tribes assigned this region never conquered it as God directed, and so the Phoenicians remained a thorn in Israel's side
 - Mark tells us Jesus traveled here so He could be alone with the twelve

Mark 7:24 Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice.

- Jesus enters a house in the region of Tyre hoping to keep a low profile for a while
- And you would think Jesus could enjoy some peace and anonymity there, but it wasn't meant to be
- Even in this remote area, Jesus' fame preceded Him
 - Mark says He could not escape notice, and soon Gentiles flock to Him seeking to be healed
 - And one particular woman among the crowd catches Jesus' attention
- Matthew says a Canaanite woman from the region came out crying to Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter
 - Matthew refers to this mother as a "Canaanite" but not in a specific sense
 - Canaanites descended from Ham's grandson, Cain, who settled in this region following the flood
 - The line of Canaan was cursed by God in Genesis 9, and as a result these people were marked out for destruction

[Some have speculated that this curse is the source for the slavery of Africans over the centuries

- Ham's descendants populate Africa, so this thinking is an attempt to justify the enslavement of Africans by Europeans
- But even a casual reading of Genesis shows us the flaw in that thinking
 - Ham wasn't cursed, Canaan was cursed
 - And Canaan didn't settle in Africa]
- In the providence of God, the Jewish people were appointed to fulfill the curse by dispossessing the Canaanite people from the land
 - But Israel failed to obey the command Joshua gave them
 - So now centuries later, descendants of the Canaanites, like this woman, still occupied the land
 - And because of that history, the Jewish people loathed the Canaanites and Gentiles in general
- In fact, the Jews called Canaanites and other Gentiles "dogs" as an insult
 - To a Jew, dogs were savage, brutal, unthinking creatures that tore their prey apart and lived in filth
 - Which is proof that the dogs of the Bible were all poodles!
- This particular Gentile woman comes to Jesus seeking healing for her daughter who was possessed by a particularly cruel demon
 - Now, in earlier lessons we discussed demon possession in some detail, and so I won't repeat that here
 - But it's worth noting how in Jesus' day demon possession was a generally accepted and legitimate diagnosis
 - Today our world views such a conclusion as superstition and myth, having no place in an age of science and reason
 - But that's not how the Bible presents demon possession...the Bible presents it as a common reality of the human experience
 - In virtually every case where a person points to demon possession as the cause of their condition, Scripture backs them
 - In fact, there is only one example in all the New Testament where someone's claims of demon possession is shown to be false:
 - When the Pharisees lied in claiming that Jesus was demon possessed
 - This pattern suggests that demon possession is a more present reality than many would consider or accept today
 - So this woman comes begging Jesus to free her daughter, but notice Jesus didn't answer her a word, Matthew says

- Jesus is waiting to see whether this woman is seeking healing as a way to demonstrate faith
- Because following His rejection, Jesus only heals people who demonstrate faith first, generally speaking
- And it doesn't require faith in Jesus to cry out for healing...everyone was doing it
 - Many people pray to Jesus for things they want...and they also pray to Buddha, Mother Earth, Allah, their dead ancestors, etc.
 - These are equal opportunity worshippers...because in the end they don't care which deity gives them what they want
 - They only care about having their need met, and that's the chief conceit of false religion...it's a worship of self
 - False religion masquerades as an act of devotion to a god, when in actuality it's a pursuit of selfish interests
- So Jesus ignores this woman for a time waiting to see if she demonstrates true faith in Him as Messiah...and in the process He also tests the disciples
 - First, notice she calls Jesus the son of David in v.22, which is one of the titles of the Messiah
 - It's a reference to the prophecies of the Old Testament that tell us the Messiah would be a descendant of David, as Jesus was
 - That was insightful on her part as a Gentile, suggesting the woman had received insight from the Spirit
 - Secondly, notice how persistent she is...the woman continues to beg Jesus for healing despite Him ignoring her
 - Ignoring someone for a time was one of Jesus' favorite ways to identify a true believer within a crowd
 - Only if the person persisted in their pleading would Jesus finally relent and engage with them
 - While that is a terrible parenting technique, it's an excellent way to identify true believers
 - Because those simply wishing for some deity to give them what they want will only give so much time and energy to that pursuit
 - Sooner or later, they tire and assume the deity isn't there or doesn't care, so they move on to other options or simply give up
 - They return to old patterns, which elsewhere Jesus compares to a dog returning to its vomit or a pig to the mud
- True believers in Jesus will behave differently...we persist in crying out to Jesus
 - Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel Jesus tells a parable of a widow who receives justice because she persists in appealing to a judge
 - By that parable, Jesus teaches that the mark of the elect, of believers, is persistence in our appealing to God

- We never give up on God and start looking for some other deity to solve our problem
- The pattern of truth faith is never relenting, never abandoning, always seeking for Jesus
 - That doesn't mean we pray when we should or as much as we should or that we don't have moments of doubt
 - That doesn't mean we get our answer immediately or even that we get the one we wanted in the end
- The point is we keep coming back to Jesus despite our laziness and doubts
 - Because we know in our hearts that He hears us and has compassion for us
 - And because we know there is no other God to hear us anyway...so where else would we go?
- So Jesus lets her begging go on for a time to test the woman's faith, and while this is going on, her persistence becomes a test for the disciples
 - They become annoyed with the woman's shouting at Jesus, so they ask Jesus to send her away
 - Wasn't it just a short time ago that these guys got into trouble with Jesus for sending the needy away?
 - Let me remind you of that moment...it was when they saw the hungry crowd near Bethsaida

Matt. 14:15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”

- Send the crowd away...send her away...if these guys had their way, ministry would be so easy...no one would ever bother you
- The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 exposed the disciples' selfish perspective, and we hoped it taught them to think differently
 - Instead we learned from Mark that the disciples hearts were just hardened, which led Jesus to put them in a boat at night alone
 - But now we see that the storm on the sea didn't teach them either, so here we go again
- The disciples didn't hear the woman's cries as an opportunity for ministry...they saw her as an inconvenience and bother
 - This woman was like a lost sheep bleating for its shepherd, and so their reaction said more about them than it did about her
 - To a shepherd's heart, the sound of a sheep bleating in need isn't annoying...it's the sound of purpose, of a mission to be fulfilled
 - Be aware of shepherds who think that a sheep in need is an interruption to ministry

rather than the point of ministry

- Jesus rightly ignores His disciples' advice and does the exact opposite of what they suggest...rather than sending her away, Jesus begins to engage with her
 - The woman's persistence led to an opportunity to show Jesus her faith, and so Jesus begins to test her
 - And to understand how this conversation is a test, I want you to imagine one of those cheesy spy movies with two secret agents
 - The agents must rendezvous at a prearranged location, but first they test each other to be sure they have found the right person
 - First one will say a special phrase, then the other agent must respond with a matching phrase
 - That's what Jesus is doing here with this woman, at least in a sense
 - He makes a provocative statement to test her understanding of the Messiah
 - And then He waits to see how she responds
 - Jesus begins saying that the Messiah was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel... which is true
 - The Messiah was born a Jew and sent to Israel in fulfillment of God's covenant with the Jewish people
 - The Gospel eventually goes to Gentiles also, but Jesus never presented Himself as King to Gentiles during His time on earth
 - The offer of the Kingdom went exclusively to Jews in Jesus' day and only later through the apostles did it reach beyond Israel
 - So Jesus' statement is true, but it's also a test to see if the woman had received divine insight
 - True faith is rooted in God's word, and the testimony of the Scriptures was that the Messiah was promised to Israel
 - Someone following Jesus for selfish reasons would be offended by His statement thinking He's saying they were unworthy
 - But someone who understood the Scriptures would acknowledge the truth of the statement
- The woman's initial response is unclear, though she is certainly not offended
 - In v.25 Matthew says she comes and bows down before Him and pleads with Jesus to help her
 - There's that persistence again, which suggests faith, though it could be nothing more than desperation on her part
 - So Jesus tests her further
 - In v.26 He says that it wouldn't be right to give dogs the food meant for the children
 - Jesus turns up the pressure even more...He uses a play on words that only a person of true faith would understand correctly

- Jesus uses an idiom that says you don't give the children's food to the dogs, meaning you don't favor a pet over a child
- What Jesus meant was that everything in God's program must happen according to His plan, in a certain order, and according to certain priorities
 - And in the plan of salvation, the Lord appointed that the Jewish people would have a place of prominence
 - In John 4 Jesus says to the woman at the well that salvation is of the Jews
 - Which means that everything we know about God and Christ comes through the Jewish people
- Paul says it this way:

Rom. 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,

Rom. 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

- The Jewish people were the first adopted as sons of God, and they received the glory of the covenants and the Law and temple
- They received the promise of Christ and they gave birth to the Christ in the flesh, so truly salvation is of the Jews
- So Jesus tests this woman by saying that the healing He offered was intended only for the sons of God, the child in His idiom, and not for the unbeliever
 - But Jesus provocatively chose a dog to represent the unbeliever so He could play on the animosity between Jews and Gentiles
 - If this woman was an unbeliever, she wouldn't have understood the analogy Jesus was making about a Jewish Messiah
 - Instead, she would have heard the word "dog" and assumed Jesus was insulting her
 - Once again, the test was whether she became offended and gave up
 - Instead, she responds like a secret agent giving Jesus the second half of the coded pass phrase
 - She says even the dogs get crumbs from the master's table
 - First, the woman acknowledges the Scripture's teaching of a Jewish Messiah sent to Israel
 - She wasn't offended at the notion, she simply understood it to be true
 - When the Lord is offering you forgiveness for your sins, you can criticize Him for the way He chose to bring you His grace
 - But then she embraces Jesus' reference to dogs by using it in the conventional sense to describe herself and all Gentiles

- She reminds Jesus that the plan of salvation always anticipated that the Gentiles would receive God's grace too
- The crumbs of the table refers to the leftovers, the excess of God's love
- She was saying to Jesus that she wasn't asking for what belonged to Israel, she was asking for what belonged to Gentiles
 - That God so loved the world – not just Israel – that He sent His only begotten Son...
 - And when God promised to bring a savior through Abraham, He also promised to bless all nations by that same Savior
- The woman proves her faith to Jesus, and so He acknowledges her faith in v.28 and heals her daughter from a distance
 - Mark reports that when the woman went home she found her daughter free of the demon
 - Notice even the miracle happened quietly, privately, because Jesus wasn't trying to gain attention from the crowds any longer
- I wonder how the disciples felt about this moment? Do you think they celebrated this Gentile woman's faith in Jesus?
 - Do we suppose they regretted trying to send her away? We don't need to guess, because the next scene reveals their hearts

Matt. 15:29 Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there.

Matt. 15:30 And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them.

Matt. 15:31 So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Matt. 15:32 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way."

Matt. 15:33 The disciples said to Him, "Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?"

Matt. 15:34 And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few small fish."

Matt. 15:35 And He directed the people to sit down on the ground;

Matt. 15:36 and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

Matt. 15:37 And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left

over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full.

Matt. 15:38 And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.

- If you feel a little déjà vu coming on, it's understandable
 - Because just a chapter ago we saw something almost identical happen
 - So before we look at the events here, let's answer the obvious question – Why is this happening again?
 - And in fact, let's be clear that this is a second occurrence of the same miracle
 - It's a different location, different crowd but the same basic storyline
 - And the answer is that with God, when you don't learn your lesson the first time, you get to repeat the class
 - In the first occurrence in Bethsaida, Jesus tried to show His disciples how Kingdom Program ministry worked
 - People who are burdened with problems are not to be sent away...they are to be cared for and ministered to
 - But since they didn't learn that lesson, Jesus now repeats the lesson, though there is a significant difference this time
 - Matthew doesn't tell us the location this time, but Mark does

Mark 7:31 Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.

- Jesus left the region of Tyre and went to Decapolis
- The Decapolis was the name given to a region of ten Greek cities, mostly east of the Jordan river
- These cities were almost entirely Gentile, so Jesus has left one Gentile region for another
- And that means that the crowd here are Gentiles, not Jews as we saw before
 - Now if in the first case the disciples objected to caring for a large crowd of hungry Jews, I can assure you they were even less interested in caring for hungry Gentiles
 - The Jew's bias against Gentiles ran very deep in Jewish culture
 - Jews were taught from birth that God only favored Jews and that all Gentiles were lost and unloved by God
 - So Jews felt justified in looking down on Gentiles and treating them with contempt
 - After all, if God had contempt for Gentiles, they thought, then it must have been a righteous perspective to take
 - So here we have a mountainside filled with crippled, lame, blind, mute and desperate Gentiles somewhere in the Decapolis

- If one Gentile woman shouting was enough to disturb them, how do you think they felt about this scene?
- It must have made the disciples' skin crawl
- But this crowd is exactly the type of gathering that these men would one day preside over as the leaders of the church

1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

1Cor. 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

- So then the miracle proceeds exactly as the previous one, beginning with Jesus healing the crowd
 - Remember our exception to the rule when it comes to healing? Sometimes Jesus will heal the masses out of compassion
 - And when an exception is taking place, Matthew alerts us by telling us that Jesus felt compassion
 - Look in v.32 Jesus says He feels compassion for the crowd below
- And then He asks His disciples to feed the crowd again, because they had been there for 3 days and nights without food
 - So by that point, the crowd can't leave to find food...they were too weak to travel
 - And once again, the disciples make the same mistake of seeking to know the "how" before answering Jesus' call to serve
 - They say, where will we find food?
 - You might have thought that at about this point one of them would have noticed the pattern
 - "Hey guys, I think I've seen this movie before."
 - And especially when they took inventory of the available food
 - When someone said we have seven loaves and some fish...surely they noticed the connection?
 - But once again, Jesus had to direct their steps, and once again they act as waiters for a crowd of many thousand
 - And once again, they receive their supply from the leftovers, putting the disciples at the end of the priority list in ministry
 - Obviously, these guys didn't internalize the earlier lesson about service in ministry, but more importantly they haven't yet figured out the love of God

- They didn't recognize that love bears all things and endures all things
- It is kind, patient, does not seek its own
- And in this case, the love of God extends beyond the Jewish people to any who call upon the name of Jesus
- We can sum up the meaning of Jesus' two journeys with His disciples by two points:
 - First, Jesus came to Israel but He also came for the world, and the Church must maintain that focus
 - And when I say world, I don't mean simply geographically...I'm meaning ethnically
 - The Jews of Jesus' day weren't opposed to ministering across the globe...the problem was they would only minister to other Jews
 - But Jesus wanted His disciples to embrace faith wherever it presented itself
 - A Gentile woman crying out for relief had equal right to be heard as a Jewish mother crying for her child
 - And prejudice and bias is part of the pride and sin of the human heart, and we all bear it to a degree
 - Our Christian witness demands we set aside prejudice in all its forms to see every human being as a potential child of God
 - The disciples held that woman's background against her, as evidenced in Matthew's description of her as a Canaanite woman
 - They felt that the curse she knew as a descendent of Canaan meant she was undeserving of their mercy
 - But they failed to consider that all of us live under a curse, the curse God pronounced in the Garden for sin
 - And if He redeemed you by His grace, He can redeem anyone
 - In fact, did you notice the change in the number of the crowd?
 - In the first miracle, the number was 5,000, and 5 is the number in the Bible for grace
 - Christ was teaching His disciples what acting in grace looked like
 - But this time the number is 4,000, and the number 4 in the Bible stands for the world, the whole earth
 - Which was intended to teach the disciples that their ministry isn't just to Jews... it's to the whole world
- Secondly, when the Lord wants to teach us something, we would do well to learn the lesson the first time, because otherwise we have to repeat it
 - As you've heard me say, there's an easy way and a hard way to follow Christ
 - The easy way to learn lessons is to live with eyes wide open
 - We appreciate that everything we experience and everything that happens to us is a lesson sent to us from God for our benefit

- And we also recognize that the best lessons in life can only be learned through trial and difficulty
- In fact I like to say that if you're experiencing a particularly bad trial, it's a sign that the Lord has an especially important lesson He wants to teach
 - Consider the woman...had she never experienced her daughter being cruelly demon possessed, would she have met the Messiah?
 - And the same is true for us in our trials whatever they are
- But if we live with our eyes down, on this world, then we may have to repeat lessons over and over again
 - Like the disciples who fed a second crowd of 4,000 so they could learn the lesson of sacrifice and service again
 - The Lord will use patterns in our life to get our attention and reinforce the point He's making
 - So if you find yourself repeating the same trials over and over again, ask yourself, what is the lesson you're not learning?
- Our goal in this life isn't merely surviving trials or even avoiding trials
 - This life is passing...the next life is the one we should be preparing for
 - So our goal in this life is to learn as much as we can, and thereby to please Christ as much as we can
 - So we can be as ready as possible for the Kingdom life to come

- A man once said:

Let us begin by committing ourselves to the truth to see it like it is, and tell it like it is, to find the truth, to speak the truth, and to live the truth.

- That's a noble statement, and it's nothing surprising, since I'm sure we all agree with it
 - But what IS surprising is who said it: Richard Nixon
 - Whatever your politics, it's easy to see the irony
- Nixon championed the truth, until the truth came into conflict with his re-election campaign
 - And we do the same thing in our own ways...
 - Like Nixon, we all say we want to know and live by the truth but in reality we all have our own preferred view of truth
 - And when our preferred view comes into conflict with reality, our commitment to finding, speaking and living the truth falters
- Both Jesus' enemies and His disciples faced that challenge
 - And in today's passage that opens Matthew 16, we find illustrations of both
 - As we always do, let's start by revisiting our setting
- At the end of Chapter 15, Jesus was in the Decapolis; the region of ten Greek cities on the eastern (or Gentile side) of the Sea of Galilee
 - He had healed and miraculously fed a large crowd of Gentiles
 - Through that experience, Jesus was trying to train His disciples on the true nature of shepherding during the Kingdom Program
 - That miracle, and the ones that preceded it, had exposed how far Jesus' disciples had to go to learn that lesson
 - They kept asking Jesus to send the needy away rather than appreciating that they are the point of ministry
 - Their ignorance, especially at the beginning of their training, is often a source of humor in the Gospels, and we'll see some of that today
 - But the story of the disciples' bumbling is also a source of conviction and encouragement for us
 - On the one hand, it's convicting to see that even those who walked closely with Jesus can still struggle at following Him well
 - That reminds us that we too have a long way to go in learning to be Jesus to the world
 - On the other hand, it's encouraging to see how Jesus eventually elevated those men to lead the church in His absence
 - They may have begun their work confused and absorbed in petty, selfish concerns, but in the end they grew to be godly examples

- So if they could begin their walk with Jesus so poorly yet finish so well, then there is hope for all of us by the grace of God
- But let's move on, as Jesus returns by boat with His disciples, sailing to the western shore of the Galilee, where our story resumes today

Matt. 15:39 And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.

Matt. 16:1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.

Matt. 16:2 But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'

Matt. 16:3 "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?

Matt. 16:4 "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away.

- Leaving Chapter 15, Matthew tells us that Jesus came to a region of Magadan, but Mark says Jesus went to the district of Dalmanutha
 - Well, Magadan is the ancient name of Migdal (also known as Magdala), and Dalmanutha was the name for Magadan's harbor
 - This place is perhaps best known as the home of Mary Magdalene
 - It's located directly across the Sea of Galilee from the Decapolis
 - And as Jesus and the disciples land there, once again they are met by a delegation of the Pharisees
 - The Pharisees normally stayed in Jerusalem, which was a three-day walk south from here
 - They had traveled up to the Galilee earlier to confront Jesus over His claims to be Messiah
 - Then when Jesus traveled to the Diaspora with His disciples, these men stayed behind not wishing to enter Gentile territory
 - Yet when Jesus returned to Jewish soil a few days later, there they were, still in the Galilee, waiting for Him
 - That shows us how determined the Pharisees were to disrupt and discredit Jesus' ministry
 - They aren't there because they admired Jesus or because they had a sincere interest in knowing more about His ministry
 - They simply wanted to tear Him down
 - They were hypocrites...they were the opposite of who they pretended to be in front of the crowds

- And we can see that plainly in this passage
- They again ask Jesus to perform another miraculous sign to prove His claims to be Messiah
 - But notice Matthew says they were testing Jesus by their question
 - By “test” Matthew means they were looking for a way to discredit Jesus in front of the crowd, if they could
 - And the test was to ask specifically for a sign from Heaven, as Matthew says in v.1
 - Pharisees knew that the devil and his agents could perform miraculous signs on earth, in the physical realm
 - The devil can counterfeit a physical healing or the manipulation of physical material like water or food
 - But they said that only God could perform a sign from Heaven
 - The problem is, what constitutes a sign from Heaven vs. one of earth?
 - Virtually any miracle that we could see here on earth would be, by definition, an earthly sign
 - So it was an ambiguous distinction that they could manipulate to suit their purposes
 - And in this case, it was how the Pharisees intended to trap Jesus
 - They ask Jesus for a sign from Heaven knowing that any sign Jesus performed could be called a “sign of the earth”
 - And in that way they could accuse Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan as they did before in Chapter 12
 - Now to the crowds, this careful investigation looked as if the Pharisees were simply doing their due diligence
 - In reality they were hypocrites working to discredit Jesus and diminish His authority and influence
- Jesus knew their hearts, so in v.2 He doesn’t address their request directly, but instead He points out their hypocrisy and ignorance
 - He makes a comparison between reading weather signs and understanding the meaning of Jesus’ miracles
 - Men could look at and read the signs in the sky and make conclusions about the coming weather
 - If they saw a red sky at night, they would know the weather would be fair while a red sky in the morning meant a storm
 - You may have heard the old adage, “Red sky and night, sailor’s delight; red sky at morn, sailor be warned.”
 - But reading weather signs by looking at the clouds isn’t easy...it takes skill and experience
 - Even today a modern weatherman is often wrong

- In fact, it's the only job where being wrong 50% of the time is considered a good record
- So if these men could discern the weather with such ambiguous signs, then they should have recognized their Messiah by His obvious signs
 - As Jesus asks in v.3, how can they discern the signs of the sky, yet not know the signs of the times?
 - Signs of the times simply refers to the miracles Jesus performed in their day
 - Those signs marked the first coming of the Messiah
- Yet in the face of such overwhelming proof, the Pharisees continued to maintain that they needed more signs from Jesus
 - They were both hypocrites and ignorant
 - First, these men were hypocrites, because they weren't sincerely seeking to know whether Jesus was the Messiah
 - They had false motives...they were pretending to be seriously considering the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah
 - In reality, Jesus simply wasn't the kind of Messiah they imagined or desired
 - They expected the Messiah to look just like one of them...a super Pharisee, not a poor manual laborer from the Galilee
 - After they got one look at Jesus, they were committed to refuting and denying His signs, not understanding them
 - The irony is they tried to judge whether Jesus was truly the Messiah, when in reality they didn't possess the ability to recognize the Messiah
 - That's why Jesus chose the example of predicting weather as His illustration
 - These men were smart and they were learned, but all their smarts and learning were centered on the natural world
 - When it came to spiritual truth, they knew nothing of God, which was particularly ironic considering their profession
 - They knew their Mishnah backwards and forwards, and they memorized the Scriptures
 - But they couldn't recognize the Messiah when He came for them
 - So it was ironic they asked Jesus for a sign from Heaven, when the only kind of signs they could understand were signs of earth
- Our world is literally filled with people like the Pharisees, people who are incredibly smart and accomplished in the ways of this world
 - Yet at the same time, they are ignorant of spiritual truth, of the truth of what lies beyond this world
 - Truth about God's realm, about heaven, hell, judgment and of the eternity that stretches out beyond the grave...
 - The understanding of those things lies beyond their comprehension, if they even give them a thought at all

- And this is true even for “religious” people, because being religious isn’t the same thing as understanding spiritual truth
 - Consider the Pharisees again...they were the most religiously observant members of Jewish society you could find
 - Yet they were completely missing Jesus
 - Meanwhile, untrained, uneducated crowds recognized Jesus as Messiah
- How was that possible? It’s possible because no one *discovers* the truth about God...not by their own intellect or education
 - We come to know the truth about God only because the Lord chooses to reveal Himself to us in a moment
 - As Jesus performed signs, some understood and others didn’t
 - Some were receiving the revelation of God and others weren’t
 - That’s still the case today...the Lord reveals Himself through the testimony found in the word of God
 - But without the Spirit teaching us what Scripture means, we can’t understand it, Paul told us
 - Understanding the meaning of spiritual truth requires that God make it known to us
 - And this isn’t just true of unbelievers like the Pharisees, it’s also true of believers like the disciples themselves
 - Later in v.15 of this chapter, Jesus will ask the disciples who they say He is, and Peter will say You are the Christ, the Messiah
 - Naturally, we assume Peter came to that understanding by reasoning it out having seen the signs and heard the teaching
 - Certainly that’s what Peter assumed
 - But as we will learn next week, that’s not how it actually happened
 - Jesus tells Peter that His faith wasn’t the result of human intellect or reasoning but was the result of the Father revealing it to him
 - That’s how everyone receives spiritual truth, and self-evidently the Pharisees had not received such a revelation
 - Which is why they continued to seek for signs
 - That’s why the church is called to go out seeking for the lost, declaring the Gospel for the ears that will hear
 - We can’t argue a closed heart to open, nor can we bring spiritual insight to the blind
 - Only God can do those things...but hallelujah that God *does* do those things!
- We are God’s messengers whenever we share the truth of Jesus
 - But whether a heart receives our message or not depends on whether the Lord is at work revealing Himself to that person
 - Without the revelation of the Spirit, the word of God will be nonsense to them...

they can't understand it, Paul says

- So in place of the word, they will seek for signs, and the enemy is more than happy to give them signs to distract them
- Notice in v.4 Jesus refused the Pharisees' request for more signs repeating what He said in Chapter 12, that there would be no more signs
 - Only one final sign would be given, the sign of Jonah, which is Jesus' term for His resurrection after three days in the grave
 - The time for convincing Israel that Jesus was their Messiah ended back in Chapter 12, so He wasn't playing their game
- That's the danger of unbelievers seeking for signs...they perpetuate the myth that we find God and that the search is never ending
 - The Bible says that God has revealed Himself to us in His Son Jesus, so we do not need to search on our own
 - And even if we tried, we couldn't go to Heaven to find the truth nor will spiritual truth be found in searching the natural world
- As Paul says in Romans:

Rom. 10:6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down),

Rom. 10:7 or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

Rom. 10:8 But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART” — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,

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

- The word of faith, our confession in Christ, brings us to God, yet that confession itself isn't something we go searching for
- God brings it to us, it's near to us Paul says, ultimately His divine revelation of Jesus as Messiah enters our heart and leaves our mouth
- So for an unbeliever, seeking for signs is not a means to the truth, it's a dangerous distraction...and the same can happen to the believer too
 - And Matthew shows us the danger of signs for the believer in the second half of the story today

Matt. 16:5 And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread.

Matt. 16:6 And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matt. 16:7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, “He said that because we did not bring any bread.”

Matt. 16:8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?

Matt. 16:9 “Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up?

Matt. 16:10 “Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up?

Matt. 16:11 “How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matt. 16:12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- In v.5 we’re told that they set sail again, and Mark tells us they landed in Bethsaida, the place where Jesus fed the five thousand earlier
 - And that detail makes the conversation that followed all the more ironic
 - As they set sail, the disciples realize they hadn’t packed enough food for the trip
 - Mark tells us that they had only one loaf of bread for the group
 - I can imagine the conversation and finger-pointing that took place in the boat...
 - Now while the disciples are fretting over lunch, Jesus tries to turn their minds back to more important matters
 - He says beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees
 - And Mark records that Jesus also said the leaven of Herod
 - Leaven in the Bible is a picture of sin in any form, but Jesus makes it more specific in this case
 - The sin of the Pharisees was seeking the Kingdom by self-righteousness, legalism in the form of Pharisaic Judaism
 - They pursued external piety absent inward godliness
 - So they opposed Jesus because He rejected the rules of the Mishnah and threatened to tear down Pharisaic Judaism
 - The sin of the Sadducees was seeking the Kingdom in worldliness, in wealth and power
 - The Sadducees exploited their role as overseers of the temple to enrich themselves
 - They turned religion into a money-making enterprise and they worshipped the wealth it gave them
 - So they opposed Jesus because He said it was wrong to make the temple into a place of business and a den of thieves
 - And the sin of the Herodians was in seeking the Kingdom through the government and social order of the Roman Empire

- Herodians supported Roman rule and sought to bring the Kingdom to the earth through the institutions of government
 - So they opposed Jesus because of His claims to being Israel's Messiah, the King coming to offer a new Kingdom
- So Jesus tells His disciples to beware of those negative, sinful influences in their own ministry
 - In other words, don't fall for the temptation to substitute easier, earthly goals for the higher spiritual goals of the Kingdom Program
 - Don't substitute self-righteous legalism for the grace of the New Covenant
 - You didn't find righteousness by doing good works and you can't make yourself more righteousness now by inventing new rules
 - And don't try to obtain your Kingdom reward in this world by pursuing earthly pleasures
 - If you trade pursuit of God for pursuit of wealth, you're trading eternal riches for things destined to burn up
 - It's a fool's bargain and it's a distraction
 - And don't put your trust in government or any institution of this world hoping to obtain things that will only be found in the next world
 - Social justice, equality, and the like are noble goals and worthy of our support and involvement...
 - But not if that support comes at the expense of investing our time, talent and treasure in building the Kingdom to come
- So Jesus says beware the leaven of these groups, but the disciples hear something completely different
 - In v.7 Matthew says the men assume that Jesus was making some oblique reference to their error in not bringing bread
 - Here's what they thought...they knew they didn't have bread, so that meant they would have to buy bread from someone
 - And they thought Jesus was pointing out their mistake when He warned them not to buy bread from Pharisees and Sadducees
 - So they probably started arguing over whose fault it was
 - Jesus hears this argument and reacts in disgust over their ignorance
 - In v.8 He says they are men of little faith

Mark 8:16 They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.

Mark 8:17 And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?

Mark 8:18 "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember,

Mark 8:19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve."

Mark 8:20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven."

Mark 8:21 And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

- In the past couple of weeks or so, they have witnessed Jesus provide bread for thousands of people on two separate occasions
 - And yet here they are worried about where their next meal was going to come from
 - It's a display of little faith, and the irony is they are doing much the same thing that the Pharisees had just done
- Those miracles were intended to be a message for these men...among other things it showed that the Lord they serve will be their provider
 - But they missed the sign because their hearts were hard, they were resistant to receiving spiritual truth
 - They apparently gave little thought to the spiritual significance of what happened in each case
 - So that now when their food supplies run low, they are caught thinking of earthly things
 - Jesus points out their foolishness in vs.9-11...didn't they notice how the two miraculous feedings ended?
 - They had baskets left over following each event
 - In the case of the five thousand, there were twelve baskets left over, one for each man
 - And the number 12 represents God ruling through human government
 - So He was saying I will work through your hands and care for you in the process
 - And in the case of the four thousand, there were seven baskets remaining
 - Obviously, the twelve shared the bread from those seven baskets
 - And seven is the number of perfection or completion (like 100%), indicating God's perfect plan
 - Were those results purely random? What are the odds that after feeding thousands of people, the leftovers numbered exactly 12 and 7?
 - Does that sound like a coincidence to you? Or does it sound like God's calling card, something to remind us that He's in charge?
 - The answer is easy, and it should have been easy for the disciples too
 - Which is why Jesus says in v.11 that they should have known Jesus wasn't worried about physical bread
 - That was the least of His concerns, and it should have been the least of their concerns too

- The disciples were suffering from the same problem as the Pharisees, though in an opposite sense
 - The Pharisees couldn't make sense of the signs Jesus performed because they lacked divine insight to understand them
 - So instead, they kept looking for signs to fill that gap
 - And signs and wonders can't substitute for spiritual insight...they are merely a distraction
 - The disciples couldn't understand Jesus' teaching because they weren't accustomed to using the spiritual insight made available to them
 - Back in Mark 8:18 Jesus told them they had eyes but did not see, they had ears but did not hear...
 - In other words, by their faith in Jesus, they had received divine insight to know spiritual truth, but they weren't using it
 - God had given them spiritual eyes and ears, so to speak, and yet they were still thinking in worldly ways
 - So when Jesus says beware leaven, He's speaking of the great spiritual battle every believer faces against sin
 - It's a continual struggle to avoid temptations of self-righteousness, greed and the pride of life in this world
 - But rather than hear it in those terms, they think He's upset at not having bread for the trip
 - Yet all they needed to do was remember the events of the previous two weeks to know that couldn't be Jesus' concern
 - So if the Pharisees were too interested in Jesus' signs, the disciples weren't giving Jesus' signs enough thought
 - They took His miracles for granted, it seems, and in the process they missed the meaning of them
 - And that too is a danger for all of us
 - Just like we can repeat the mistake of the Pharisees by seeking for too many signs, we can also ignore the ones we do receive
- Do you remember the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19? Let me remind you of it briefly, because it's an excellent illustration of this problem
 - The prophet is upset at God for failing to bring a great revival in Israel through Elijah's ministry
 - So the prophet demands an audience before God at Mt. Horeb, the mountain where God met Moses
 - During that audience, God chastises Elijah for abandoning his post in Israel
 - And to teach Elijah a lesson about how God works, the Lord gives the prophet a demonstration
 - He placed Elijah in a cleft of the rock so Elijah could witness the glory of God

passing by as Moses did

- But first, God causes earthquakes, fire and great wind to appear before Elijah, but the Lord was not present in these moments
- Then the Lord brings a soft breeze and the text says His presence was found in that breeze
- God's point to Elijah was that He didn't usually work through great signs and miracles
 - Neither in the course of world events nor in our own lives
 - Only rarely does God part a Red Sea or call fire down from Heaven
- Instead, the Lord usually works in quiet, almost undetected moments, like a soft breeze we barely notice
 - In the hearts of people around us, in the subtle ways He directs our steps throughout the day
 - Most of all, through simple lesson from His word that changes our outlook and causes us to live differently
- If we're paying attention closely, if we train ourselves to think spiritually, we can follow and serve Him now
 - But if we're seeking God in big displays of power like Elijah, then we're going to miss the work of God happening all around us
 - If our eyes are on this world...thinking about our next meal, our next business deal, our next purchase, or our next conquest...
 - Then we won't recognize spiritual truth when it crosses our path
 - We can't follow Jesus like Pharisees, demanding sign after sign from God without understanding what they mean
 - And all the while, the word of God is right here ready to reveal spiritual truth to us
 - Neither can we think like the disciples in that boat missing spiritual truth because we're preoccupied solving problems of this world...problems that Jesus has already solved for us
 - Live in the light of the counsel of God's word, train yourself to see and hear spiritual truth, and don't let the world pull you off the goal
 - Serve Jesus with eyes for eternity, not dependent on signs, but resting in His work and His truth

- Over the past several weeks, we've watched in bemusement as Jesus trained His disciples how to serve the Kingdom program
 - Those men struggled to make sense of it all, and to be fair Jesus' lesson would have been hard for anyone to grasp
 - Because Jesus wasn't running just another rabbinical school preparing men to perpetuate Pharisaic Judaism
 - Jesus was a rabbi unlike any other...and therefore His ministry would be unlike anything else the disciples had known before
 - The Lord was preparing these men to lead a new, worldwide movement of God
 - They would live on the frontlines of a spiritual battle for truth and the salvation of the world...and that's no small assignment
 - So where do you start in preparing someone for such a high calling?
 - Well, Lesson #1 is knowing that Jesus is God... they were in the company of the Messiah, the Lord's anointed One
 - And Lesson #2 is appreciating the significance that God became man to live and die for us
 - Because at the end of the day, the Church isn't about miraculously feeding hungry people or healing diseases
 - Our mission as ambassadors of Christ is saving souls, calling men and women to be reconciled to God...that's what all this is about
 - So understanding that Jesus came to bring forgiveness and hope and eternal life to lost sinners is paramount
 - And more than that, those men needed to understand that they were to do it as Christ did it, following in Jesus' footsteps
 - Just as the Son of God came to seek and save the lost, so will His disciples seek to serve the lowly and needy with the good news
- Grasping all that is a tall order, so perhaps it's understandable that these men were so slow to catch on to what Jesus was saying and doing
 - But last week they had a breakthrough of sorts
 - Look back to the end of prior passage in vs.11-12

Matt. 16:11 “How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matt. 16:12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- Jesus chastised them for their lack of faith in Him and for failing to pay attention to all they had seen and heard
 - The final straw was their ignorance of Jesus' comment about beware the leaven of Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians

- Jesus was speaking of the dangers of each group's false teaching while the disciples were thinking only of trivial matters
- After Jesus corrected them, Matthew says then they understood what Jesus meant, and that gives us hope they turned the corner
 - Maybe they were starting to grasp the enormity of what was happening around them
 - And most importantly, maybe their hearts were finally opening to Who Jesus was and what His arrival meant?
- Well there's only one way to find out...so Jesus decides it's time to test their understanding starting with Lesson #1

Matt. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Matt. 16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Matt. 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Matt. 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

- Matthew tells us that Jesus goes to the district of Caesarea Philippi
 - This district sits at the base of Mt. Hermon, the tallest mountain in the Middle East, nearly 9,000 ft high
 - Today, the northern half of the range is in Syria and the southern half is in Israel
 - In Jesus' day, the region was largely Gentile, much like the eastern side of the sea of Galilee
 - This area was under the rule of one of Herod the Great's descendants, Herod Philip II
 - And at the foot of Mt. Hermon sat a small town called Paneas, which Philip renamed Caesarea to honor Caesar
 - At that time, there was already another city called Caesarea in Judea built by Herod the Great on the Mediterranean coast
 - So to distinguish one town from the other, this Caesarea became known as Caesarea Philippi
 - It's original name, Paneas, came from a temple in the town dedicated to an ancient pagan god, Pan
 - Pan was a figure of Greek mythology depicted as half man, half goat
 - He was the god of nature and outdoors, and his followers engaged in wild fertility rituals and other extreme behavior
 - For that reason, we get the word "panic" from the god's name
 - The temple of Pan was located in a cave at the base of Mt Hermon, the ruins of which are still visible today

- Scholars have assumed that this encounter between Jesus and His disciples took place somewhere near the Pan temple
- But Mark says this conversation took place among the men as they traveled to Caesarea Philippi
- So perhaps they were near the Pan temple, perhaps not
- In any case, Jesus asks His disciples who do the people say the Son of Man is, and Mark records the question as who do they say I am?
 - For the first time, Jesus acknowledges the elephant in the room...the question of His identity
 - The answers they offer reveal the confusion and mystery that surrounded Jesus' ministry
 - But remember, Jesus already knew what was being said, so He's not asking the disciples this question because He was curious
 - Jesus was actually asking to find out what the disciples are thinking...which view have they accepted?
 - They tell Jesus that some in the crowds were saying Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist
 - We know who was principally responsible for that rumor
 - Matthew told us earlier that Herod Antipas, the man who killed John the Baptist, thought that Jesus was the resurrected John
 - But since both men were alive at the same time, this was a ridiculous conclusion
 - Others were saying that Jesus was Elijah, the prophet well known for being taken up in a chariot of fire at the end of his life
 - Jewish people knew that Malachi prophesied Elijah would return to announce the Messiah's arrival
 - So it was natural to assume that Jesus was Elijah come to announce the Kingdom's arrival
 - But the Bible says John the Baptist was the herald sent to announce the Messiah's first coming
 - And Elijah's return awaits to announce Jesus' Second Coming, so this was also illogical
 - Then others were saying Jesus was a resurrected Jeremiah, which is even stranger
 - The Bible never says Jeremiah will reappear, so perhaps some assumed Jesus was Jeremiah based on similarities in ministry
 - Jeremiah ministered to Judah during a time when a foreign kingdom had conquered Jerusalem and held the city
 - And like Jesus, Jeremiah spoke of a coming Kingdom for Israel
 - But there was simply no basis for drawing such a connection
- In fact, speculation seemed to be the order of the day, because some were saying Jesus was one of the other prophets resurrected they say

- It seems as if any suggestion was fair game, and obviously, the people weren't constrained by Scripture or even logic
 - Meanwhile, they ignored what Jesus actually said about Himself, as well as His miracles, especially the Messianic miracles
 - And they ignored what John and Scripture said about Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of the Messiah
 - And when it comes to understanding what God is doing, once you set aside Scripture, all you have left is speculation
- So obviously the crowd has many ideas for who Jesus is, but did you notice the one, obvious option that the disciples didn't mention?
 - Surely, we know some in the crowd were saying Jesus was the Messiah
 - So why didn't the disciples at least mention that possibility?
- I think that's why Jesus began by asking what the crowds were saying...it gave the disciples an easy way to suggest that Jesus was Messiah
 - And yet it seems that most of these guys either hadn't come to that conclusion yet themselves
 - Or they were too nervous to be the first to make that suggestion
 - And in Jewish culture, fear of blasphemy was a real thing, because the penalty was death under the Law
- But thank the Lord that He included Peter in this group, because where others feared to tread, Peter charged ahead
 - Jesus forces the men to enter into the conversation everyone was avoiding
 - He asks them plainly who do you say that I am? It's time to get them on the record
 - And though the text doesn't describe the scene in detail, here's how I imagine it
 - Mark says they were on their way to Caesarea Philippi, so I imagine the men walking in a small group with Jesus in front
 - Looking straight ahead, Jesus asks the question and there's a pregnant pause... no one wants to be the first to speak
 - The men start exchanging glances trying to figure out the next move...do they say the obvious and risk blaspheming?
 - Peter senses the awkwardness and can resist filling the silence
 - Moreover, Peter knows what the correct answer should be...inside himself the answer seems obvious and surely everyone knows it
 - In fact, he can't understand why the others aren't speaking up
 - And he's even a bit embarrassed at his own silence, so as the seconds tick by Peter finally blurts out...
 - He says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
 - But in Greek, Peter's statement has a particular feeling that's not evident in the

English translation

- Before each noun, Peter adds the article “the” which gives his words an emphatic tone
- Literally in Greek, Peter said you are “the” Christ, “the” Son of “the” God, “the” living One
- All of those articles leaves us with the impression Peter was making a point to someone
 - And given what he’s saying, I don’t think he was trying to convince Jesus
 - After all, if you believe Jesus is the Christ, you don’t assume He needs your help understanding that
- I believe Peter was making a point to his comrades and probably even to himself
 - This was the first time Peter let those words escape his mouth and he wasn’t doing it tentatively
 - He’s owning it publicly, and he wants everyone to know it
 - And I suspect he’s also making a point to the other disciples that their hesitation to speak up was a problem
- This is one of Peter’s finer moments... it’s the moment Peter assumed the mantle of leadership among the disciples
 - And Jesus recognized and confirmed Peter’s leadership, but first Jesus makes clear that Peter’s courage and initiative was not entirely his own

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

- Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah, but more than that, he has declared some remarkable things
 - He has said that Jesus is the son of God, effectively introducing the concept of the plurality of the Godhead
 - Then as now, orthodox Judaism didn’t acknowledge the Trinity
 - Yet here’s a Jewish man declaring that God had a Son spiritually speaking, and Jesus was that Son
 - That was quite a leap in understanding
- Peter stepped forward and in one statement changed the course of Jewish belief and established a fundamental Christian theology
 - He affirmed that Jesus was the promised Seed, the Messiah, the One sent by God to end sin and the devil’s reign of terror
 - Moreover, he said Jesus is God himself, incarnate in the flesh
 - Fully man and fully God, the Son of God, a part of the Godhead
- Peter was the first among the disciples to reach these conclusions, and even John, who

later tells us Jesus is God and was with God, didn't speak up here

- No, it was Peter who came to this conclusion first, and as such he deserves our admiration
- And yet Jesus goes on to say that though Peter was first, he wasn't operating by his own intellect or reasoning
- Jesus says Peter was responding to a work of God in his heart, for it was the Father in Heaven who revealed this truth to Peter
 - Before we consider the significance of this revelation, notice that Jesus' words confirm both aspects of Peter's confession
 - If it were true (as some critics say) that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, then why didn't Jesus correct Peter here?
 - Instead, Jesus acknowledges Peter's confession saying it was the result of divine revelation, which clearly indicates Jesus agreed
 - Secondly, notice that Jesus says the source was His Father in Heaven, affirming Peter's second statement that Jesus was the Son of God
 - So Jesus confirms both that He is the Messiah and He is the Son of the living God, which confirms the Trinity
 - That God is One existing in Three Persons
 - Notice also that Jesus uses Peter's full name which was Simon bar Yonah
 - Bar means "son" in Hebrew and Yonah is Jonah
 - So Peter's full Hebrew name was Simon, son of Jonah
 - Why did Jesus start by addressing Peter so formally? Because this was an important, solemn moment...a turning point in Peter's life
 - Peter stepped forward declaring publicly his faith in Jesus as the Messiah and his belief that Jesus was God incarnate
 - And as he did, Peter crossed over a line from which there is no return
 - Either Peter was correct and if so, he has defined the belief that every follower of Jesus after Peter must also confess
 - Or else he was wrong, in which case Peter just committed the sin of blasphemy and should be put to death according to the Law
- This is his defining moment, and Jesus' response makes clear which of those options holds true here: Jesus says that Peter was blessed, not condemned
 - Moreover, Jesus says Peter's remarkable insight was not his own, but instead was a revelation of the Father to Peter
 - What Peter just said, he couldn't have said unless the Father in Heaven had given Peter the understanding he now possessed
 - Without that revelation, Peter would have remained as clueless as the others
 - So as we look at this moment, we need to see it with spiritual understanding, stepping back to see it from God's vantage point

- Scripture is telling us that in that moment as the disciples stood silently hesitating to answer Jesus' question, the Father was at work
- But His Spirit, He placed the knowledge of the truth in Peter's heart, and that truth was burning inside him
- And it was pressing to get out, to make itself known, and Peter could feel it
- He knew the truth and he knew he had to share it, and so when Jesus asked the question Peter offered his remarkable answer
- That, my friends, is how faith works in the heart of everyone who has ever believed in Jesus
 - The knowledge that Jesus is our Savior and that He is God incarnate must be revealed to us by the Father
 - Without that revelation, we will never come to that understanding – no matter how often someone tells us
 - And no matter how many miracles or signs and wonders might be done in our presence
- But on the other hand, once the Lord has placed that truth in our heart, as He did for Peter here, we can't bear to hold it inside us
 - It's a truth that we must declare, and once it's taken up residence in our hearts, it's only a matter of time before we make it public
 - And often the Lord will prompt us as He did with Peter here
 - He will move us into a moment like the one Peter experienced where the question comes our way and we know the answer
 - And more than that, we know we're supposed to answer the question
 - That moment we call a confession of faith, and it's the moment where faith in the heart makes itself known through a confession of the mouth
 - And as the two come together in that moment, the truth God planted in our hearts becomes a truth we ourselves accept
 - It's the moment that a free gift of salvation placed in our heart becomes a gift received and affirmed in our minds and words
 - As Paul says:

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

Rom. 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Rom. 10:11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Rom. 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;

Rom. 10:13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

- So at some point before this moment (or maybe in the moment), Peter received revelation from the Father to know that Jesus was Messiah
 - And then Jesus prompted Peter to confess what he knew by giving him an opportunity make that confession
 - And this happens all the time...whether through an altar call in church or a conversation with a friend over coffee
 - I remember the way the Lord brought me to a confession...
- So this is Peter's confession moment, and this was also the moment Peter stepped forward and became the leader among these men
 - And Jesus affirms Peter's leadership position

Matt. 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matt. 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

- Much has been made of Jesus' statement, and I suspect many of you are aware of some of the controversy that surrounds it
 - For example, the Catholic Church teaches that the pope is the highest representative of Christ on earth
 - And they point to this statement as evidence that Jesus establishes the papacy through Peter
 - Their claims are revisionist history, obviously self-serving and completely unsupported by the text
- But Protestants can run too far in the opposite direction by unfairly diminishing Peter's importance as a leader in the early church
 - The truth lies between those two extremes, as this text makes plainly clear
 - On the one hand, in speaking to Peter Jesus says He's going to build the church upon "this" not on "you"
 - So Jesus' choice of words rules out believing that the church was to be built upon Peter himself or that Peter founded the papacy
- But on the other hand, in v.19 Jesus says plainly that Peter will have a special role in leading the early church
 - He will have "keys" to the Kingdom
 - And in some way, Peter's leadership will connect heaven's intentions to the events of the church on earth
- Jesus' two statements are fundamentally important, a key turning point in Matthew's Gospel
 - And if we're going to fully appreciate what's going on in this moment, we need to

examine both carefully

- With the time we have this morning, we will only look at the first one, and we'll save the second for next week
- In His first statement, Jesus begins by changing Peter's name, that is from Simon to Peter
 - Although Matthew has been calling the apostle by the name Peter all along, this is the moment when his name was first given by Jesus
 - Prior to this moment, 2 years into Jesus' ministry, the man's name had been Simon Bar Yonah
 - But Jesus says from now on it's Peter, and Matthew uses the Greek *petros* which means rock in the sense of small stone
 - Later when Jesus says on this "rock" He will build the church, Matthew uses a different Greek word, *petras*, which means cliff
 - These two words are different genders in Greek, so clearly Matthew was trying to make a contrast between the two
 - Something about what Peter did in stepping forward to confess Jesus in the way that He did would serve as an example of the church overall
 - We could say that Peter was a chip of the block, a small stone compared to a cliff
 - And the relationship is easy to see, especially if we read Peter's own writings

1Pet. 2:4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,

1Pet. 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1Pet. 2:6 For this is contained in Scripture:

"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

1Pet. 2:7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve,

"THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,"

1Pet. 2:8 and,

"A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

1Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- I wonder if Peter was thinking back to this moment at Caesarea Philippi as he wrote his

first letter to the church

- He says to all believers you have come to a living stone, the cornerstone that the builders rejected
- A cornerstone was the most important stone in construction, because it set the direction and stability of a building
- If that cornerstone was structurally weak or set improperly, the entire building would list and eventually fall
- Jesus is our cornerstone: sure, strong, unbreakable and true
 - And yet the builders, that is the Jewish nation, rejected the stone
 - The Lord builds His kingdom on the promises He gave to Israel, and yet Israel rejected the One upon Whom the building begins
 - So that building begins with Gentiles first, with you and me
- And Peter says that we are living stones God is using to construct a spiritual structure called the Church
 - And the process that led to Peter's public confession is the same way the Lord will fashion us into living stones
 - The Father will reveal to us the truth of Jesus as Lord, and in a moment God appoints, the Spirit will prompt us to step forward
 - And that truth burning inside us will come out as a confession of things that only God could have taught us
- In that moment, salvation arrives and we become part of something larger than ourselves
 - Jesus says He builds His church through this process of divine revelation and public confession
 - This is the first use of the word "church" in the New Testament and one of only two uses of the word in all the Gospels
 - Mark, Luke and John never use the word "church" at all, and it reflects how new this idea truly was
 - In Greek it's the word *ekklesia*, which means the invited or called out ones
 - Jesus gives us this new term for the body He was preparing to create because none of the existing words could work
 - Since Israel rejected Jesus in Chapter 12, He wasn't going to be building Israel – at least not for a time
 - And He isn't creating rabbis or (God forbid) Pharisees or Sadducees
 - We are the church, the invited ones, and the One doing the inviting is the Father Himself by the revelation of His Spirit
 - And as we respond in faith, like Peter did, we become the called out ones
 - We are called out of the world to be a child of God
 - We are called out of darkness and into light, out of condemnation and into

mercy and forgiveness

- As we follow in Peter's footsteps, we become another brick in the wall (with apologies to Pink Floyd), another living stone in the Church
- Jesus was telling Peter and the disciples that's what this whole thing was about... building a Church a body of people united by a shared faith
 - As Paul said:

Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

Eph. 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Eph. 4:6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

- Church is about Jesus as our God and Savior...and we can't ever forget that
 - If you ever find yourself doing "church" in some sense and you realize that it's been a while since you talked about Jesus, stop
 - Our focus as a church can never become programs, buildings, money, growth, image, etc.
 - And here's something that may surprise you...neither can it become about prayer, worship, study or fellowship
- Because those things are merely the means to a greater end...and the end is Jesus Christ
 - Every time we have conversations with an unbeliever about "church" our emphasis needs to be on Jesus and the salvation He offers
 - And every time someone enters this place, the sense they should get is that we are living stones following the cornerstone
- If possible, we want to always and forever live in the moment Peter established by example
 - We are forever declaring by our words and actions that Jesus is THE Christ, THE Son of the THE God, THE Living One
 - That there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)
- Lesson #1 is that Jesus is God and we can't ever allow our life as a body in His name to set that focus aside for the sake of lesser priorities
 - Next week, we look at Lesson #2 in Jesus' second comment to Peter

- Last week we ended in the middle of an important moment for the Apostle Peter
 - Peter made his personal, public confession of Christ and as he did, he set the example for all who followed in the Church
 - Moreover, as a result of his boldness in that moment, the Lord confirms Peter as the early leader in the church
 - He grants Peter a unique responsibility, a role that is different than many assert yet still significant
 - We need to return to this moment today, but before we do I thought it was important to address one of Peter's most important roles
 - As we all know, Peter guards the pearly gates of Heaven...or so all the jokes would tell us, right?
 - Like the story of the day (in the future) when Bill Gates dies and meets Peter at the pearly gates

Saint Peter takes Bill to see his new house. It's a small wooden cottage with a black & white tv, two bathrooms, and a straw bed. Right next to him was a huge castle made of silver and gold.

"Hey how come that guy gets a castle and I'm stuck with this cottage?!" Bill Gates asked. Peter replies, "That castle belongs to the builder of the Titanic." "What? How does the man responsible for the greatest maritime disaster in history get a better house than me?" asked Bill Gates. "Because the Titanic only crashed once," Peter answered.

- Now that we have that out of our system, let's return to the story that truly matters...

Matt. 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matt. 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

- Peter responded to Jesus' question stating emphatically that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and Jesus responds with three important statements
 - First, in v.17 Jesus tells Peter that what he knew about Jesus did not come to Peter by way of human agency
 - Jesus says flesh and blood didn't reveal the truth about Jesus to Peter
 - Jesus says "flesh and blood" not "people" to emphasize that not even Peter's own flesh and blood deserved credit

- No one taught Peter to know that Jesus was Lord, but neither did Peter's own flesh and blood figure it out
- Jesus said the Father in Heaven revealed that spiritual truth to him
 - If Peter grasped the truth about Jesus, it would be because the Father gave Peter that understanding
 - And as I said last week, that's the way faith comes to every human being
 - Peter isn't being singled out because he was unique...on the contrary, Jesus calls Peter a model for the rest of us
- In v.18 Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter and says He will build His church upon "this" rock
 - And the gates of hell will not prevail against it
 - In this moment, Simon became forever known as Peter, because up to this point, his given name had been Simon, son of Jonah
 - His new name, Peter, means rock in Greek, and the term can be used for a rock of any size, from pebble to boulder
- Then Jesus makes a play on the word rock, saying upon "this" rock He will build His church
 - Jesus is making a comparison between His Church and Peter, but the question is what connection was Jesus making?
 - The answer you get depends upon whom you ask
 - If you ask the Catholic religion, they say Jesus meant Peter personally
 - They believe Peter himself was the "rock" upon which the Church was built because Jesus said on this rock He builds the Church
 - From this interpretation, Catholics assert that Peter was the first pope
 - But the text itself contradicts that conclusion in two ways
 - First, Jesus said He builds His Church on "this" rock; He didn't say I build my church upon you, Peter
 - Secondly, the word Matthew uses for Peter's name is *petros*, which a masculine Greek word meaning stone or rock
 - But the Greek word for the rock that establishes the Church is *petras*, a feminine word meaning a massive stone like a cliff
 - So the Greek grammar doesn't support the conclusion that the Church rests upon Peter
- So what is the rock upon which Jesus builds His Church? It must be something connected to Peter and to the events of that moment
 - And it is...Jesus was speaking about the larger process taking place in that moment
 - It was Peter's confession, yes, but it's much more
 - Peter's confession didn't start the process...the Father started it by revealing truth to Peter

- Followed by Jesus' invitation to Peter to speak what he believed
- And it finally ended with Peter's public confession
- Peter's response was just the last link in that chain
 - And that's why Jesus used the Greek word *petras*, referring to a cliff or mountain, to describe the foundation of the Church
 - And as Peter confessed he became the first stone (rock) in a massive mountain of people Jesus intended to build
 - Jesus would build His church one disciple at time, and each of them would enter in the same way Peter demonstrated
- This was an important lesson for these early leaders of the Church
 - Because in their minds, there had only ever been one way a person could be part of the family of God: you had to be Jewish
 - And to be part of the Jewish nation, you had to be born physically as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - While a Gentile could convert to the Jewish religion by pledging a commitment to Yahweh, they were not becoming Jewish
 - They were considered a proselyte, a God-fearing Gentile, not a Jew
- It's true that the Jewish people occupy a special place in God's plan, but at the same time, being born a Jew has never saved anyone
 - Eternal life only comes by faith in the promises of God, and in the Jewish nation some Jews had saving faith while many did not
 - Nevertheless, Jews in Jesus' day were taught by Pharisees that simply being born Jew was enough to please God
 - And conversely, Pharisees said if someone wasn't born Jewish, God didn't love the person and they didn't matter to God
- That bias wasn't compatible with Jesus' plan for His Church, so Jesus is showing His disciples that physical identity would not matter in the Church
 - The Church would be built upon faith alone, a faith brought by the Father and confessed by those who receive it
 - Which means anyone from any background may become a part of the Church
 - In fact, the Father in Heaven invites people from every tribe and nation and tongue to enter the church just as Scripture foretells
 - That's why Jesus gives the institution a new name, church, which in Greek is *ekklesia*, meaning the invited or called-out ones
 - Jesus was establishing something new, something that had never existed before on earth
 - He was establishing an institution of people invited by the Father to enter and be called-out of the world, not just Israel
 - The Church would be separate from the world just as Israel was also to be separate from other nations

- We are separated by our confession of Christ, meaning what we believe and speak about Jesus separates us from the world
- And Jesus tells us the gates of Hell will not prevail or hold power over those who share in this confession, over those in the church
 - Some interpret Jesus' statement to mean the Church institution will not be defeated by Satan, and certainly that is true as well
- But Jesus isn't talking about the institution...He's talking about the people in the institution
 - When we say "the Church" in any context, are we talking about an institution or are we talking about people?
 - And Hell will not prevail against the Church, meaning it will have no eternal power over those who confess Jesus as Christ
 - To summarize it simply, Jesus will build a body of people through faith alone in Christ alone, and they will receive eternal life
- That's why Jesus changed Peter's name...because Jesus was emphasizing that by his confession Peter obtained a new identity
 - No longer was Peter's identity before God based on his physical birth into a Jewish family
 - Instead, Peter's identity would be found in a new birth through a confession of Christ
 - No longer was Peter to be known by his Jewish name but by a name given to him by Jesus
 - Of course, Peter was no less Jewish, but Jesus' point is that Jewishness would no longer be a meaningful distinction in this new institution

Gal. 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal. 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Peter's new birth brought a new identity and a new eternal future
- His future shifted from Hell to the Kingdom and there's nothing the devil or Hell itself could do about it
- So Peter's example of joining the church through a confession of faith becomes an example or model for how the Church itself would be built
 - But Jesus goes a step further in Peter's case...Jesus assigns Peter the role of leading the transition from Jew to Gentile
 - Jesus assigns Peter the responsibility of moving the Gospel from the Jewish people outwardly to the rest of the world
- In v.19 Jesus makes His third statement to Peter saying Peter will have the "keys to the

kingdom”

- Moreover, Jesus says what Peter binds and looses on earth will be bound and loosed in Heaven
 - These are remarkable words, and Protestant Christians have struggled to make sense of them
 - Some say this is a reference to Peter’s confession, but Jesus’ mention of binding and loosing go beyond a confession of faith
- I think our struggle comes from our desire to stand opposed to the Catholic view of Peter as the first pope
 - And while Peter wasn’t a pope, nevertheless he was given a very important leadership position as Jesus’ words clearly indicate
 - And we can’t ignore that truth simply because we don’t want to lend support to a wrong interpretation
 - Jesus doesn’t explain the meaning of His words here, but we do have other Scripture to give us the answer, specifically in Acts
- In the book of Acts, the story of Peter centers on how Peter turns these three keys to unlock (or loose) the Gospel
 - On three separate occasions, Peter was personally involved in the outward expansion of the Gospel in its earliest days
 - The first of these moments happened at Pentecost, when 3,000 Jewish men came to faith in the Gospel at the preaching of Peter
- This was the first example of mass evangelism following Jesus’ departure and it was connected to Peter’s preaching
 - And it was also the first time that the Holy Spirit indwelt believers, which Paul tells us is the definition of the Church itself
 - All those indwelt by the Holy Spirit are part of the Church, and all believers receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith
 - But there were a few notable exceptions to this pattern in the early church, where the arrival of the Spirit was delayed
 - And those exceptions were connected to Peter’s role and to Jesus’ words here in Matthew
- For example, at Pentecost Peter preached, men believed in the name of Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit came
 - From that moment, the Jewish people began to respond to the Gospel in large number
 - Soon the church was growing quickly among the Jews in Jerusalem and beyond
 - What Peter let loose at Pentecost among the Jewish people, Heaven let loose all over Judea
 - It was as if Peter had turned a key by his preaching at Pentecost, unlocking a door to the kingdom among the Jews

- The moment of Pentecost was the first of Peter's three keys to the Kingdom, the moment when the Jewish people began to respond to the Gospel
 - And the Lord used Peter to make that happen *not* because Peter was necessary to God but because the Lord elected to work through Peter
 - Jesus was using Peter to lead the outward movement of the early church
 - And the first key Peter turned was to invite the Jewish people to join the Church at Pentecost
 - The second and third keys worked in similar ways
 - The second key was turned in Acts 8 when Peter traveled into Samaria to confirm the evangelistic work of Philip
 - As Peter arrives in Samaria, he finds men and women who had come to faith on the basis of Philip's preaching
 - But these believers had not yet received the Holy Spirit
 - Why not? Because the Lord was waiting for Peter to preside over this next step of the outward movement of the Gospel
 - Until Peter turned that key on earth, the Lord hadn't confirmed their entry into the Church
 - We finally see that moment later in Acts 8

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,
Acts 8:15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

- Samaritans weren't Jews, but neither were they like other Gentiles...in Jewish thinking they existed between Jew and Gentile
- So the Lord made Samaritans the second stop along the Gospel's outward journey to the world
- So, just as for the Jews at Pentecost, Peter's presence was required before the Lord ushered Samaritans into the Church by the Holy Spirit
 - Peter turned a second key, and what Peter loosed through his personal ministry, Heaven loosed everywhere among Samaritans
 - Regardless of how much Jews hated Samaritans, nevertheless the apostles could not deny what was happening
 - The Lord had accepted Samaritans equally as members of the Church
 - Once again, the Lord confirmed that upon this rock, that is upon the example

modeled by Peter, His church would be built

- Finally, Peter is called to turn a third key to open the church to Gentiles everywhere – but if you remember the story in Acts, Peter was reluctant at first
 - Because of His Jewish upbringing, Peter initially didn't want to reach out to Gentiles with the Gospel
 - In Acts 10 the Lord had to “persuade” Peter to go to the Roman centurion, Cornelius, in a powerful dream
 - But we should ask why was it so important to God that Peter be the one to convert Cornelius? Why not send someone else?
 - Because Peter had been given the keys to the Kingdom for all peoples, for Jews, Samaritans *and* Gentiles
 - Heaven would let the Gospel loose when Peter opened the door by His preaching, as God appointed
 - So it fell to Peter to turn that key by preaching to the first Gentile, converting him and his family
 - And as a result they received the Holy Spirit

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

Acts 10:45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Acts 10:46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

Acts 10:47 “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

- So Peter turned his third key and let the Gospel loose among the Gentiles
- And Heaven responded by sending the Gospel to all nations, to the ends of the earth
- And after soon after this moment, Peter disappears from the pages of the Acts, because his mission had been completed
 - He turned three keys, and each time he introduced a new group of people to the Kingdom of God
 - And with each turn, Heaven responded by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon a new group of humanity, leading to a flood of new believers
- The delayed arrival of the Spirit was a testimony to the apostles and to all the Church that Jesus was at work building His Church as promised
 - He was building upon the rock of Peter's example, through faith and confession one person at a time
 - And He was doing it among all people, not just the Jewish people
- As I opened our teaching last week, I mentioned that to prepare these men for ministry,

Jesus needed to teach them two basic lessons

- First, they needed to understand that Jesus was God, the Messiah
 - Jesus' identity is central to our salvation and to the message of the Church
 - Don't settle for those who agree Jesus was a good Man or a good Teacher or even a Prophet or anything less than what Jesus claimed to be
 - The only Son of God, God Himself in the form of Man, the only name under heaven by which we may be saved
 - Everything starts there or we have nothing at all
- But secondly, Jesus needed His disciples to understand that the mission of the church is fundamentally about spreading that confession to others
 - The Church is not a secret society or a special club limited to certain worthy individuals
 - Neither is it an open community anyone may join simply by attending a meeting or associating with a crowd of people
 - It is an institution Jesus Himself builds through the testimony of those in the Church, starting with Peter's work to turn three keys
- And today the doors Peter opened remain open and we are called to invite people to enter with us by faith in Jesus Christ
 - That's our mission, and nothing is more important and nothing can take the place of that mission
 - We can never allow the enemy to entice us to follow after a different mission or to substitute other worthy goals for Jesus' goal
- Because the enemy will try to convince you that solving earthly needs is the mission of the church, but they are merely the means to an end
 - Feeding hungry people is commendable and it can be very helpful to the mission of the church...if it leads to opportunities to share the Gospel
 - Building houses for the homeless, offering shelter to the battered or abused, taking care of orphans, opposing immoral government policies...all of those things are worthwhile crusades...
 - If they lead to opportunities to save souls
- On the other hand, if those pursuits become our goals...then we have forgotten why Jesus called us
 - Because unsaved people with full bellies end up in the same place as hungry unbelievers
 - Unbelievers living in nice homes end up in the same place as unbelievers living on the streets
 - Unbelievers with foster parents and unbelievers with government aid and unbelievers living morally good lives...still end up in Hell
- The mission of the church is keeping people from the gates of Hell, and only entry into the Church stops the power of Hell

- And entry into the Church requires a confession of faith like Peter made
 - And we are the Lord's instrument to bring that confession to the world
 - And we do not have authority to change the message or decide for ourselves what the best way is to build the Church
 - Jesus will build His church, He says, and He does it only upon the model that Peter showed us
- And do you want evidence of how serious Jesus is about maintaining His authority and control over how His church reaches the world?
 - Take a glance at the very next verse in this passage

Matt. 16:20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

- The disciples had just heard Jesus confirm Peter's testimony that He was the Christ
 - If that group was at all in doubt about Jesus' identity before this moment, there were no doubts now
 - And then immediately after saying He would build His church on that confession, Jesus instructs them not to share the news
- We know the reason why Jesus is asking these men to stay silent: because the offer of the Kingdom was no longer available to Israel
 - There was no reason to broadcast the news of Jesus as Messiah, for that nation could no longer receive it in that day
- But now we have a second reason for Jesus' command...because Jesus was waiting for the arrival of the Church at Pentecost
 - Until Peter turned the keys of the Kingdom, Heaven was not going to loose the Gospel
 - And the Lord had established the way that would happen and the timing for that to happen
 - And the disciples were not free to re-imagine or reinvent that plan
 - Now we might assume that any time we share the Gospel and any method we might dream up is equally pleasing to Christ
 - And certainly Paul says elsewhere that any preaching of Christ is good even if our motives for doing it are wrong
 - But Paul's point is that Christ was being preached in both cases
 - So even though the preacher's motives were wrong, at least the Gospel was being preached and that's the mission of the church
 - What we're learning here today is that we must be aware of the opposite problem: having the *right* motives, but the *wrong* methods
 - In Jesus' day, it would have been wrong to share the news of Him to others in

the nation because Jesus determined that time was past

- And today we can find the wrong ways to serve Jesus in the church if we forget the true mission of the church
- As you work in the church or as you live as a witness for Christ, always ask yourself if what you are doing is contributing to the mission?
- Does it lead people to Christ in the way Jesus asked us to do?
 - Or does it merely bring someone to church? Or serve a physical need? Or make us feel better?
 - Other institutions are working to feed, clothe and care for people, and the church should do that too from time to time
 - But no one else has the power to save people from the gates of Hell, no one else has the Gospel...that's ours to share

- Last week our study ended in v.20 with Jesus commanding His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ
 - That surprising statement came on the heels of Peter's bold confession of faith in Jesus which serves as an example for the rest of the church
 - Which in turn led Jesus to declare that Peter would preside over the outward movement of the Gospel in the early church
 - It seemed like a breakthrough moment for the disciples and for Peter personally
 - So after that defining moment, naturally we expect Jesus to send these guys out to spread the news of Jesus as Messiah
 - But not so fast, because Jesus says they can't say anything about what they have learned – not yet anyway
 - Because had these men gone out right then, they would have been doing it wrong
 - Operating out of ignorance, they would have carried the wrong message to the wrong group at the wrong time
 - They would have declared to Israel that Jesus was their Messiah and that the kingdom had come to Israel
 - But that message had already gone out earlier, and it had been rejected by Israel's leaders
 - So the time for persuading Israel to receive Him had come and gone
 - As a result Jesus shifted His ministry to preparing His disciples to launch the Kingdom Program after His death and resurrection
 - And that a change in audience would also necessitate a change in the Kingdom message itself
 - Instead of "Repent, and receive your King," the Church was going to declare "repent, and receive salvation"
 - Furthermore, that message could only be received *after* Jesus' death and resurrection and the arrival of the Spirit at Pentecost
 - Calling upon the world to receive Jesus now was fruitless until the Holy Spirit turned the Kingdom keys through Peter
 - So had Jesus' disciples gone out now, they would have carried the wrong message to the wrong audience at the wrong time
 - So Jesus has to explain to these men why a delay was necessary, because He knew they didn't understand yet
 - In fact, they barely grasped the fact that Jesus was the Christ at this point, as our text today will reveal

Matt. 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Matt. 16:22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.”

Matt. 16:23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

- Matthew says that from this moment Jesus began explaining His coming suffering, death and resurrection
 - This is the first moment that Jesus reveals these details to these men
 - There have been a few earlier moments when Jesus alluded to His coming rejection and death
 - Most notably, when Jesus spoke of the sign of Jonah, and that the Messiah must spend three days in the heart of the earth
 - But this is the first time Jesus has spoken about these things plainly, and even then the disciples didn’t follow what Jesus was saying
 - Jesus simply began their education process here by introducing the plan using a four part outline
 - First, Jesus says the Messiah’s ministry will end in Jerusalem, which was probably the least surprising detail in the outline
 - Had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, then Jesus would have entered Jerusalem triumphantly so He could reign over His people
 - The disciples anticipated this, because the Old Testament says the Messiah will rule from the throne of David
 - And the Davidic throne exists in one place only, in Jerusalem
 - But since Israel rejected their King, Jesus’ reign over Israel is to be delayed for two millennia
 - Nevertheless the Messiah’s first earthly ministry would still end in Jerusalem, only in death rather than in reigning
 - Just as the King of Israel must reign from Jerusalem, so must the Passover Lamb be sacrificed in the city
- Which leads to the second step in this outline: Jesus says He will suffer many things at the hands of the leaders of Israel
 - In Mark’s account, Jesus specifically says He must be rejected by the leaders of the nation
 - The Pharisees denied Jesus’ claims in Chapter 12 in the hope they could persuade the crowds to reject Jesus as well
 - And many did reject Jesus, but enough remained committed to Jesus that He still posed a threat to the religious leaders
 - So they conspire with the Romans to bring Jesus under charges, leading Jesus to great suffering when He arrives in the city

- Which leads to the third step...Jesus says He must be killed
 - The Messiah's death was always a part of the Lord's plan, because without His substitutionary death there could be no forgiveness
 - So that had the Jewish nation even embraced Him as King, Jesus still would have died first
 - He would have gone to Jerusalem to set up His Kingdom
 - But even as He did, Jesus would still have told His followers that He would die first because death was unavoidable
- Finally, Jesus ends His outline with probably the most surprising statement of all: He would be resurrected after three days
 - His death wouldn't be the end of the story; instead it would be the beginning of the Kingdom Program
 - In fact, until the Messiah died and rose again, there was no Good News to declare
- Jesus' outline explains why there was no point in these men going out at this moment to preach about Jesus
 - Naturally, having overheard Jesus giving Peter the keys to the Kingdom, they assumed they knew where the plan was going
 - But in reality, there was a lot they didn't understand about that plan
 - They didn't understand the need for Jesus to die and rise again
 - They didn't understand the arrival of the Spirit or the 2,000+ years of waiting for Jesus' return
 - They weren't expecting the shift to a mostly Gentile Church or the coming persecution for believers
 - So they had some knowledge, yes, but they lacked a lot more
 - And we're all in the same situation to varying degrees
 - We all have some knowledge, things we've learned about Jesus and His plan
 - And some of us may know quite a bit, and perhaps others know a little less
 - But we all have a lot more we don't understand
 - Because knowing aspects of Jesus' plan and *understanding* His entire plan are two different things
 - Ask yourself, how well do you know and understand God's plan for the world? Have you got it all figured out?
 - No? Well, do you understand His plan for the Church? What about His plan for this body of believers?
 - Can you even say with certainty what His plan is for your life?
 - So if we're all in the dark to some degree about what Jesus is doing around us, how should we respond in service to Him?
 - Do we stand still in our ignorance? Well, no, because otherwise we could never

serve Him as He has called us to do

- Do we march ahead in our ignorance assuming that it will all just work out?
- No, because as we see here, Jesus would rather His disciples do nothing than do the wrong things at the wrong time
- So how then do finite, ignorant people serve an infinite, omniscient God? Easy...we just do what He tells us to do as the disciples did here
 - Walking the Christian life means staying focused on where Jesus is going, or as the Bible says it, abiding in Jesus
 - And to do that, we have to listen to Him regularly, daily
 - And if you're wondering how someone hears from Jesus, then that tells me you need to work on your listening skills
 - Because believers hear from Jesus all the time, in direct ways...not in an audible voice but yet unmistakably
 - If you set aside daily time for prayer, for study in the word, and for fellowship with fellow believers, you will hear from Jesus
 - But if you fall out of those routines, then you become like these men, armed with a little info but clueless of the big picture
 - And if you've never established those patterns in the first place, then you have probably been spinning your wheels
 - That's why Jesus gave His disciples this outline, because while their ignorance was understandable, it wasn't desirable
 - They couldn't possibly understand *everything* Jesus was saying on this day, but there were some details they had to know then
 - But if they didn't stay close to Him and listen to Him and follow Him, they would have done the job wrong
 - And that is our model too...learning continuously, following Jesus, never assuming we can walk our Christian life without abiding in Him
 - If we pursue life-long study of God's word, we greatly increase our opportunities to serve Jesus now and in the Kingdom
 - We show ourselves to be diligent workmen approved by God for how we handle the word of truth
 - And by what He reveals to us in His word, He qualifies us to serve Him in new and greater ways
 - But if we try to work without Him, to get ahead of Him, we're likely to say the wrong things to the wrong people at the wrong time
 - And as a result, we miss opportunities
 - And even worse, we may act contrary to the Lord's purposes, which the next passage demonstrates

Matt. 16:22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it,

Lord! This shall never happen to You.”

Matt. 16:23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

- Where angels fear to tread, Peter rushes in
 - It’s not hard to understand how the news of Jesus’ approaching death would have made no sense to these men
 - The thought that the Messiah could be killed probably sounded crazy to them
 - And how does a Kingdom or even a Church come to pass if the leader dies before it’s even established?
 - What all these guys were probably thinking, Peter alone decides to say out loud in v.22
 - And I think there is a connection between this moment and the earlier moment where Peter’s name is changed
 - Imagine how Peter must have felt when Jesus changed his name to rock and said on this rock I build my church?
 - And then Peter received the keys to the Kingdom
 - He must have felt quite privileged and special and important
 - It looks as if Peter let that go to his head, because now he thinks he can advise Jesus on the work
 - Matthew says that Peter first took Jesus aside, away from the group
 - And there’s one reason you take someone aside like that...to save him from embarrassment as you correct him privately
 - It’s like when your spouse says “honey can I see you in the kitchen”, after you say something dumb in front of the dinner guests
 - Then after pulling Jesus aside, Matthew says Peter rebuked Jesus
 - The word in Greek for rebuke could be translated censure or sternly warn
 - Peter says God forbid, Lord, this shall never happen
 - Peter wasn’t giving Jesus friendly advice here...he’s correcting Jesus in a stern fashion, reversing roles with Jesus
 - And Peter’s statement is actually quite humorous, in a way, because it’s self-contradictory and paradoxical
 - Peter moments earlier said Jesus is the Son of the living God, which was an acknowledgment of divine power and authority
 - And now a few seconds later, Peter is saying that this divine being got it wrong and God would forbid it from happening
 - As some have observed, Peter joined two thoughts that should never go together: “no” and “lord”

- Peter's making a mistake, and his mistake begins with ignorance over what it means to be the Son of God
- But there's more than ignorance at play here...and Jesus' response tells us that
 - First, in v.23 Jesus opens with a rebuke of His own, telling Peter to get behind Me
 - To get behind Jesus means to fall in line behind my authority
 - Jesus is saying you have assumed a role and place of authority when you should have been following Me
 - That comment tells us that at the core of Peter's mistake was pride, and Peter's body language reflected his pride at work
 - Peter pulled Jesus aside as if to suggest his new position means he had right to counsel Jesus
 - Secondly, he invokes the name of God to suggest he knew God's plan better than Jesus
 - And thirdly, Peter tried alter Jesus' plan, suggesting he was a better judge of what God should do than the Son of God
 - That's what pride looks like...it's foolish, it's presumptuous and it makes us look ridiculous to others
- Secondly, Jesus calls Peter "Satan" but Jesus wasn't trying to insult Peter or shock him...Jesus was speaking in a somewhat literal sense
 - As a man, Jesus didn't want to get on that cross, because he knew the pain it involved
 - So just like you or me, Jesus dreaded the thought of it, and any temptation to avoid the cross made obedience that much harder
 - Peter was tempting Jesus to consider a path other than the one the Father had appointed for Him, and that's the devil's work
 - So Peter was acting on behalf of Satan, which is to say that had Peter got his way he would have been furthering Satan's goals
 - Ironically, Satan himself was ignorant of God's plan at this point
 - We know this because Satan was the one trying to bring about Jesus' death and ultimately the one God uses to bring it about
 - Only after Jesus rose from the dead did Satan realize that Jesus' death was his own undoing
 - Nevertheless, Peter's desires were ultimately aligned with Satan, so as Jesus said in Matthew 12, He who is not with Me is against Me
- Finally, Jesus says Peter is not setting his mind on God's interests but man's
 - This is probably the most revealing thing Jesus says about Peter in this moment
 - Peter wasn't thinking about what God wanted, he was actually protecting his own interests; man's interests
 - Remember, Peter had just been named the chief apostle, the man who sets the example for the Church

- Moreover, Peter had been given the keys to the Kingdom
- And though I'm sure Peter didn't fully understand what that meant in that moment, it certainly sounded impressive to him
- So when Peter hears Jesus say the whole enterprise would come crashing down in Jerusalem, he immediately realizes what that means
 - I'm sure Peter also hated the thought of the man he loved being killed, but make no mistake, Jesus said Peter had set his mind on man's interests
 - So whatever concern Peter felt for Jesus, he was acting out of a selfish interest
 - Peter's ignorance allowed his pride to take control and he responded to protect his own interests
- But interestingly, Peter framed his concerns as if they were God's concerns ("God forbid it")
 - Peter didn't say I forbid this...he claimed God would not want this for Jesus
 - Peter was a "Ready, fire, aim" kinda guy, when he should have stayed quiet and sought to understand better what Jesus said
 - He should have remembered the Proverb

**Prov. 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,
But he who restrains his lips is wise.**

- Just as Peter's confession earlier was a model for the rest of the Church, so does Peter's mistake serve as an example for us
 - First, we need to come to grips with the reality that there is a God and we are not Him
 - He's not into power sharing arrangements
 - We're supposed to be behind Him, not in front of Him counseling Him
 - There are many ways to know if you are in "front" of Jesus, but here are a couple I see commonly
 - If you aren't in the habit of asking Jesus what to do before you do it, you are in front of Him in the sense of knowledge
 - Or maybe you ask Him to bless what you've done after you do it
 - Or maybe you just never think to ask Him about anything at all
 - You believe you have the plan that Jesus needs, not the other way around
 - Or secondly, if you're the Christian who must always be the exception to the rules that everyone else follows
 - You're in front of Jesus in the sense of authority
 - Regular church life or rules don't apply to this person because they feel privileged like Peter

- Somewhere along the way, they came to believe they speak for Jesus and He NEEDS them in ministry
- This person may have that bumper sticker, “Jesus loves you, but I’m His favorite”
- In all its forms, there is only one cure for this disease: that believer needs a dose of humility, and humility never comes easily
 - Humility comes from the Lord’s rebuke usually delivered by trial, failure, and correction, and obtaining it involves discomfort
 - You can bet Peter felt sheepish when Jesus rebuked him and I’m sure it hurt his feelings, but Peter left Jesus no other choice
 - And if we get in front of Jesus instead of behind Him, expect a rebuke from Jesus through friends, family or the church leaders
 - Expect His correction, and welcome it when it comes, because it will lead you to a better place
- Secondly, Peter’s experience teaches us that when we act or speak contrary to God’s word, even when we do so out of ignorance, we further the enemy’s work
 - We become like Satan in the way Peter did, doing or saying what Satan prefers rather than what God desires
 - And the most dangerous thing about ignorance is that we don’t know what we don’t know
 - So that as biblical illiteracy grows in the Church, so does carnality and selfishness done in the name of God
 - Believers don’t even realize what God’s interests are, so they further Satan’s desires while calling it God’s desires
 - And that’s how we end up with many Christians promoting wrong, selfish ideas by calling them God’s ideas
 - This is where busy-bodyness and legalism gets started and all manner of false teaching takes hold
 - It’s where you get people saying things like God helps those who help themselves (which is the opposite of the Bible)
 - Or to justify some sinful choice they want to make, they defend it by saying God wants me to be happy
 - They are furthering the work of Satan in their own lives and in the lives they influence in the church
 - You can see clearly every time a world disaster happens, and the world says if there is a loving God, why does He let bad things happen?
 - And then Christians ignorant of God’s word feel the need to defend God’s honor by claiming God isn’t responsible for the disaster
 - They tell the world that the devil is responsible for disasters, not God
 - Did you know that when you make apologies for God, you are actually doing the work of the devil?

- You have diminished God and contradicted His own word
- You are lessening God's sovereignty by suggesting that God competes with Satan for control of the world
- You're making the devil look stronger than he is, which is certainly Satan's goal
- Meanwhile, the Bible tells us plainly who is responsible for everything that happens on earth, whether good or bad

Is. 45:5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other;
Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun
That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,
Causing well-being and creating calamity;
I am the LORD who does all these.

- We may not understand everything that happens or why it happens
 - But that doesn't mean we get to substitute our understanding for God's or change the Bible to suit our preferences
 - We don't get to say "no" and "Lord" in the same sentence
- Remember when the righteous man Job suffered one calamity after another at the hands of Satan?
 - The book tells us those terrible things came upon Job because God encouraged Satan to test His servant
 - And we're also told that Job was the most righteous man on earth at the time, so Job was understandably confused by it all
- Yet what does Job say in response to God? He laments his situation, he mourns for his losses, he cries out to God in distress
 - He questions God to explain why and he challenges God to justify it
 - But one thing Job never did was curse God or challenge God's righteousness in His actions
 - Instead, Job says

Job 13:15 "Though He slay me,
I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

- Arguing with God is an acceptable response when you're confused or hurt by God's plan

- You can argue your ways before God and you can cry out to God for Him to explain His ways to you
- But no matter what happens, even if God should choose to take someone's life, you continue to trust in His plan
- Because anything less is doing the devil's work for him
- Finally, we need to set our minds on God's interests rather than our own, and this is a process of denying our flesh and learning God's priorities
 - Peter couldn't see what God was doing because he was only interested in what he wanted
 - And like Peter, our selfish desires and personal goals are ever before us, because that's part of the human experience
 - We spend most of our time thinking only of ourselves, and that's the nature of pride and selfishness
 - Meanwhile, God's interests – His goals and priorities – are clearly expressed in the Bible
 - So our challenge is to transform our thinking through the study of God's word
 - Simply put, if you want to focus on God's priorities rather than your own, you have to know where God is going
 - Death is perhaps the best example of this shift, because everyone worries about dying
 - Everyone is trying desperately to avoid dying and when death comes near to us, we struggle to accept it
 - And that's natural in a way...but when we live in fear of death, we're setting our minds on man's interests, not God's
 - The Bible says that fear of death is a tool the enemy uses to enslave people to do his desires instead of God's
 - And that's why Jesus took away the power of death so that we would no longer fear it and it could no longer control us

Heb. 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,
Heb. 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Peter's disobedience was driven by a fear of death – and not just Jesus' death but the death of Peter's dream, his personal aspirations
 - Next week we move through the rest of this chapter and into the next, and as we do we will see how Jesus tells Peter to alter his thinking
 - But even now glance ahead to the next verse to see where Jesus is going

- In v.24 Jesus tells Peter that if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, you have to deny yourself the things you want in life
- You have to be prepared to accept different goals, you have to set your mind on God's interests, not your own
- Why? Because we are either serving Christ or we are serving ourselves, and serving our interests means serving Satan's desires
 - You could sum up the third point with my favorite phrase: Living with eyes for eternity
 - Learn to see things from God's point of view, and you will find it much easier to set your mind on His interests
- So Jesus' response to Peter was get back in line, stop doing the devil's job for him, and starting setting your mind on what God wants
 - And that's sound advice for all us...
 - Let's get back behind Jesus, embracing our role as disciple with all humility, accepting His correction and learning from it
 - Let's stop doing the devil's agenda out of ignorance, and instead let's learn to be patient and listen and learn
 - And as we grow in the knowledge of Christ, then let's be motivated by God's eternal interests, not our worldly concerns

- What are God's interests?
 - Last week Jesus scolded Peter for not setting his mind on God's interests
 - Jesus disclosed that He must suffer and die, but Peter vehemently objected to that possibility
 - He probably assumed his objection to the plan would please and even comfort Jesus
 - So I'm sure Peter was surprised when Jesus rebuked him, calling Peter's idea the devil's work, not God's desire
 - Peter probably wondered how could a desire to protect the Messiah from suffering and death *not* be aligned with God?
 - And the answer of course is that God intended to do great good through Jesus' death
 - God was working to free humanity from sin and condemnation
 - So as horrible as Jesus' dying would be, it was the greatest good the world has ever known
 - The Father's plan to put His Son on the cross reminds us that God is in the business of turning bad circumstances to good
 - God's ways are not man's ways, but what *are* God's ways? Can we learn how to avoid Peter's mistake?
 - Can we understand God's interests well enough to avoid doing the devil's work? Jesus shows us how:

Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Matt. 16:25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Matt. 16:26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Matt. 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

- Before we look at Jesus' instructions, we need to get a better appreciation for the misconception that led to this moment
 - The fundamental mistake Peter made was in assuming that God's highest priority was preserving earthly life
 - That's why Peter said "God forbid" that Jesus should die
 - He couldn't believe God would desire that outcome for anyone, much less for His Son the Messiah
 - But Peter was thinking about death from a human perspective
 - Human beings are preoccupied with our own death

- Though the exact moment of our death is a complete mystery, we all know it's coming...no one escapes it
- So because we live in the shadow of inevitable death, saving our earthly life dominates our thinking
- And yet ironically, the world's solution to death is largely to ignore it altogether
 - Many people live their lives pretending it won't happen, at least until it's impossible to ignore and they're forced to confront it
 - And if you bring up the topic of death, the world tries to end the conversation, just as Peter tried to stop Jesus from discussing it
- In fact, when you think about it, it's amazing that the world isn't *more* preoccupied with death
 - Given the short time we spend on earth, you would expect the world to spend every day consumed with finding a solution
 - And some in the world do search for an answer, and their search takes them in many different directions
 - Some find a solution in religion, some seek medical miracles, some settle for better cosmetics
 - But in general, most give it little thought at all, because we can't bear the thought of it and ignorance is bliss
- Unbelievers live in fear of death, and their fear drives them to push death out of their minds, but that's not the way God thinks about death
 - When the first man, Adam, sinned, he received a death sentence
 - In Chapter 2 God warned Adam that in the day he ate of the fruit, he would die, meaning his spirit would fall under condemnation
 - So the very instant Adam ate the fruit, he came under a death sentence and his spirit was corrupted
 - But Adam's physical body lived on...at least for the moment
 - So when God confronted Man and Woman in the Garden, He added additional penalties, including physical death

Gen. 3:19 By the sweat of your face

**You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return.”**

- God declared that Adam's body came from dust and now as a result of his sin, Adam's body would return to dust one day
 - Adam's spiritual death would now be accompanied by his physical death

- But this wasn't a punitive measure...the Lord was also taking a step toward solving the problem Adam created
- Because when it comes to death, God's ways are not man's ways
- From God's point of view, the death of our sinful body has two primary positive effects
 - First, the death of the physical body puts a time limit on mankind's sinful existence on earth
 - All humanity lives "on the clock" knowing life is finite
 - And the Lord has placed in everyone a conscious awareness that judgment awaits
 - So the deadline imposed by the death of our bodies forces us to consider the problem of death and to seek for a solution
 - We have a powerful incentive to learn the truth about death and God and the afterlife
 - And in that search perhaps we might find Him

**Acts 17:25 ... He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;
 Acts 17:26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,
 Acts 17:27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;**

- The Lord gave everyone life and determined our appointed times (meaning set a limit to their days) that we might seek God
- So when it comes to death for the unbeliever, God's interests are not man's interests
 - God wants the death of our body to drive us toward Him
 - Meanwhile, the world is trying to ignore the very thing that God is using to get their attention
 - In the example of death, it's easy to see how sin drives humanity away from God even as God makes Himself known
- But when a person comes to faith in Jesus and is born again, our understanding of life and death changes dramatically
 - No longer are we afraid of death, because the penalty for our sin has been removed by Jesus
 - So now we know that even as we experience physical death, we won't experience spiritual death
 - So physical death isn't a problem for us...it's a solution because it puts an end to the sinful body
 - And that's the second reason the Lord introduced physical death after the fall – He was making a way for something better

- The death of our physical body sets us free from this container of sin, a vessel that is irretrievably corrupt and unrepairable
- We can all see the negative effects our body has on our walk with Jesus, and it troubles us everyday
- Paul describes the daily fight we have against our bodies in Romans 7

Rom. 7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

Rom. 7:23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

Rom. 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Rom. 7:25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!...

- Our body wages war against our spirit, our inner person, and that war is tiring and depressing and we yearn to be free of it
- And when we experience the physical death of our body, we will be set free from that burden once and for all
- Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!
- In the meantime, knowing we will die one day and escape this body and this world, Paul says physical death encourages us to abide in Jesus

2Cor. 1:9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

2Cor. 1:10 who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,

- We're dying a little bit everyday...we're running out the clock of our lives, and yet we have no fear of that moment
 - So neither should we trust in our own strength or ability nor anything else in this world
 - Trusting in something in this world is ridiculous when we know it's not lasting
- Watching our life fading should encourage us to rely more on Jesus each day
 - Because as Paul says we know He raises people from the dead
 - In other words, we place our certainty and trust in what is waiting for us after death, not what we leave behind in death
- What would make you happier: keeping your current worn out car forever or getting a brand new one?
 - Would you prefer to have a brand new perfect house or a fixer-upper?

- Believer, your body is a worn out junker and a serious fixer-upper
- And Jesus is planning to give you a brand new one in a day to come
- And to make way for that new one, He set a date that your old one gets turned in
- Jesus will raise you from the dead, which means your sinful body will be replaced by an undying glorified one
 - So in the meantime, don't show more interest in the junker body than in the new glorified body Christ has prepared
 - Place your hope in the next life, look forward to your next body, the next home, the next world...not what you have here
 - Stop trying to live as if your life here is the highest priority – and God's greatest concern
 - Living here forever wouldn't be a blessing...it would be a curse...it's a life sentence on death row
- That's God's perspective on life and death, and it's the perspective the believer must have to serve Jesus well
 - But it wasn't the perspective Peter brought to that moment, and it's often a perspective we struggle to maintain too
 - And that's what Jesus was talking about in our passage
 - In v.24 Jesus says that anyone who wishes to come after Jesus must deny himself and take up his cross
 - To go after Jesus means to be His disciple, walking in His ways, representing Him, serving Him, making your life a living sacrifice
 - He's not talking about how to be saved...that was covered earlier in the moment of Peter's confession
 - Jesus is addressing the attitude of a disciple, of a believer who serves Jesus well
 - Now that we have been saved, our service to Jesus requires personal sacrifice but not everyone is willing to give Jesus that service
 - Not everyone who comes to faith in Jesus serves Him equally well – or even at all
 - The fact that so much of the New Testament exhorts us to make sacrifices for JESUS tells us not everyone does it
 - It's also why the Lord holds out the prospect of eternal reward for those who do serve Him...because He wants to motivate us
 - And key to finding that motivation to serve Christ is thinking about life and death the way God does, Jesus says
 - And key is learning to deny ourselves, which means fighting against the desires of our sinful flesh
 - Because our body may be dying, but it's not powerless
- Medicine and science won't tell you this, but the Bible says our flesh is a powerful force with a will of its own, independent of our mind

- Our physical body opposes God and our spirit at all times, and you can see this truth at work in your life everyday
 - Do you have a persistent sin in your life that you know is wrong and you want to stop...and yet it's still there?
 - You just keep doing it even though you tell yourself you shouldn't do it
 - So ask yourself why do you continue to do it? Why isn't your intellectual decision to stop reason enough to cease from sinning?
 - Because your flesh doesn't agree with that decision, because it's programmed from birth to oppose God at every turn
- It's like we have two dogs fighting for control inside us
 - One dog is the new spirit we received when we were born again by our faith in Jesus Christ
 - According to Paul in Romans 6, our new spirit is perfect in its desires, and it always wants to please God by obeying Him
 - Paul says in Romans 7 that our spirit agrees with the Law of God, and left to itself, it would never lead us to sin
- But we carry our new spirit in a body of sinful flesh, the same flesh we inherited from Adam
 - Our flesh is always working to pull us off track even as our spirit is encouraging us to obey
 - They are literally at war with one another, but which one is truly "us"?
- Our new spirit and old flesh are both "us", at least for now, and they are like two dogs fighting for control inside us
 - So which dog is going to win that battle? As the old saying goes, the one you feed gets stronger and the one you starve gets weaker
 - And in v.24 Jesus is saying you need to deny that devil dog inside you what it wants
 - Deny it by being aware of its desires, putting up barriers so it can't get what it wants, while praying to escape temptation
 - Jesu says take up your cross, which is a clear reference to crucifixion
 - In the Roman method of execution, the condemned was forced to carry the horizontal beam of his own cross
 - By analogy, Jesus asks we crucify our flesh, putting it to death, so to speak
 - His point is if we are going to serve Jesus well, we must participate *willingly* in the process of our own sanctification
 - Sanctification is a process of yielding to the Spirit while denying our flesh
 - The Lord does the real work of our sanctification, convicting us of sin and leading us into obedience by the power of His Spirit
 - And our role as disciples is to work with the Spirit by participating in the execution of our flesh's desires

- And the Lord will not force a disciple to engage in that process...we get to decide how much we yield to the Spirit
 - So we all have a choice to make in this regard...because we're all called to serve Jesus with our lives
 - Every minute of every day is a service to Jesus, whatever walk of life we pursue
 - And the question is whether we're "all in" with Jesus?
- Jesus says our choice is simple: we can choose to save our earthly life or lose it
 - To save our life means to seek the life that our flesh desires, to protect its interests at every turn
 - And what kind of life does our flesh want? It wants what the world offers... wealth, fame, power, luxury, sex, entertainment
 - "Saving our life" means doing what we want here and now instead of what God is asking us to do in serving Jesus
 - But Jesus says this choice comes at a cost, because as a Christian, you can't have it all
 - Or in the words of that great philosopher, Bob Dylan, "you're gonna have to serve somebody"
 - There's always a cost for saving your earthly life, for pursuing your flesh's desires rather than Jesus' desires
 - Jesus says the cost is that you will lose your life
 - But the Bible talks about two lives for a Christian
 - There is the life we lead here now and there is the life we will lead in the Kingdom, the life that begins after our resurrection
 - This life is temporary, the next is eternal
 - In this life we encounter testing and trial, in the next life we receive reward
 - Jesus says if we live this life trying to make the most of it (trying to "save" it), then we put at risk things of the eternal life
 - And which of these two lives should be more important to us?
 - In v.26 Jesus asks what profit is it for us to gain the whole world if it results in us losing our soul?
 - And after chasing the whole world and gaining it, what good does it do when your soul is at risk?
- Jesus isn't saying that our salvation is on the line; we know that because our soul is not gained or lost on the basis of how we live our life
 - Just as no disciples of Jesus ever obtains the "whole world" likewise, no disciple ever lost his soul because he pursued the world
 - Jesus is using hyperbole, speaking in exaggerated terms to make a point
 - The point is every time we prioritize this life over the next life, there will be an opportunity cost

- And we're making a terrible bargain, trading eternal riches for temporal gains
- In fact, it works both ways: the more you seek for the one life, the less you will have of the other
 - That is, the more you pursue the flesh's desires in this life, the less you serve Jesus and therefore the less you receive later
 - And the more you prioritize serving Jesus now, the more sacrifices you make now but the more the Lord rewards you in the Kingdom
- And in v.27 Jesus reminds us that a moment is coming when repayment comes for everyone
 - At His Second Coming to establish the Kingdom Jesus repays all humanity according to deeds
 - For the unbelievers, their deeds are evil, and since they lack the forgiveness of Christ's atoning work, they receive judgment
 - For the believer there is also a judgment of deeds, but our judgment is solely for the purpose of assigning reward
 - And we too will be repaid for our deeds done in the body
 - In other words, gaining the whole world is only attractive until we remember the reality of death again
 - Death puts an end to everything we accomplish here, including to all that we accumulate
 - So no matter how much you accumulate, your life is not the sum of your possessions
 - And when you leave it all behind anyway, what was the point? Was owning it for a few decades really that important?
 - Our coming judgement is our incentive to crucify the flesh, to make the hard choices
 - To favor the right dog inside us, to follow Him as His disciple
 - If you are willing to lose this life, to crucify your flesh's desires, you will gain far more in Heaven than you stand to lose here
- As Jim Elliot observed, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose
 - Peter tried to hold onto something he could not keep
 - He tried to forbid Jesus from dying to protect something he valued in this life, something his flesh wanted
 - And in the process Peter was placing something eternal at risk, something the Father wanted
 - Jesus was meant to die on a cross, and so was Peter one day
 - And everything that happened in Peter's life between those two moments belonged to Jesus
 - And if Peter served Jesus well during that time, Peter would see a life in the Kingdom well-rewarded

- If he got absorbed in saving this life, he would miss what Jesus had for him
- Peter was fighting to preserve the wrong life, and we do the same thing too whenever we let our flesh's desire decide our path
 - Let the Spirit guide you, listen to His counsel through study of the word, and prioritize eternal outcomes over earthly
 - Live with eyes for eternity, and anticipate your death with hope and joy knowing it's the moment of your reward



Matthew - Lesson 17A

Chapters 16:28, 17:1-6

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- Jesus' disciples have received a whirlwind introduction to the Kingdom Program
 - After Jesus withdrew the Kingdom from that generation of Israel, He began preparing His apostles to lead in His place
 - Jesus initiated a series of lessons and experiences that must have left His disciples' heads swimming
 - In fact, it's remarkable to look back and see how much the Lord has accomplished in such a short time
 - The most challenging thing Jesus taught came at the end of Chapter 16
 - Jesus revealed that He wasn't establishing the literal Kingdom on earth, at least not yet
 - Instead, something new and different would come, something Jesus called "the Church"
 - Jesus said He would establish His Church not based on tribal identity but upon faith in Him alone as revealed by the Father
 - Moreover, Jesus designated Peter to usher this new entity into existence and move it outward to reach all nations
 - And once the Church was planted, Jesus promised that not even the powers of Hell could stand against it
 - That's not what these Jewish men were expecting from their Messiah
- And then Jesus told them something that was simply too much to bear
 - He said that in order to bring the Church into existence, Jesus must suffer and die
 - Peter objected forcing Jesus to rebuke Him
 - And Jesus exhorted all the disciples to prioritize the Kingdom life over this life
 - But that moment illustrated the problem facing these men
 - They couldn't appreciate how to serve Jesus because they didn't understand Jesus' plan
 - Hearing Jesus say He will soon die in Jerusalem rattled them, and they couldn't see past that concern
 - They knew that if their rabbi is killed, they would likely be threatened as well
 - And more importantly, if Jesus dies, would they ever see the promised Kingdom? Would they lose their chance to enter it?
- So in the next section Jesus does something to address those concerns

Matt. 16:28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

- As we look at Jesus' statement, we start by taking note of Jesus' open phrase..."Truly I say to you"
 - This phrase means "believe what I tell you", but that's not why Jesus spoke it
 - Obviously, Jesus always expected His disciples to believe what He told them

- That phrase was Jesus' way of introducing a new topic, a new thought
- Back in v.27 Jesus had been speaking about His coming in His glory to set up the Kingdom
 - And He says when He comes, He will repay all humanity for their deeds
 - The point is to encourage these men to prioritize the next life over this one and to be ready for that judgment
- But even more importantly, Jesus is reassuring these men that His death is part of the plan of the Kingdom, not a threat to that plan
 - They need not fear the reality that Jesus would die, but they did need to understand why it happens
 - So to encourage them further, Jesus gives them a second promise, a promise that they will see fulfilled in their day
- Jesus says (in my own words), "...speaking of Me coming into My glory, some of you will not taste death before witnessing the Son of Man in His kingdom."
 - My English translation says coming in His "kingdom" but the original Greek language is less specific
 - It could be translated coming in His "reign" or "royal power"
 - Obviously, the physical Kingdom didn't appear in their lifetimes (nor even in ours)
 - So we know Jesus wasn't speaking of the literal place, and therefore the better translation is coming in His "royal power"
 - That's why Jesus used the phrase "taste death" in v.28...He was responding to their concerns over Jesus' prediction of His own death
 - Jesus is reassuring His disciples that the prophecies of His coming death will not stop the Kingdom from arriving
 - In fact, they will see Jesus reigning with power in their day
 - But Jesus couldn't promise that the Kingdom itself was coming soon
 - Yet He could reassure them that His victory and His reign was right around the corner
 - So He must show them that His rule takes place from another realm at least for a time before it appears in this realm on earth
- That's the single most important detail of the Kingdom Program Jesus needs His disciples to understand
 - And it's going to take something special to make that clear
 - So Jesus allows three of His disciples the privilege of witnessing Him in glory and power

Matt. 17:1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Matt. 17:2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

Matt. 17:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

- Notice that Matthew specifically mentions that this scene took place six days after the events at the end of Chapter 16
 - The Gospel writers rarely give exact time references like this, so when they do, it means the timing is important for our understanding
 - Matthew wants us to understand that this moment is connected to the earlier one
 - In fact, Luke introduces this moment saying “and it came to pass...”
 - In other words, this is the moment Jesus fulfilled His promise to show them His power and glory
 - Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the top of a high mountain alone
 - We don’t know the exact mountain and many locations have been proposed
 - We know they were in Caesarea Philippi a week earlier
 - And nearby is the highest mountain in the Middle East, Mt. Hermon
 - But a week is a long time, so they could have traveled to almost anywhere in the Galilee, and the exact place isn’t important
 - So Peter, James and John accompany Jesus on this high mountain and then at some point, Jesus enters into a glorified state
 - The other Gospels say the three disciples were sleeping at the time and awoke to see this scene
 - And Matthew says they saw Jesus transfigured into glory
 - The word for transfigured is *metamorphoo* similar to metamorphosis, and it means Jesus completely changed before their sight
 - He wasn’t merely the same person glowing or floating...Jesus looked very different in all respects
- Matthew gives us only a brief description of what Jesus looked like in that moment, but John gives us a full description elsewhere

Rev. 1:13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

Rev. 1:14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.

Rev. 1:15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Rev. 1:16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

- John’s description of Jesus in His glory is consistent with several other descriptions of Jesus glorified taken from the Old and New Testament
 - And it matches the details here as well, so it’s likely what these three men saw when they awoke
 - This is certainly a demonstration of Jesus in His royal power, just as Jesus

promised

- And in case you doubt it, Luke says plainly they saw Jesus' glory
- Curiously, they also see two figures standing next to Jesus and talking to Him, which the Gospel writers name as Moses and Elijah
 - Luke says these two figures were glorified also, though based on the descriptions, we know Jesus' glory was much greater
 - And Jesus was conversing with these men in this moment
- And this scene raises so many interesting questions
 - How did the three disciples recognize Moses and Elijah? No photos existed and presumably no one painted their portraits
 - We assume the disciples must have received divine insight to know their identities
 - Which means the Lord wanted these men to know it was Moses and Elijah, but why?
 - And perhaps the real question is what's the purpose in this scene overall?
- Our answers start by remembering this scene is connected to the earlier moment with Peter and the disciples
 - Peter objected to Jesus' dying, which led Jesus to challenge His disciples to be willing to lose things of this life in order to preserve the next life
 - And losing their lives now meant (among other things) losing Jesus' company for a time in this life
 - Jesus had to die, resurrect and then ascend leaving the disciples to minister in His place
 - Those men had to be willing to work with that arrangement confident they would see Him in the Kingdom to come
 - Secondly, losing their life here also meant being willing to live without the physical Kingdom on earth for a time as served Jesus
 - In a future day, the Kingdom would be a reality and they would join Jesus in that place
 - But in the meantime they serve something different, the Church and the Kingdom Program
 - That's a lot for anyone to understand, and these men have to grasp it all very quickly, in less than a year
 - So rather than spelling it all out in words, Jesus chooses to tell the story in pictures, because a picture is worth 1,000 words
 - So let's put words to this picture
- First, Jesus appears glorified, which communicates that He is divine and eternal in His reign
 - He told the disciples they would see the Son of Man coming in His glory to reign, and this is what glory looks like
 - And yet, this was *not* how Jesus appeared to His disciples while on the earth
 - Jesus was transfigured from an ordinary, modest, even unattractive form into

a light brighter than the sun

- His divine appearance was a stunning contrast to His humble appearance
- That difference begs a question... if Jesus possessed such divinity and glory, then why hasn't He been showing it to everyone now?
 - Why was He hiding behind such plain appearances?
 - That's the question Jesus wanted these men to consider
 - Jesus' first coming wasn't intended to be a period of reigning but a time of sacrifice and suffering
 - The dual nature of the Messiah's ministry is succinctly reflected in two verses in Zechariah

Zech. 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;

He is just and endowed with salvation,

Humble, and mounted on a donkey,

Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zech. 9:10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

And the horse from Jerusalem;

And the bow of war will be cut off.

And He will speak peace to the nations;

And His dominion will be from sea to sea,

And from the River to the ends of the earth.

- Zechariah says Israel's Messiah would be just and endowed with salvation as he came humbly riding a donkey
 - But in the next verse the prophet goes on to say that the Messiah would do incredible things
 - He would stop all war, bring peace to all nations and have a dominion stretching from sea to sea
 - Clearly v.9 speaks of Jesus' first coming while v.10 is speaking of His second coming
 - So showing Himself glorified reinforced the truth that His death wouldn't be the end of Him but a transition of sorts
- Secondly, Jesus is seen conversing with two biblical figures to make several more points
 - First, their conversation itself was a lesson for these men
 - Luke tells us that were "speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem"
 - The Greek word for departure is exodus, which is a reference to the Passover
 - So they were discussing Jesus' plan to fulfill the Passover by dying on the cross

- The conversation was held for the benefit of the disciples and to explain the meaning of His coming death
 - His death wouldn't be a sign of defeat but a fulfillment of the Feast that pictures Israel's victory over slavery and death
 - In the literal exodus, Moses freed the nation from physical slavery to Pharaoh and from the physical death of the 10th plague
 - And in Jesus' exodus, all nations gain freedom from slavery to sin and the spiritual death it brings
- Furthermore, Moses was the redeemer of God's people – the man who brought the nation through the trials of the desert
 - But He died before the journey was complete, and no one ever found Moses' body

Deut. 34:5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.

Deut. 34:6 And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day.

- So Moses becomes a type of Christ in his redemptive work and in how His body will not be found afterward
- Then there's Elijah, and the Bible says Elijah's life ends when God ushers him straight into heaven without passing through death first

2Kings 2:11 As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

- The Bible also says that Elijah returns again to earth under equally mysterious circumstances

Mal. 4:5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Mal. 4:6 “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

- We will have more to say about this return in a future lesson when Jesus addresses it
 - For now, here's the point: Elijah's sudden ascension into Heaven is connected to His future return in the last days at the end of the age
- So it will be for Jesus as well...they will see Jesus leaving them in a future day, ascending into Heaven, but that won't be the end of Jesus
 - In a future day, they will see Jesus come again at the end of the age
 - And at His Second Coming, the literal physical Kingdom will come too

- So Jesus is seen standing next to these two men because they picture the two-fold nature of Christ's earthly ministry
 - On the one hand Moses pictures Christ's redemption of His people by His death as the Lamb of God
 - And on the other hand, Elijah pictures Jesus' resurrection and ascension into glory
 - Just as God used these men in those ways, so is Jesus going to do the same and much more in His ministry
- But the picture created by these men goes even deeper
 - Seeing these men present in glory reassured the disciples that their own glory wasn't dependent on the Kingdom coming to earth
 - After all, neither Moses nor Elijah lived to see the Kingdom arrive in their day
 - And in fact Moses didn't even have opportunity to enter the Promised Land on earth that God gave to Israel
 - And yet here they were in glory and in the presence of, and in fellowship with, the Messiah
 - So clearly, the Lord's servants will be rewarded with glory even before the Kingdom arrives on earth
 - Predictably, those men didn't catch all that in the moment

Matt. 17:4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

- Peter recognized this was an important moment, but as usual he ran too far
 - Specifically, Peter assumed the Kingdom was now arriving on earth
- So Peter suggests he make three booths or tabernacles for Jesus and the other two men
 - Peter was applying Old Testament Scripture concerning the Kingdom
 - In the Law the Lord established an annual fall feast for Israel called the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles

Lev. 23:41 'You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Lev. 23:42 'You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths,

Lev. 23:43 so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'"

Lev. 23:44 So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD.

- The feast commemorates the wandering of Israel with the Lord in the desert
 - And it also pictures God's people living a temporary existence on earth as we await our entry to the Promised Land, the Kingdom
- But all the feasts God gave Israel serve a dual purpose...they all memorialize a past event and picture a future event
 - Passover memorialized the exodus from Egypt but it also pictured the Messiah's death to pay for our sin
 - Likewise, the feast of Tabernacles has a dual purpose
- It memorializes Israel's wandering in the desert and it pictures a time of God's people dwelling with the Lord in the Kingdom

Zech. 14:9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Zech. 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- The inaugural feast of the Kingdom on earth will be the feast of tabernacles
 - As the Kingdom on earth begins, we will all be there to celebrate it with Jesus in a feast of Tabernacles
 - Because we will truly be dwelling with God
- Peter knew these prophecies from the Old Testament, and so as he witnesses what he believes is the start of the Kingdom, he offers to make booths
 - It's the right idea...but the wrong timing
 - This isn't the moment for celebrating the Kingdom
 - That moment awaits the Lord's return in glory
 - So if the Kingdom isn't here yet, then what is the duty of Jesus' disciples now as we await Jesus' return?
 - And that's the final lesson Jesus wanted to teach these men
 - And that lesson comes through the voice of the Father

Matt. 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

Matt. 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

- While Peter was still speaking, the Shechinah glory of God enveloped all of them, and a voice from Heaven spoke
 - The Father declares this is His Son, in Whom He is well-pleased

- And then He adds “listen to Him!”
- And in response to the voice of God, the men assume the classic position of fear
- Any time sinful mortal flesh enters into the presence of the eternal creator and judge, we naturally fear His presence
- But the point of that moment is found in the command God issued to these men
 - He says listen to Jesus, in other words Jesus is the Father’s witness to the world
 - And therefore their responsibly as disciples was to listen to Jesus
 - And not only while Jesus was with them on earth
 - They must also be prepared to listen to Jesus when He is glorified and away from them in the heavenly realm
 - That’s the mission of a disciple...we can’t bring the Kingdom to earth a day sooner than the Lord intends
 - And we need not worry about saving our life here nor about whether we will see glory in the future
 - Instead, our only concern is whether we are listening to Jesus, in His word by His Spirit teaching us all things
 - And once more the two men standing next to Jesus emphasize this point through illustration
 - The Law of God was given to Israel through Moses, so Moses has come to picture the Law
 - And Elijah was considered the greatest prophet sent to Israel, and so he pictures all the prophets
 - And in Jewish culture, the phrase “Moses and the Prophets” is shorthand for the word of God
 - So imagine the scene again, standing in the center of Moses and the Prophets is Jesus, the Word, the Witness to God the Father
 - Listen to Him...just as you listened to Moses and the Prophets in their day, you listen to Jesus in His day and forevermore
 - In fact, these men always were listening to Jesus because the word of God is always from Him
- So let’s summarize what this scene taught these men
 - It communicated the two-fold nature of Jesus’ earthly ministry, a humble beginning followed by a glorious future
 - And it explained the purpose of His coming death to fulfill the Passover
 - It showed that Jesus would begin His reign in Heaven before the Kingdom’s arrival on earth
 - And it reassured these men that their own future glory was not in jeopardy in the meantime
 - Finally, it reinforced the duty of the disciples in the meantime of Jesus’ coming absence...to listen to the testimony of the word of God
 - We don’t need to see Jesus walking among us in order to know Him and His

commands

- We don't have to see the Kingdom physically on the earth to serve it in the meantime
- And we don't need to share in Jesus' glory now to share it with others
- We know those things are coming in a future day, and in the meantime we only need to listen to Jesus' Word (the Bible) to serve Him well
 - Make the pursuit of His word your devotion of duty, taking what you learn and living by it
 - And sharing the good news of it with all you meet...that's the Kingdom Program

- When we last joined the disciples and Jesus, they were on a high mountain somewhere in northern Judea witnessing the Lord in His glory

Matt. 17:1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Matt. 17:2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

Matt. 17:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Matt. 17:4 Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

Matt. 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

Matt. 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

Matt. 17:7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.”

Matt. 17:8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

Matt. 17:9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”

- A week earlier Jesus had promised that some of His disciples would not die without having seen the glory of His reign
 - So Peter, James and John were given a special opportunity to see Jesus in glory as He will appear in the Kingdom
 - Jesus was transfigured from His lowly earthly form into a totally different appearance, a glorified Heavenly form
 - This is the form He will possess in the Kingdom to come
 - And to see the King in His glory is to see the glory of the Kingdom, at least as much as one can before it comes to earth
- Their opportunity came as a result of a terse exchange a week early between Jesus and Peter
 - Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to die, and Jesus responded by rebuking Peter for his misplaced priorities
 - Peter had been trying to hold on to the world he knew while Jesus was speaking of the world to come
 - Jesus’ death was necessary to bring many sons to glory in the Kingdom, but Peter couldn’t see past this world
 - So the only way the disciples were going to gain an eternal point of view was if they

got a glimpse of what was coming

- This may be the single greatest challenge facing every Christian as we seek to follow Jesus
 - Trying to live with an eternal perspective, one that appreciates that this world is passing away but the next one is the one that matters
 - In effect, it's trying to live in the next world and according to its values and priorities even while we still exist in this fallen world
 - But the enemy and our flesh and the world conspire to direct our attention to here and now
 - And if we're not focused in our walk with Christ, those conspirators will weaken our walk with Jesus
 - They cause us to focus on making this life into our "heaven"
 - We will spend our time on earth trying to make the most of this life, trying to gain the most, to experience the most
 - The world tells us we need the right house, the right job, the right spouse, the healthiest body, the best retirement fund
 - Before we know it, we're living as if this world is the only world that matters and the only one that we will ever know
 - That was the instinct driving Peter in that earlier moment...he was reacting in his flesh to oppose Jesus' plan to die on a cross
 - He wasn't expressing an eternal perspective that places this world above the next
 - Peter was making a poor choice to favor preserving earthly life over serving eternal goals
 - And when we operate with that upside down perspective, we make short-sighted choices
 - As Jesus said, if your goal is saving your life (here), you put at risk the life you will receive in the Kingdom
 - If Peter had an eternal perspective, he would have embraced God's plan for Jesus' death on the cross knowing it would produce so much good
 - Certainly, Peter wouldn't have been any happier seeing Jesus suffer and die... emotions are what they are
 - But intellectually, Peter could accept and support the plan if he saw it the way God saw it...if he had eyes for eternity
- That's why we must place so much emphasis on studying our Bible
 - Understanding the Bible is a process of gaining the mind of Christ, so as we study, our eternal perspective grows as well
 - The more our minds are saturated with the truth of God's word, the more we will come to see the world as Jesus does
 - And the more we will anticipate the Kingdom, and in that anticipation we will

adopt its priorities and values now

- So studying is key to seeing the Kingdom as a more present reality than the world around us
 - As I like to say, the more “real” the future Kingdom becomes for you, the less “real” this world will seem
 - And that’s a good thing, because the more real the Kingdom becomes for you, the more your life decisions will be made based on Kingdom priorities rather than on the priorities of this world
- That’s why Jesus showed these men this vision...He was moving their perspective to Kingdom concerns
 - He gave them a taste of the Kingdom, so that that future world would be more real for them
 - And then they would carry that new perspective with them into the world and into their Kingdom work
 - As we saw last week, Peter misunderstood the significance of the moment at the time, but eventually he appreciated its purpose
- In fact, just listen to Peter’s eternal perspective as he writes to the church

1Pet. 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1Pet. 1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,

1Pet. 1:15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;

1Pet. 1:16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

1Pet. 1:17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;

- That’s a man who understood that this world was passing
- So he teaches the rest of us to fix our hope on the coming of Jesus and to conduct ourselves in fear during our time here
- So after the voice of God was heard, the vision immediately ceased and the disciples found themselves again with just Jesus in His normal appearance
 - And then they began to descend the mountain, but as they walked, Jesus tells the men they are not allowed to share what they saw
 - They could only speak of it *after* Jesus had been raised from the dead
 - Matthew doesn’t gives us any more than that, but in Luke we learn that these men did as they were told

- They shared nothing of what they saw that day until after Jesus resurrected
- If this vision was so important for preparing these men for future ministry, why did Jesus only share it with three of His disciples?
 - Well, we know these men did eventually share it, because we have it written for our benefit here in Scripture
 - And Jesus didn't say *never* share it, He just told them not to share it *before* He resurrected
- And this makes perfect sense given the struggle all the disciples were having in understanding that Jesus was going to die
 - Jesus was planting seeds for the future
 - He knew that sharing the story with the others now wouldn't have benefitted them
 - The disciples who didn't witness it firsthand wouldn't have understood nor likely even received it
- But after Jesus died and resurrected, those same disciples would both need and welcome an explanation for what was happening
 - But Jesus wouldn't be around to explain it Himself, and the Spirit of God wasn't coming for another 50 days following Jesus' death
 - But in that moment, these three men would have a vision to reassure the disciples that all was well
 - So Jesus selected Peter, James and John to lead the church and explain the Kingdom plan to the rest of the disciples in the early days
- On the other hand, Jesus *didn't* select Peter, James and John because they were better than the rest of the disciples
 - They were just fisherman, and the Gospels say nothing about their qualifications
 - The only qualification they had to serve Jesus was that Jesus selected them
 - And that's a fact we can all take heart in...no one serves Jesus because we are qualified
 - We serve Jesus because He qualifies us
 - Jesus takes unqualified men and women, giving us a new heart by faith, and then He equips us to serve Him in that new heart
 - And though He calls us when we are unqualified, He won't leave us untrained or unprepared
 - He bestows upon us spiritual gifts, builds our knowledge by His word, corrects our sinful behaviors, and rewards our obedience
 - And there were some Jesus calls to even greater service and to these He grants an even greater investment of His grace
 - Jesus pulled aside twelve men, His apostles, and gave these men instruction and experiences the crowds never received
 - He empowered them to conduct ministry in ways that the others never would

- And He also granted these three men even greater privilege to see Jesus in His glory
- Jesus poured into these three the most because they were given the most responsibility to serve Him in the early Church
 - Peter was the chief Apostle, the man with the keys to the Kingdom, the one who opened the Church for all peoples
 - James was the leader of the first church in Jerusalem, and one of the earliest martyrs
 - And John was the last Apostle, the longest living who carried the leadership of the church to the end of the first century
 - So to whom much is given, much is expected
- They began walking down the mountain to rejoin the rest of the disciples, and as they reflect on what they've experienced, a question comes to mind

Matt. 17:10 And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

Matt. 17:11 And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things;

Matt. 17:12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

Matt. 17:13 Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

- The two men who appeared besides Jesus in the vision were Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets
 - Elijah is unique among prophets in that his life pictures Jesus' life in several ways
 - He raises a widow's son in Nain from the dead just as Jesus does
 - Elijah's life on earth ends without a body undergoing decay in the grave just as Jesus' body didn't decay
 - And Elijah is the only prophet (besides Jesus) who is foretold to return to the earth one day
 - Specifically, in Malachi 4 we're told this:

Mal. 4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

Mal. 4:2 “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

Mal. 4:3 “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts.

Mal. 4:4 “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

Mal. 4:5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Mal. 4:6 “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

- In what are the final words of the Old Testament, Malachi prepares Israel for what will come next in God’s plan
 - First, he told Israel that a day of judgment is coming for the earth and all evil doers
 - And at that time, Malachi says those who are God-fearing (believing) will enter the dawning of a new age
 - It will be an age of righteousness where all are healed and restored to perfect health and joy
 - Obviously, this is a reference to the coming Kingdom and it’s the future for all believers in Israel and everywhere
- But in the meantime, the Lord reminds Israel of their obligations to Him while they await for the revealing of the Messiah
 - They must continue to observe the Law of Moses, because the law was their custodian guarding Israel until the Messiah’s arrival
 - And secondly, the people of Israel were told to watch for the return of the prophet Elijah in those last days
 - This is the promise that came to the disciples’ minds when they saw the vision of Elijah
- So they ask Jesus why the prophet Elijah must return to Israel before the fulfillment of the age and the arrival of the Kingdom
 - Jesus responds, but His response only hints at the full explanation
 - He says Elijah is coming to restore all things, but I doubt the disciples understood the restoration Jesus was speaking about
 - Because these men could not have anticipated just how far Israel would fall in the future
 - Jesus was speaking about restoring Israel to observing the Law of Moses
 - Malachi told Israel to continue keeping the Law of Moses, yet that’s exactly what Israel fails to do
 - In the centuries after the temple was destroyed in AD 70, the people scattered and Jewish observance of the Law waned
 - Keeping the Law fully became impossible without a temple, but that change also

prompted a steady shift away from orthodoxy in general

- Today, a typical Jew only observes traditional holidays or perhaps attends synagogue occasionally
- Many live entirely secular lives with no thought given to the Law
- That's a far cry from the religious life in Jesus' day, when Jewish life was centered around the temple and the Law
- The apostasy of Israel in the last days poses a threat to the Lord's plan for His people
 - Observing the Law will be crucial to Israel receiving their Messiah in the last days
 - Because the Law isn't just for the purpose of guarding Israel from corruption or giving God's people a common identity
 - It also taught them important principles about sin and holiness, about sacrifice and atonement, about judgment and forgiveness
 - And they need to understand these principles before they will anticipate and receive their Messiah when He comes for them
- But what if Israel isn't looking for a Messiah? What if they are so far from the Lord that when He arrives, His arrival is met with a shrug of indifference?
 - That's why the Lord prepares the hearts of His people to receive Jesus
 - In both His first coming and His Second Coming, the Lord will bring Israel a forerunner to announce the Messiah's arrival
 - Jesus confirms this plan when he compares Elijah's role to that of John the Baptist
 - In v.12 Jesus says "I say to you that Elijah already came..." and at first, it sounds like Jesus is saying that Malachi 4 has already been fulfilled
 - But in v.13 Matthew quickly clarifies that Jesus was actually speaking of John the Baptist, not the literal Elijah
 - Moreover, we know John the Baptist couldn't be the literal Elijah since John himself denied it in the Gospel of John 1:21
 - Instead, Jesus was saying that John was a type or example of "Elijah" who has already come serving a similar purpose
 - John the Baptist was the man who prepared Israel to receive the Messiah in His first coming
 - John the Baptist called the nation to a heart of repentance knowing their Messiah was soon to appear
 - And when Jesus was revealed, John the Baptist announced him to those who were ready to receive Him
 - But as Jesus points out, the effect of Elijah's ministry was not national conversion and acceptance of Jesus
 - Far from it, they rejected Elijah's testimony and abused him, and ultimately,

they killed him

- And if they kill the one who announced the Messiah, you can be sure they will do the same to Jesus
- John the Baptist's circumstances reflected the heart of the people and so it predicted the result for Jesus
- So John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus' first coming, and in that way he was a type or example of Elijah
 - But the real Elijah is still yet to return and when he does, he will be the forerunner for the Lord's Second Coming
 - So just as Jesus' first coming is a lessor event compared to Jesus' Second Coming, so is John's ministry a lessor to Elijah's great ministry
- But when Elijah comes to Israel, the effect of his appearing will be very different than the effect of John's ministry
 - Malachi 4:6 says that Elijah's return to the people of God will result in the hearts of the fathers being restored
 - The literal Hebrew reads he will restore the hearts of fathers "to sons"
 - In other words, the fathers of Israel (the leaders in that day) will find their hearts become like sons' hearts with child-like faith
 - And these soft hearts will turn back to the fathers, which is a reference to the patriarchs of Israel in times past
 - As a result of Elijah's appearing, those future Jewish leaders turn their attention to the fathers like Moses and David and others who followed the Law faithfully
 - And as a result, they will be restored to orthodoxy, returning to following the traditions of the fathers and of the Law
 - So as a result of Elijah's ministry, the Jewish people of the last days will return in large number to keeping the Law of Moses as Malachi said
 - That restoration will prompt them to return to worship and sacrifice in a temple in Jerusalem
 - And ultimately, it will prepare Israel for the Messiah's return at the end of this age
- That's what Jesus was describing when he answered the disciples, but of course the disciples only understood that Jesus was speaking of John
 - They didn't understand the big picture, that Jesus would depart soon and that Israel would be scattered again
 - And they didn't understand how long it would be before Jesus' return
 - Nor could they appreciate how far Israel would drift away from the Law and their traditions
 - So naturally, they didn't understand the necessity for a prophet to return to Israel to re-establish orthodoxy in the nation
 - And do you notice how Jesus moved past this question so quickly to change the

subject?

- His answer was barely an answer, and only because we have the rest of Scripture can we understand it ourselves
- But Jesus wanted to emphasize more immediate concerns for them, that they would understand His future death
- It was more important for them to understand what would happen in their days than what would happen in distant times to come
- And that's the lesson I want to leave us with too...that there are things to come described in the Bible which we can and should understand
 - But like these disciples, there are others truths – more present concerns – that we should be focused on in our walk with Jesus
 - Our concerns center on the return of Christ for the Church, not on the Second Coming of Christ
 - And on being ready for that moment today by living a life that pleases Jesus
- So the chief thing we need to consider even as we learn about the events of the end is how will Jesus find us serving Him when He comes

Luke 18:7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

Luke 18:8 “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

- Jesus said in Luke that when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?
 - In other words, Jesus asks what will be the report of our faithfulness to Him?
 - You see, Jesus is saying the Lord will remain faithful to us in His promises
 - And one of His promises is that He will return, and when He returns for His Church, He comes to reward us for our faithfulness

Mark 13:33 “Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.

Mark 13:34 “It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.

Mark 13:35 “Therefore, be on the alert — for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning —

Mark 13:36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep.

Mark 13:37 “What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’”

- This is the ever-present expectation for every believer, that Jesus may return for us at

any time and when He does, will he find faith?

- Or will He find us sleeping, lulled into a pursuit of this world, oblivious to the reality of the next
- We study these things so that we may be prepared for that moment, so don't miss the lesson
- Seek to make whatever changes in your life are necessary to ensure you are living for the world to come and not for the one today
 - Be ready for Jesus, because He's coming to you soon
 - And we pray, come quickly Lord Jesus!

- Jesus and Peter, James and John are coming down from the mountain following Jesus' glorification
 - They engaged in that interesting conversation about Elijah which Jesus quickly turned into a discussion about His own circumstances
 - They wanted Jesus to tell them why Elijah was supposed to return shortly before the end of this age
 - But Jesus wanted them to know that in the near future He was going to suffer and die to fulfill the purpose of the age
 - And as we studied that moment, I told you that the disciples' misplaced priorities can be a challenge for any Bible student
 - We have to maintain a balance in our study of the Scriptures
 - We can't let our interest in the future foretold in the Bible overshadow our present responsibilities of knowing and serving Jesus
 - We know we're living in the end times, so that's our best reason to focus now on our witness and our mission
 - In the case of the disciples, Jesus had precious little time with them before He would turn over the Church to their leadership
 - So as they contemplated the meaning of a prophet coming to a distant generation shortly before the end of the world...
 - Jesus reminded them to focus on Him instead and on the things Jesus was preparing to do in their life
- In a nutshell, that's what the Bible is talking about when it tells us to walk by faith
 - To walk by faith means to live every day in the present, knowing that God is at work in and through you to glorify Himself
 - Yes, His plan takes us to the end of the world and beyond, but it's happening even now everyday
 - We will acknowledge that our eternity is secure and Jesus wins in the end
 - But are we also willing to acknowledge that He rules in our lives today?
 - Do we think enough about how today contributes to God's plan?
 - That's the question that drives us into the next section of the chapter
 - And the scene picks up immediately after Jesus and the three disciples return from the mountain

Matt. 17:14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying,

Matt. 17:15 “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

Matt. 17:16 “I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.”

- As the men come down, they approach a crowd of people, and a man in the crowd falls down before Jesus seeking healing for his son
 - Matthew actually drops us into the middle of this moment without much background, but Mark gives us more details

Mark 9:14 When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.

Mark 9:15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him.

Mark 9:16 And He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?”

Mark 9:17 And one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute;

Mark 9:18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.”

- Mark helps us understand the overall moment better and in particular the fact that the scribes were present
- Mark says the scribes were arguing with the crowd, and probably more specifically with the disciples of Jesus
- Jesus and the three disciples approach the arguing crowd, and as soon as the crowd sees Jesus they run over to Him
 - The scribes don't accompany the crowd to see Jesus, so Jesus asks the crowd to explain what the debate had been about
 - And one man in the crowd speaks up explaining that his son's predicament was at the cause of the commotion
- Both Matthew and Mark tells us that the boy has been demon-possessed from a young age
 - And the demon's presence in the boy has produced terrible physical consequences, Mark reports
 - He foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, stiffens his body like a seizure, and most importantly, the boy has become mute
- Back in Matthew we hear that this demon would also compel the child to throw himself into fire or water, presumably in an attempt to kill the child
 - Demons are fallen angels, spirits that followed after Satan in his rebellion against God
 - These fallen angels are now bound to serving their master, and they exist to do his bidding
 - Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospels that Satan's *modus operandi* is to kill, steal and destroy
 - And therefore, demons have the same mission as they act on Satan's behalf

- And one of their tactics is to occupy human bodies (though they are not able to possess the body of believers)
 - In this way they seek to kill, steal and destroy:
 - They are destroying the boy's physical body slowly
 - And they are stealing away from the boy's father the joy of a healthy son
 - And they are seeking to kill the child
- So as Jesus said, these demons have come to kill, steal and destroy, and in the process they hope to strike fear into the hearts of onlookers
 - But as you may remember from the last time we studied demon possession, a demon spirit cannot leave a physical body easily
 - Once a demon takes up residence in a human body, they are bound to remain in that body for as long as the body is alive
- When a demon is ready to move to another host, they must find a way to bring about the death of their current host
 - They will torment the person's mind and body to accomplish that goal, speaking to the person to convince them to take their own life
 - Or as we saw in the story of the pigs that ran into the sea, they may drive the body to endanger itself as they are doing here
- The only other way a demon can be removed from a body is when God Himself casts or forces out a demon
 - And demons don't like to be forced out of their hosts by God, because it ruins the effect of their possession
 - Demons possess people to show their opposition to God and to defy God by destroying His greatest creation, human beings
 - And ultimately, they seek to provoke fear among God's people by demonstrating their power over the human body
 - So when they are cast out it ruins everything...it rescues and restores the person, it makes Satan's demons appear weak and it brings glory to God
 - That's why a demon, who had been seeking to escape the body by killing it, nonetheless will still resist efforts to cast it out
 - If a demon can resist efforts to expel it from a body, it brings that much more glory to its master, Satan
 - And ultimately, they undermine the faith of God's people in God's power and authority
 - That's the situation Jesus has dropped into, and now it's up to Jesus to fix the mess that His disciples invited
- In v.16 the man tells Jesus he brought his son to the disciples hoping that they could remove the demon
 - The father assumed that Jesus' disciples possessed the same ability to heal as Jesus Himself, and that was a reasonable assumption

- Exorcism was not uncommon in Jesus' day, since men were sometimes empowered by God to cast out demons
- And in an earlier time the Lord had given His disciples power to cast out demons and they had done so successfully
- So it wasn't unreasonable for the father to ask, but despite their best efforts, the disciples were unable to free the boy
 - And in Mark 9:14, we're left with the suggestion that the disciples' failure to cast out the demon triggered that argument with the scribes
 - And the argument comes from something that happened earlier, back in Chapter 12
- In Chapter 12 Jesus casts out a mute demon much like the one we see in this boy here
 - As I told you then, rabbis in Jesus' day recognized that the Messiah, when He came to Israel, would possess unique powers
 - And those unique powers would set Him apart so as to confirm His identity as Israel's Messiah
- One of those unique powers would be the ability to cast out a demon which has rendered its host unable to speak (mute)
 - From time to time, God gave men in Israel the authority to cast out demons but they had to use a specific method
 - That method required that the exorcist communicate directly with the demon inside the body to learn its name
 - The exorcist would attempt to speak to the demon inside the possessed person hoping the demon would answer back
 - If the demon shared its name by speaking through the person's mouth, then the exorcist could cast the demon out by name
 - We saw Jesus using this method in Luke 8:30 and Jewish exorcists using the method in Acts 19
 - This was the way the Lord directed Israel to remove demons, and it worked whenever the Lord willed it, to allow it
 - But if a demon rendered the person mute, then casting out the demon was not possible using the normal method
 - So rabbis concluded correctly that only the Messiah would be able to compel a mute demon to leave a body
 - Back in Chapter 12 when Jesus cast out a mute demon, the crowd immediately recognized the significance of that Messianic miracle
 - They even asked whether Jesus could be the Son of David but the leaders rejected that possibility
 - And ever since that moment these leaders have been seeking to undermine that claim
 - And when Jesus' disciples failed to cast out this mute demon, they think they've

found the opportunity they've been hoping for

- The scribes begin to argue before the crowd that the disciples' failure was proof that Jesus was a fraud
- Then Jesus shows up, and the crowd runs to His side, leaving the scribes to slink away for a future opportunity
- Obviously, the disciples made the mistake of presuming they could do whatever Jesus could do merely because of their association with Jesus
 - And this is a mistake that's easy for any believer to make, especially once the Lord has worked through us in amazing ways in the past
 - In earlier days when Jesus gave these men power to cast out demons, they performed amazing ministry
 - Listen to what a large group of Jesus' disciples said as they returned from using those new-found powers

Luke 10:17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

- Those men were so excited to tell Jesus what they had accomplished, and that's only natural
- We feel the same way when Jesus gives us great results
- Have you ever prayed for someone specifically, and you see the Lord grant the very thing you requested?
 - Or you give money to a ministry need and then later you hear that the amount you gave was exactly what was needed?
 - Or maybe you feel led to share a verse of Scripture with someone as an encouragement
 - And then that person looks at you wide-eyed and says that was the exact verse the Lord put on their mind earlier that day
- That's what it feels like to walk in the Spirit, that inner thrill we feel when we do what Jesus asked us to do and He shows up big time
 - It builds our faith, it encourages us and it whets our appetite for more opportunities like that
 - It's the joy of serving our Master
- But if we're not careful, our successes in ministry can become an opening for our pride, and if so, it impedes our future service to the Lord
 - That seems to have happened for these disciples
 - Because their success in that earlier moment led them to presume too much in this moment
 - And I believe Jesus knew this could happen, because of what He tells them immediately after they celebrate their victory

Luke 10:18 And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

- Jesus first offered them that encouraging word, saying as they cast out those demons, Jesus was watching Satan fall from heaven
 - He means that whenever we serve Jesus in the power He gives us, we’re participating in the defeat of Satan’s dominion
 - One spiritual victory at a time, one soul at a time, Jesus says our successes are bringing Satan down
- But the key here is it’s not we who defeat Satan...it’s Jesus working in and through us
 - We don’t decide what work must be done...Jesus told them to cast out demons
 - And our success certainly isn’t a result of our ability...Jesus gave them the power and authority to accomplish that work
- So we aren’t working for Jesus...we’re not even working with Jesus...we aren’t even working at all – He does all the work through us
 - But it’s easy to blur those lines especially after we get a taste of success in ministry
 - We can come to see ourselves or our methods or our education or our training or our anything else as the source of our success
 - But it’s never those things...it’s always the Lord working through us, which means He receives all the glory
 - And that’s why Jesus tempers the disciples’ excitement in the next part of that passage from Luke

Luke 10:19 “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.

Luke 10:20 “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

- Jesus says those men were given specific authority and power to accomplish certain things according to Jesus’ direction
 - And yet He says do not rejoice in the power I give you to serve me
 - Because when we rejoice in that power, we are no longer rejoicing in Jesus and His work
 - We’ve begun to rejoice in our own efforts as if the power is our own
 - And we don’t have to possess power to cast out demons or handle deadly serpents to be tempted into this thinking
 - Any success in ministry has the potential to deceive our hearts into thinking we’re something special
 - And to that Jesus responds saying do not rejoice in your accomplishments

- The disciples shouldn't rejoice that the demonic spirits were subject to them, and nor should we rejoice in whatever we accomplish
 - But what should we rejoice in: that are names are recorded in Heaven
 - Or in other words, rejoice in the saving work of Jesus who made us to be a royal priesthood and called us to serve Him
 - Put simply, rejoice in the work of Jesus for you, not your works for Him
- So back to our study, having heard that His disciples tried and failed to perform the miracle, Jesus rebukes the father of the boy and the rest of the crowd too

Matt. 17:17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me."

Matt. 17:18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

- Jesus reacts to the scene with disgust and frustration, calling this generation of Israel unbelieving and perverted
 - Harsh words, to be sure, and we need to understand why Jesus was so upset
 - First, He calls this generation unbelieving because of the prior moment in Chapter 12
- When Jesus cast out the mute demon previously, they recognized that Jesus had done something that only the Messiah could do
 - But the Pharisees explained it away as the work of Satan casting out his own demons
 - And despite the illogical nature of that explanation, the crowd accepted it and refused to embrace Jesus as Messiah
- Now here we find the same type of possession, yet this time the crowd has turned to Jesus' disciples expecting them to perform the same miracle
 - What does that tell us about their beliefs?
 - First, it tells us that they believed the Pharisees' explanation from Chapter 12...they believe that Satan had given Jesus His power
 - And therefore, they assumed that Satan may have also given the disciples the same power
 - Their willingness to ask the disciples to cast out a mute demon was proof that they were unbelieving in Jesus as Messiah
- Secondly, even though they were told that the power to cast out a mute demon came from Satan, nonetheless they still sought to gain Satan's help
 - They were willing to work with the devil to get what they wanted, and that's why Jesus called them a perverse generation
 - It's perverse to seek for the favor of the enemy of God, the one who comes to

kill, steal and destroy

- The devil's bargains always asks us to trade something of eternal glory for something of earthly perversion
- And that's what this crowd had done, so Jesus expresses disgust in their unbelief and willingness to bargain with the devil
 - And He asks how long will I put up with you, how long will I be with you because time was running out
 - Jesus knew that He wasn't getting through to so many in that generation, and it spilled out at that moment
- Moreover, Jesus is frustrated at His disciples for having opened this Pandora's Box
 - When they tried to perform this miracle, they participated unknowingly in the Pharisees' deception of the people
 - They have lent credibility to the suggestion that anyone could perform this Messianic miracle, which diminished Christ in their eyes
- That's the impact of seeking to do ministry in our own power rather than in the power of Christ
 - Not only will we fail ultimately, because we're relying on our worthless efforts in place of Jesus' power and authority
 - But in the process, we tarnish Jesus' name and reputation, because we make Him appear to be impotent or uninterested
 - We introduce doubt into the minds of others who see our failures and assume that God is to blame
- And we see both of those results here, which is why Jesus reluctantly gets involved to heal the boy
 - In v.17 Jesus says bring him to me and in v.18 Jesus quickly does what only the Messiah could do
 - He rebuked the demon and casts him out without knowing the demon's name
 - And the boy was cured at once
 - Jesus cures the boy to re-establish His testimony as Messiah and correct for the disciple's presumption
 - And that's what Jesus does...He protects His name and His glory
 - So if we act impetuously as these disciples did, you can expect Jesus to get the work done in His own way without us
 - In the end He still gains the glory He deserves, but we may miss the opportunity to be a part of that work
 - We miss the experience of the thrill and joy of succeeding in a ministry that I mentioned earlier
 - In the end, Jesus always wins, but we may lose if we don't walk with Him in the Spirit
- But there's more to the story here, which we see in Mark's Gospel again

Mark 9:20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.

Mark 9:21 And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood.

Mark 9:22 “It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!”

Mark 9:23 And Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.”

Mark 9:24 Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

- The father asks Jesus to help “if He can” and immediately Jesus seizes upon that statement because it reveals the man’s lack of faith
 - Jesus responds saying, “If I can??” All things are possible to him who believes”
 - First, why is this man expressing doubt in Jesus’ ability?
 - Remember, the Jewish people had been taught that only the Messiah could exorcise a mute demon like his son’s
 - And yet Jesus had done this very miracle at least once before, so this man had every reason to believe Jesus was the Messiah
 - And if so, he should have had complete confidence that this miracle could take place
 - That’s what Jesus meant when He says all things are possible for those who believe, as in believe in Jesus
 - If you believe in Jesus as Messiah, than you know He is God and therefore you know He can do anything
 - So when Jesus offers to do something for you, there’s no room for doubt
 - You know Jesus can do it because He is the Creator of the Universe...as Jesus says elsewhere, with God all things are possible
 - But it’s important to understand that Jesus wasn’t saying that we can do anything because we believe we can do it
 - That’s not faith...that’s heresy
 - If it were true that we can do anything we dream up merely because we know Jesus, then the disciples should have been able to cast out the demon themselves
 - We have zero power apart from Jesus, and therefore our faith in our power is meaningless and useless

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

- Now we see the devastating impact of the disciples' earlier mistake...they have brought doubt to this man's mind and confused him about what to believe
 - Notice his response to Jesus...in v.24 of Mark he says, "I do believe, help my unbelief"
 - Have you ever felt that way...part of you knows that you should trust Jesus in some situation
 - And yet another part of you still has doubt and fear and worry
 - Where does that doubt and worry come from? We know Jesus is capable of all things, so why should we ever question?
 - In our case, our doubt is usually a result of not knowing for sure that what we want is what Jesus wants
 - In other words, we know Jesus *can* do anything, but we wonder *will* He do the thing we desire
 - And that's natural, and it gets easier as we grow in our relationship with Him and come to understand His will better
 - But for this man the issue was not having full confidence in Jesus' identity
 - He believed in Jesus enough to bring his son seeking a cure that only the Messiah could perform
 - But at the same time, he was confused
 - Between the Pharisees' lies and the disciples' presumption, the man wasn't sure what to believe anymore
 - That's why he said he believed and yet he needed help to believe
 - And that's also why Jesus took pity on him and granted this miracle despite the man's wavering faith
- So Jesus has solved two of the three problems He faced: the son has been freed from the demon and the father's faith has been built up
 - But there's still the problem of the disciples' behavior...which is where we end today

Matt. 17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?"

Matt. 17:20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

Matt. 17:21 ["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]

- Outside the hearing of the crowd, the disciples ask Jesus to explain what happened and why they couldn't cast out the demon
 - And the answer is because of the smallness of their faith

- Now how can faith be “large” or “small”? The key to interpreting Jesus’ words is to remember that faith requires an object
- Faith doesn’t exist by itself...faith without an object is merely wishing
- We place faith in something, and it’s that something that possesses the power
 - If I place faith in myself, then it’s my own power I’m relying upon
 - If I place faith in government, then it’s the power of government I depend upon to help me
 - And if I place faith in the Creator, then it’s His power I trust in
- So if I place my faith in something small, something of little power, than I have little faith
 - And if I place my faith in something large, meaning something of great power, than I have great faith
 - So Jesus wasn’t describing the amount of faith we have, and we see that plainly by what He says in v.20
- Jesus says you can have faith the size of a mustard seed and move mountains
 - You don’t have to have a strong faith, you just have to place what little faith you have in something strong
 - And that’s where the disciples went wrong
 - They placed their trust in themselves, which was a very small thing indeed
 - They thought they possessed the power to cast out that demon when they did not, for that was a Messianic Miracle
 - The Father had reserved that specific miracle for His Son to perform alone as a sign to prove His claim to be Messiah
 - And so no one else would ever be permitted to do the same
 - Notice in v.21 Jesus says this kind of demon only comes out with prayer and fasting, which refers to a petitioning of God
 - In other words, Jesus is saying that only God can accomplish this type of miracle of casting out a mute demon
 - So you should have known to come to God, that is to Jesus, placing their faith in God’s power
 - Instead, they placed their trust in themselves, in their own power, and in the process they displayed little faith
 - And little faith accomplishes nothing because we’ve chosen the wrong object of our faith
- But Jesus says if they placed their faith in something great, like God, they could move a mountain, which was hyperbole to make a point
 - God can move mountains...God can do literally anything
 - So if you are walking in faith, knowing the will of God, then anything can happen
 - God could command you to move a mountain, and because you have faith in His power to accomplish that work, you could do it

- If that happened, it wouldn't be you doing it self-evidently
 - It would be God doing it through you, and so your faith in God's power would have been rewarded
 - That's the key to understanding this whole passage
- The crowd, the father and the disciples all struggled to place faith in the right object leading to failure and confusion and deception
 - The crowd placed their faith in Satan, and they were prevented by it
 - The father placed his faith in the disciples, and his faith in Jesus was weakened as a result
 - And the disciples placed faith in themselves, and as a result they diminished the name of Jesus among the people
- Where we place our faith and trust matters more than simply who we call Lord
 - Our eternity rests on the answer to that question, yes
 - But what we depend upon for the power and authority to serve Jesus will determine the fruitfulness of our walk today
 - As Paul says,

Phil. 2:12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Phil. 2:13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

- We're following Jesus in His final year of life on earth, and it's a year of turmoil and conflict
 - The nation of Israel lost their opportunity to receive their King in the day their leaders rejected Jesus
 - Individually, Jews are still being saved, of course, as they place their faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - And for those who do believe, Jesus is ministering to them, teaching them and healing them at times
 - But for the crowds and the nation as a whole, Jesus is refusing to reveal Himself any further...He no longer teaches or heals publicly
 - Instead, Jesus is secretly preparing His disciples to assume charge of the Kingdom Program after He departs
 - But that work is difficult because these men are having a hard time grasping the idea that Jesus is leaving
 - And more than just His leaving, they can't make sense of Jesus' statements that He is going to suffer and die and rise again
 - Jesus has hinted at His death and departure on numerous occasions, and He's even stated it plainly once
 - Even though these men hear Jesus' words, they can't believe it and so they have yet to accept it
 - But they need to understand it, because ultimately it will be their responsibility to explain it to others
- So as we return to Chapter 17 today, we begin with Jesus taking yet another opportunity to remind His men of what lay ahead

Matt. 17:22 And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, **"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; Matt. 17:23 and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day."** And they were deeply grieved.

- Here we see Jesus' stating for a second time the simple truth of what was coming for Him
 - Jesus says plainly He would be delivered into the hands of men to be killed but then be raised again on the third day
 - This is the essence of the Gospel, and it's at the core of our faith
 - We hear it preached today as history, but these men heard it preached as a prophecy
 - And as hard as it is for some today to believe in a historical resurrection of Jesus, it was even harder for them to understand it in advance
 - They must have asked themselves who could harm God's anointed?

- And how could God send a Deliverer only to have Him killed by those He came to save?
- In fact, if their Messiah could be killed, it would seem to argue against Jesus' claims to be the Son of God
- On its face, that makes no sense...but when we understand the significance of Jesus' death, the plan becomes clear
 - Jesus came to die because God was making a way for us to be forgiven for our sin
 - That's what Jesus means when He says He will be delivered
 - We know Jesus was delivered by Judas and the Jewish authorities over to the Romans for crucifixion
 - But it wasn't merely Judas or the Jews or even Pilate who delivered Jesus over to death
- It was the Father in Heaven Who delivered His own Son over to death for our sake

Is. 53:10 But the LORD was pleased

To crush Him, putting Him to grief;

If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,

He will see His offspring,

He will prolong His days,

And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

- Jesus' resurrection – His return to life after three days – is evidence that He was dying to pay for our sins, not His own
 - Because anyone who dies because of his own sin never returns to live life on earth
 - The death of the ungodly results in a permanent separation from God and from the opportunity to enjoy this Creation
- But Jesus, having no sin of His own, could return from the dead because He was not under the penalty of sin
 - His resurrection proved that His death was not for His own sake
 - And therefore, it has become a payment for us, for all who receive it by trusting in it for their salvation
 - That's the Gospel...that we can be forgiven of all our sin by placing our faith in Jesus' substitutionary death
- That's the message these men were going to be charged with sharing with others
 - So they needed to understand it themselves
 - But that's the piece of the story that the disciples were having the most trouble accepting at this point
- And we see that clearly in their response in v.23 where Matthew says they were deeply grieved at what they heard

- And at first it sounds as though the disciples had begun to understand what Jesus was saying which is why they were grieved
 - But Mark makes clear what was going on in their minds...which wasn't much, frankly

Mark 9:30 From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it.

Mark 9:31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."

Mark 9:32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

- This is now the second time Jesus has stated He will die and rise again, yet it's clear these men were not following what it meant
 - Mark says they were too afraid even to ask Jesus to explain Himself
 - But to be fair, a proper understanding was probably beyond their reach at that point
 - Because they couldn't appreciate why Jesus had to die until they understood two central concepts of Christian theology
- First, they need to understand the significance of the incarnation – of God becoming man
 - Granted, it's impossible for anyone to truly understand how Jesus can be both fully God and fully man at the same time
 - But that's not the issue...we don't need to understand *how* that can be true
 - But we do need to understand the *implications* of that truth, and it's those implications that these men were missing
- Secondly, they didn't truly understand God's self-sacrificial love
 - Agape love, self-sacrificial love, is the way God loves
 - It's the kind of love that Jesus shows us and the kind we are called to show one another and the world
 - But that kind of love does not come naturally to our sinful hearts...it's actually the opposite of how we love
 - And yet that kind of love is at the core of Jesus' ministry and it is the motivation for His willingness to die for us
- Those two concepts – the incarnation of God and the self-sacrificial love of God – lie at the heart of all Christian theology and practice
 - And unless you appreciate these two ideas, you haven't fully understood the Gospel itself
 - If you don't understand them, then you cannot possibly understand why the Messiah came to die

- And the next two scenes recorded in Matthew serve to illustrate the disciples' confusion on these points
 - We will study them, beginning with the first one today, which is a lesson on the significance of God becoming man

Matt. 17:24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?"

Matt. 17:25 He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?"

- Jesus and the disciples return from the far north of Judea near Caesarea Philippi and Mt. Hermon and enter Jesus' adopted home town of Capernaum
 - And as they enter the city, they enter Peter's home, and while there a group of tax collectors come calling looking for Jesus
 - These men were assigned by the temple authorities to collect a certain tax required by the Law of Moses

Ex. 30:11 The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying,

Ex. 30:12 "When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them.

Ex. 30:13 "This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD.

- The Law required the sons of Israel to pay a ransom of half a shekel to the Lord each year
- The tax was paid to the temple for the operation of the temple, and it was required of every male Jew ages 20–50
- The shekel was a Jewish coin, but Romans used the drachma coin, which the Jews valued at 1/4th of a shekel
 - So 2 drachma was the equivalent of 1/2 shekel
 - Since there was no half-shekel coin in circulation at that time, it became customary to give 2 drachma coins instead
 - Or else two Jewish men might pair up and give a single shekel coin to cover the both of them
- Normally, the temple tax was paid around Passover in Jerusalem
 - But here we have Jewish temple tax collectors collecting months after the Passover and up in the Galilee

- Which suggests that Jesus never paid the tax while in Jerusalem that year so they have come to collect back-taxes
- Since it was Peter's home, he goes outside to greet the men, and as he does they ask Peter if his rabbi pays the required tax?
 - Peter decides to answer these men without consulting Jesus first saying yes, Jesus would pay the temple tax
 - Now if the narrative ended here, we would assume Peter was correct and that Jesus did, in fact, owe the required tax
 - But because of what Jesus does next, we quickly discover that Peter answered presumptuously for Jesus
 - When Peter comes back inside, probably to ask Jesus for the money the tax collectors were waiting for outside, Jesus throws a question at Peter
 - Jesus asks when kings on earth institute a poll or customs tax, does that tax apply to the sons of the king or to strangers?
 - A customs tax was the tax assessed on goods passing through a kingdom along a trade route
 - So as goods flowed from the east to the west or vice versa, those goods would be taxed as they passed through customs
 - But the tax generally only applied to foreigners not to the citizens of the king's kingdom
 - In the Roman Empire, Roman citizens were not obligated to pay poll taxes
 - Poll taxes or tribute taxes and the like were assessed on non-citizens who lived in territories conquered by the Roman army
 - Similarly today nations may have taxes they impose only on foreign nations or foreign visitors but not on their own citizens
 - And at the very least, the king's family members would always be exempt from paying taxes imposed by the king
 - A king wouldn't expect his own family to pay a tax to their father
 - Especially since his sons would eventually inherit the father's wealth anyway
 - So only the strangers, whether foreign citizens or the king's subjects, were obligated to pay the tax
 - And after hearing Jesus' question, Peter gives the correct answer, saying only strangers are obligated to pay customs taxes
 - And that leads Jesus to make His application

Matt. 17:26 When Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt."

- Jesus uses this simple example to establish a principle that's true not only with human government but also with God Himself

- The principle is this: a distinction should be made between the law giver and the law keeper
 - There are those who make the Law and those who are obligated to obey the Law
 - And the one who makes law for others is not obligated to keep that law himself
- In our culture, we struggle a little to understand this principle because we have adopted a system of government that works differently
 - Our government follows principles like the rule of law and equal protection under law
 - Those principles hold that the law is the highest authority in the land and that no one in the government is above the law
 - Therefore, in our experience the one who makes the law is also bound to keep the same law
 - So therefore, Jesus' example doesn't make as much sense to us
- But our way of government is actually a radical notion, and it was not the way governments worked in Jesus' day
 - In Jesus' day, most governments were monarchies and monarchs made the law for their subjects
 - And monarchs were generally above that law, literally
 - They, and often their families or members of their court, were not bound by those laws
 - In the case in the Roman Empire, there were two sets of laws: one for Roman citizens and another for non-citizens
- So as you study this passage with me, you need to reorient your thinking to see it from a first century perspective
 - A law giver inherently had the right to decide what his subjects must do without being obligated to do it himself
 - That was normal and expected, and it is not inherently wrong or unrighteous
 - It was simply the way law worked in that day
- Peter knew this, of course, and so he answered the question correctly
 - Only the strangers must pay taxes to a king because the sons of the king would certainly not be expected to do so
 - But now why did Jesus ask Peter this question?
 - Jesus was pointing out to Peter that he erred when he told the tax collectors that Jesus was bound to pay the temple tax
 - Jesus was not required to pay that tax because that tax was commanded by God to support the house of God, the temple
 - And therefore the Son of God was not obligated to pay His own Father a tax for the upkeep of His own house

- That's the point Jesus is making to Peter, but implicit in that point is a lesson about Jesus' identity
- To apply this principle to Jesus means you must acknowledge that Jesus is God just as a son is the future King
- And that's why Jesus asked Peter this question
- Peter and the other disciples did not yet see Jesus as He truly was: God in the flesh
 - And if Peter had known that, he would have handled this moment very differently
 - Ask yourself this question...what if the Son of God had appeared inside Peter's house not in His lowly form as Jesus of Nazareth
 - Rather, imagine Jesus standing in Peter's house in His full glory
 - Imagine Peter's house filled with the glory of God shining as brightly as the sun, with a voice like thunder and all the rest
- And then while Peter is standing in awe at the glory of Christ, there comes a knock at the door
 - Then Peter goes outside to greet tax collectors who ask Peter if Jesus was going to pay the temple tax or not?
 - How do we imagine Peter would respond to that question under those circumstances?
- Do you suppose Peter might have said, "You guys are welcome to go inside and collect it from Jesus yourselves."
 - The point is clear: if Peter had appreciated the deity of Jesus, he never would have imagined asking the Son of God to pay a tax
 - Especially a tax levied on Israel for the upkeep of God's house
- So then why did Peter tell those men that Jesus should pay that tax?
 - The answer is Peter failed to appreciate the incarnation of God
 - Peter knew Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, but he had not fully grasped that Jesus *was* God
- We too struggle at times to appreciate what it means that God became man
 - But for all that we can't know, there is this at least we must know: Jesus is fully God and fully man, and no less one for the sake of the other
 - So as hard as that may be to appreciate that truth in all its dimensions, we must be careful not to dismiss it either
 - We can't see Jesus only as God such that we overlook what it meant for Him to enter into His Creation
 - And of course, we cannot see Jesus merely as human so that we fail to appreciate Him as our Creator
 - Both sides are essential to the Gospel, for without both Jesus cannot be our Savior
 - If Jesus wasn't fully man, then His death couldn't pay the price for our sin

- God requires a person's life for the sin of a person, so Jesus had to be fully human to serve as a substitute for us
- But if Jesus wasn't also fully God, sinless and perfect, then He wouldn't have been qualified to be our substitute
 - Being only divine, Jesus entered the world without sin of His own
 - And therefore His death was available as a payment for our sin
- So if Jesus is going to save anyone, He must be both God and man
 - That's why Christians maintain that no one may enter Heaven except by faith in Jesus
 - No one else could do what is required to reconcile us with God
- In this case Peter was seeing Jesus more as man and less as God – and perhaps not as God at all
 - And his confusion on this point is one reason why he and the other disciples were struggling to understand *why* Jesus would die
 - If Jesus was merely a man and not God, then the prospect of His untimely death is devastating
 - It's like Alexander the Greek dying early or JFK dying early...it would seem to bring an end to the Messiah's mission
 - It would seem to suggest God failed in His promises and it would call into question God's authority
 - But when I understand that Jesus is God becoming man so that He may die, now I see the outcome very differently
 - It's not a failure of the plan...it is the plan!
 - And so I'm forced to consider what did God accomplish by becoming a man and dying and then returning to life?
 - And that question leads me to the important theology that is the cornerstone of the Christian faith
 - So if you learn nothing else from your Bible, you must learn this: Jesus' death was the plan of God to save you and me from eternal punishment

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

- This simple lesson was Jesus' way of leading Peter to a larger thought...to consider the importance that Jesus is the Son of God
 - And as the Son of God, Jesus is the lawgiver and as such He is not subject to the laws given to mankind
 - More importantly, Jesus is divine
- Perhaps the hardest thing for Peter and the other disciples to accept was not that a man

could be God but that God should be willing to become a man

- Every time Peter set his eyes on the earthly Jesus, he saw something very ordinary
 - But plain and ordinary aren't what we expect to see when we think of God
 - So the temptation is to explain it away as if Jesus was something less than God...it's as though His humility denied His divinity
- And that's the way the Father wanted it to be...as Jesus says

Matt. 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

- God did not come to earth as a man to show off His power and authority...though He did show Himself to possess great power
 - He didn't come to rule over us...though one day He will rule over the world
- No, rather as Paul says

Rom. 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- And He came in ordinary packaging as a part of that strategy
 - Jesus wanted to be approachable so that no one might feel as though God was too powerful or awesome to accept them
 - So that He could sympathize with our circumstances, identify with our needs, and model righteousness as our example
 - But that ordinary appearance also allowed Peter to underestimate Jesus' divinity
- And Jesus' divinity and humility come together in a beautiful way at the end of Chapter 17

Matt. 17:27 "However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me."

- Jesus has explained to Peter that He is God and therefore He is exempt, but the problem of the tax collectors remains
 - Imagine if Peter had gone back outside and told those men that he was mistaken, and since his teacher was God, he was exempt from the tax
 - How do you think that scene would play out?
 - At the very least, it would have become opportunity for the Pharisees to make an accusation against Jesus

- More over, any suggestion that Jesus was God would have been very offensive to the religious leaders of the day
- It would have been seen as blasphemy though of course it was a true statement in Jesus' case
- So Jesus says to avoid offending these men, we will pay the tax but in a way that reaffirms the lesson He's teaching Peter
 - He tells Peter to go fish in the Sea of Galilee, which was barely a few hundred feet away
 - The first fish he catches will possess a shekel in its mouth and with that one shekel Peter can pay the tax for himself and for Jesus
- This solution is notable for several reasons
 - First, it's obviously a miraculous provision, which only serves to underscore that Jesus is God
 - How else could you explain this situation except that God is providing a payment for Himself by His own means
 - That a fish could be prepared to swallow a coin and then be directed to the hook at exactly that moment
 - Certainly, it's another reminder that Jesus is not merely a man
- Secondly, it demonstrates the humility of Jesus to condescend to pay a tax He didn't owe, which is itself a picture of the Gospel
 - He is fulfilling His purpose in putting Himself in our place which was an act of humility on God's part

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.
Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- Thirdly, consider why Jesus elected to use the mouth of a fish to provide the payment? Why not have Peter find a coin under a rock or behind a tree?
 - Jesus was extending the teaching a step further for Peter's sake
 - When Peter was called by Jesus to follow Him, Jesus said He would make Peter a fisher of men
 - So here Peter goes fishing and returns with a needed provision
 - The message there was clear...obey Jesus and He will provide through your ministry
 - The act of fishing for men will also result in the receiving of provision for all

needs

- In fact, notice Jesus tells Peter to use that shekel found in that fish to pay for both of them
- Remember, the tax was half a shekel per man, so Jesus is allowing Peter to pair up with Him for that payment
- But also notice, Jesus doesn't say pay for "us" but rather for "you and me"
 - I think that detail is important because Peter and Jesus were not equals
 - Jesus was providing for Himself and providing for Peter but for different reasons
 - Peter was obligated to pay a ransom, but Jesus was humbling Himself to make that payment on Peter's behalf
- The incarnation of God is both the means by which we are saved and the example by which we serve others
 - We receive the payment of Jesus made on our behalf recognizing He made the ultimate sacrifice for us
 - And from that understanding, we seek to serve Him selflessly by mimicking His humility in our own work
 - If Jesus can leave the right hand of the Father to become man and then die on a cross for my sin, maybe I can get out of my recliner and serve someone in the body of Christ
 - Maybe I can set aside my own desires for the glory of Jesus
 - Maybe I can serve others the way He served me

- This week's lesson is a "Part 2" to the teaching we began last week
 - Jesus has been explaining to His disciples that in the near future, the Messiah would suffer and die and then resurrect from the dead
 - But for those men, the thought of their Messiah dying was simply too hard to accept
 - And as we taught last week, their struggle came from confusion over two foundational points of Christian theology
 - They didn't fully appreciate the incarnation (God becoming man), and the self-sacrificial nature of God's love
 - And without an understanding of these two concepts, they could not possibly appreciate why their Messiah would die
 - But they must understand these truths, because the Gospel and the Church itself will be built upon them
 - So Matthew chose to record two scenes that took place between Jesus and His disciples shortly after Jesus' statement about His death
 - In each of these moments, Jesus uses the circumstance of the moment to correct the disciples' ignorance
 - We studied the first of these moments last week as Jesus exposed Peter's lack of understanding of the incarnation
 - Tax collectors came calling to Peter's home to collect the temple tax from Jesus
 - And Peter thoughtlessly committed Jesus to paying the tax without first considering the implications of Jesus' identity as God
 - So when Peter re-entered his house, Jesus pointed out that Peter had misjudged Jesus by not considering His deity
 - And if Peter had understood Jesus is God, he wouldn't have expected Jesus to pay a tax that God Himself collects
- The incarnation of God – God becoming man and taking our place to receive the penalty for our sin – is at the core of the Gospel and our faith
 - This understand is what Peter was lacking
 - In fact, if it were not for the need to die in our place, Jesus would never have taken on flesh in the first place

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- Jesus become a man so that He could live the life we could not and so that He could die the death we dared not
 - But as Peter and the other disciples looked upon Jesus in His lowly and humble form, they overlooked Jesus' divine nature
 - And because they didn't appreciate the significance of Christ's divinity, they

couldn't understand the purpose of His death

- But there is a second lesson these men needed to learn before they could fully appreciate Jesus' death
 - This second lesson will be on God's self-sacrificial love, and it comes in the next scene that opens Matthew's 18th chapter

Matt. 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

- Matthew says at that same time, another interaction took place between Jesus and the disciples
 - And in typical form, Matthew dives in without much background so we need to fill in the gaps a little first

Mark 9:31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."

Mark 9:32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

Mark 9:33 They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?"

Mark 9:34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.

Mark 9:35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

- Mark shows us more clearly how the earlier moment when Jesus told the disciples He was going to die is connected to this moment
 - As we saw last week, the men were confused when Jesus told them He would die and they were afraid to ask questions
 - So instead of dwelling on that bad news, they changed the subject to a discussion of the kingdom
 - And specifically, they began debating which disciple would be elevated to the highest position in the Kingdom
- This topic wasn't entirely inappropriate, since we know Jesus will assign His disciples positions of authority in the Kingdom
 - And our positions of authority will be based on merit
 - Our work for Christ and our faithfulness to Him in this age will play a part in determining how we are rewarded in the Kingdom
- But the timing of their conversation was inappropriate, coming on the heels of Jesus'

statement that He would suffer and die

- Although they didn't understand what Jesus meant, they should have at least appreciated the seriousness of it
- And we can see that they knew that their timing was wrong in v.34 of Mark 9
- Because when Jesus asks them to share what they were talking about, they suddenly go quiet and refuse to answer
- But more than simply being insensitive, their conversation shows they understood nothing of how honor in the Kingdom works
 - Matthew says they were discussing which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom
 - And we can safely assume how each disciple was making the case for himself
 - Peter probably said "Jesus called me rock, so I must be the most important disciple"
 - And then maybe James responded, "Jesus meant you're as dumb as a rock, Peter. I'm going to be the greatest in the Kingdom."
 - Then John countered with, "But I'm the one whom Jesus loves"
 - And perhaps someone else says I'm oldest or I'm the strongest or I'm the most courageous, etc.
 - Whatever they were saying, we know by Jesus' response that they were measuring greatness in terms of personal power, achievement or status
 - And that's a very human way of thinking about honor
 - In our way of thinking, whoever obtains the most accolades in this world will be the one most honored by God in the next
 - But God's ways are not man's ways
 - And Jesus gives us the way God measures greatest in Mark 9:35
 - He says that the one who desires to be first in the Kingdom must seek to be the last in this world and the servant of everyone
- The terms "first" and "last" are Jesus' way of referring to worldly achievement, worldly status, worldly honor
 - And we know what it means to be first this world, don't we? In fact, the world teaches us from a young age the value of being first
 - Receiving the most recognition, obtaining the most possessions, wielding the most power, being the best in every way...that's being first in this world
 - From our earliest years, you strive to be first in your class, first to raise your hand with the answer, first to be picked for the kickball team
 - At work we want to be first to be promoted, first to have a private office, first to become vice president
 - And in life in general, everyone wants to be first and to have the most
 - We want to be first in line, first with the new phone, first to see the new movie

- We celebrate those who have the most likes on Instagram, the most views on YouTube
- The most tools, the most shoes, the most attention at the party, the most sales awards at the office
- We're impressed by the biggest truck, the most expensive purse, the skinniest waist, the largest biceps, etc. etc. etc.
- It's pride and ego and me, me, me, and it's the way the world assigns value and bestows honor...and in the words of Solomon, it's all vanity
 - But Jesus says if you want to be first in the Kingdom, you will need to live by a different standard
 - And you DO want to be first in the Kingdom, because if there was ever a place to be first, it's that place to come
- Being first in the Kingdom means receiving the best of what God has to offer and enjoying it in a guilt-free, sin-free environment
 - It means enjoying it in a place where no one can take it and nothing will destroy it and doing so for 1,000 years and longer
 - If you think being first in this fallen, corrupt and dying world feels good, wait until you see how being first in the Kingdom feels
 - The Lord is holding out that opportunity for anyone who desires it, and to have it you need only do one thing, Jesus says
- To receive the most honor in the Kingdom, you only need to seek to be last in this world
 - And we also know what being "last" here means, don't we?
 - Being last in this world means being willing to set aside your pursuit of being first according to the world's way of thinking
 - It means giving up your place in line to someone else who needs it or desires it more
 - It's allowing others to step on you as they climb the corporate ladder
 - It's leaving others to try to win the rat race, while you focus on finishing your race for the eternal prize of Christ's reward
 - Making yourself a servant of everyone else will probably mean fewer accolades, less business or social success, a smaller bank account
 - It will challenge you to learn how to be content with watching others achieving or possessing more than you
 - It means putting the needs of Christ ahead of your personal career or financial goals
 - It will mean teaching your kids why they can't have everything other kids have
 - Being last means loving God and others more than you love yourself, which requires turning the world's priorities upside down
 - Here's the most interesting thing about this formula...which is easier? To be first in this world or to be last?

- Is it harder to be first in line or to be last in line?
- Is it harder to let go of pursuing the American Dream or to achieve the American Dream?
- My point is that Jesus isn't asking us to do the hard thing...He's freeing us by asking us to do the easier thing
- And then He's offering to reward us for being willing to do so
- And just to be clear, Jesus is demanding self-deprivation...this isn't a pursuit of piety or poverty...it's a pursuit of others over self
 - Which means we may possess nice things and achieve significant things and receive honor while in this world
 - Jesus' point is not to make the pursuit of those things our goal at the expense of pleasing Christ and obtaining the Kingdom
 - On the contrary, Jesus says if we make those things our priorities today, we are putting our reward in the Kingdom at risk
 - It's a choice of having your reward now or having it later
 - And even more than that, it's a matter of cultivating the love of God inside ourselves
 - Because when you love like God loves, you naturally seek for the things God seeks
 - Someone who loves like God loves desires for someone else to be first, someone else to receive more
 - The one who loves like God sees two donuts left on the tray...one perfect and the other smashed
 - And then chooses the smashed one for himself leaving the nicer one for the next person
 - The one who loves like God leaves the closer parking spot for the next person rather than taking it for themselves
 - The one who loves like God turns the other cheek, blesses those who curse you, forgives his enemies, and so on
- If the disciples had the correct understanding of greatness in the Kingdom, they would have been discussing who was the greatest servant now
 - And more importantly, they would have understood why Jesus said He came to suffer and die on a cross
 - If you understand how God loves, you instantly appreciate why God called His Son to suffer on the cross
 - You recognize Jesus' death as the ultimate display of being last, of serving others, the ultimate example of agape love

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

- John 3:16 tells us that the Father's willingness to put His Son to death for our sake was a display of His love for the world
 - That's the main point of that famous verse of Scripture...the emphasis of John 3:16 is not on our belief but on God's love
 - Because without the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, there would be nothing for us to believe in
 - Our salvation starts with God loving us before we ever thought about Him
- In fact, later in his first letter, John says that the definition of love is not how we feel about God but what God did for us

1John 4:8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1John 4:9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

1John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- In other words, love is not a noun...that is, it's not an emotion or a feeling or a state of being
 - Though we often speak of love in that way, that's not the love of God because it's self-centered love
 - When we say I love you, the emphasis is on us and our feelings
- But John says that God's love is actually a verb, it's a self-sacrificial action on behalf of another
 - Love is God sending His Son to receive wrath we deserved
 - And His love sets the standard for how we are to love as well

1John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- If you're struggling to understand how this love looks in day-to-day life, Jesus says you only need to look at the way a child thinks and lives

Matt. 18:2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,

Matt. 18:3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 18:4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

- In making His point, Jesus calls over a child who must have been playing nearby and sets the child before the disciples

- And then Jesus says unless you are converted and become like a child, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven
- Jesus is speaking of how salvation enters the heart of any person so He can draw a comparison to our behavior after salvation
- So how does salvation come to any person in the beginning? Well, as Jesus says in John 3, it's like being born again
 - We are made new in our spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit, being brought first to repentance and then to faith in Jesus
 - And as the Spirit does that work in a person's heart, how does it impact the person?
- First, it humbles us, causing us to see our sins as God sees them, and as we do, we are mortified by what we discover
 - And as a result, we throw ourselves on God's mercy seeking His forgiveness in Christ
 - And in that moment, we are not first in anything...we are last and we know it
- That experience is exactly the opposite of what you find in the hearts of unbelievers, those who think they deserve to be "first" with God
 - People who believe that their piety will impress God expect that God will grant them entry to Heaven because they deserve it
 - And Jesus told a story in Luke to illustrate the difference between being first and being last

Luke 18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Luke 18:11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Luke 18:12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Luke 18:13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

Luke 18:14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- A true salvation experience, Jesus says, is always associated with humility, with being last in your own heart before God, which Jesus says is being like a child
 - Because young children (properly raised) live in a state of humility
 - They make no decisions, they have no authority
 - They are usually doing something wrong and so they are always receiving correction
 - They are servants of everyone and first in nothing, and that's what Jesus is talking

about

- Entering into the Kingdom by faith is very much like being born a child in a home
 - We enter because of a father's love, we start that new life humbly, bringing nothing of our own and contributing nothing
- Then Jesus turns to His main point in v.4 saying we must not only be born again in humility but also live like as a child – humbly
 - We must remain humble, under authority and submitted to the Lord
 - Not seeking to be first either among your brothers or with God but realizing that true obedience means seeking to be last
 - And whoever succeeds at being last and serving others will be exalted the most by God in the Kingdom
 - Just as Jesus became last among all Creation to obtain the greatest name and the most glory in His Kingdom
- Now you see why these men were struggling so much to appreciate the need for Jesus to die
 - Every time Jesus said He would die, they were confused
 - They probably asked themselves, if Jesus knew His death was coming, why didn't He do something to avoid it?
- But what they failed to consider was that Jesus intended to die...that He was willing to die as a sacrifice for them
 - That's what it means to be last, that's agape love...and it's entirely incomprehensible to the world
 - But that's exactly why Jesus rewards those who adopt this kind of approach to ministry
 - Our most powerful witness to the world is showing the love of God through our actions to one another and to the world
 - Making sacrifices for other people, becoming a servant to everyone, putting others before ourselves
 - Do that consistently and genuinely and you are mirroring God's love and it's a powerful tool
 - We will never make a stronger case for Christ in someone's life than when we serve them sacrificially
 - It's such a shock to find someone in this world who isn't self-absorbed and focused on themselves at the expense of others
 - When we encounter a heart of humility, a heart to serve, we get a taste of God's love, and once we do, we often want more
 - It's out of those moments that we get our best opportunities to share the Gospel
 - So we have the disciples arguing over who would be first right after Jesus was explaining how He would be the last for their sake

- Their ignorance of God's love and the incarnation of God prevented them from appreciating Jesus sacrificial death
- If we do the same, we negate our opportunities to share the Gospel
- If we can't explain why God became man or if we fail to demonstrate His self-sacrificial love, we make obscure the Gospel
- The writer of Hebrews explains how the two concepts of the incarnation and God's self-sacrificial love work together in one verse

Heb. 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

- The writer says that Jesus was made lower than angels, that is He was made man, for a time
 - And He took this humble form so that He might suffer death for all of us
- The incarnation of God was necessary so that Jesus could taste death for all of us
 - And why would God be willing to humble Himself in this way? Because of His grace and love for us
 - And what did Jesus gain from having acted with such humility? The writer says He will be crowned with glory and honor
 - So if Jesus is crowned with glory and honor for humbling Himself in this way, then we will receive honor for doing the same
- As a church body, we talk at times about our mission to reach people with the truth of the Gospel, and I hope you appreciate the privilege we have to do so
 - But just as much I hope we understand how we are supposed to do so
 - Just as God's plan for our salvation began with His self-sacrificial love for us, our mission begins with showing agape love
 - Not the noun...the verb...not a feeling, but an action
 - And that action is living like a child, in humility, seeking to be last in this world, allowing others to chase after being first
 - And as we make sacrifices for others, you can expect the Lord to do two things
 - You can expect Him to use your humility and love to prompt curiosity in others for the Gospel so that you may introduce them to Jesus
 - And secondly, you can expect Jesus to take notice of your service and reward you in the Kingdom
 - If ever there was a win-win proposition, that's it

- As you read the New Testament gospels and epistles, you can't help but admire the men who wrote them
 - John, Peter, Matthew and Paul were exceptional men who endured great trials and became examples for believers throughout the age
 - They gave us wise counsel and provided steady leadership during the years when the church was forming and growing
 - But they weren't always so steady and wise
 - Like every believer, those men had to grow spiritually over time until they become godly examples of Christ
 - And the Lord was kind and gracious to allow us to see their progression from sinner to saint to servant
 - Beginning with their stumbling in the Gospels, moving to their growing years in Acts
 - And ultimately best exemplified by their instruction to the church in their letters...
 - We can chart their growth as men and leaders in the church and followers of Jesus Christ
 - Seeing that progression should be encouraging for all of us
 - Because it reminds us that spiritual growth takes time for everyone
 - In a sense we all start as Simon before we become Peter
 - We all transform from a Saul to a Paul, from Abram to Abraham, from Jacob to Israel
 - And that progress depends entirely on the Lord working inside us to produce the necessary change
- But in the beginning of that journey (and even for many years after), it's natural for us to struggle at times in our walk, to revert back to our old nature
 - Sometimes we succumb to selfishness and pride, sometimes we're confused by things Jesus says, sometimes we disappoint Jesus
 - But in time, as we continue following Him, we do better
 - And that's perhaps the most encouraging thing about reading stories of these men in their early days following Jesus
 - Everyone who follows Jesus – even the greatest disciples of Jesus – started the same way we did...*poorly*
- And today we get another opportunity to be reminded of that lesson
 - Last week these guys were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom, which earned a rebuke from Jesus
 - They were measuring their greatness in terms of worldly achievement or status, but Jesus said God rewards humility
 - The one who served his brothers the most would receive the most honor in the Kingdom, Jesus said

- And Jesus compared the proper attitude of a believer to that of a child, because as we learned last week, children are models of humility
 - Young children don't rank as first in the home, they rank last
 - They serve others, wait for others, obey others
 - They have the least power, make the fewest decisions, have the least freedom
- And their attitude in life reflects that reality, so Jesus says that's the attitude a believer should adopt in seeking to please the Lord...
 - Remain humble while serving others
 - And if you do that well, you will be well-rewarded in the Kingdom
- The disciples no doubt felt the sting of Jesus' rebuke, but rather than learn from it, they sought to change the subject
 - And that's where we pick up today, back in v.4

Matt. 18:4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 18:5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;

- After Jesus told the disciples that humility will mark the greatest in the Kingdom, He moves to how we should treat those who serve in this way
 - When someone humbles themselves to serve us, like a child, Jesus says we are receiving Jesus in that moment
 - For example, if Jesus came to serve you (as when He washed the disciples' feet), how would you respond to Him?
 - You would be astonished at His humility, wouldn't you?
 - In fact, you would probably feel a bit embarrassed at the prospect of Jesus serving you knowing it should be the other way around
 - Jesus says that's how we should respond to those who serve us
 - We receive that child (a reference to a believer in Jesus' metaphor) as we would Jesus
 - We receive them in thanks, appreciative of their humility, seeing them as a representative of Christ to us
 - That's not how the world looks upon the humble who serve them
 - Servants are barely acknowledged and even abused
 - They are perceived as weak, insignificant, and useless even as they make possible the lives of the rich and powerful
 - People look down on servants thinking if they had more intelligence or strength, they could do better for themselves
 - That's how the world looked at Jesus when He became their servant on the cross

Matt. 27:39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads
Matt. 27:40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Matt. 27:41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying,

Matt. 27:42 “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

- Little did they understand that the Son of God had placed Himself on that cross voluntarily for their sake
- It was Jesus’ strength that made it possible for Him to be such a humble servant
- That’s what Jesus is saying here to His disciples...it takes strength to be a servant to others sacrificially
 - So when someone comes to us serving self-sacrificially, we need to receive their service with gratitude and honor them in return
 - Celebrate them, and remember you may be looking at the person who will be your superior in the Kingdom
 - Because as they serve you with child-like humility, they are auditioning for a better place in the Kingdom, Jesus says
- So Jesus tells His disciples to adopt a humble attitude and to honor others who do as well, so what do you think the disciples said in response to that?
 - Well, once again, it’s hard to see what’s happening here by looking only at Matthew’s account
 - Matthew jumps into the next part of Jesus’ teaching in v.6 without noting what the disciples said in between
 - I can’t help but wonder if Matthew moved on so quickly to avoid exposing what happened next
 - But thankfully, Luke (who wasn’t there at the time) was faithful to include the background on the moment

Luke 9:47 But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side,

Luke 9:48 and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.”

Luke 9:49 John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.”

Luke 9:50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you.”

- Earlier, the disciples were debating which one of them within Jesus' inner circle would be greatest in the Kingdom
 - Now after Jesus' rebuke, John moves to comparing Jesus' disciples to those outside the inner group
 - Apart from the twelve men Jesus selected to be His apostles, Jesus had many more disciples by this point in His ministry
 - But these twelve men who became Jesus' inner circle were set apart from the rest
 - They were appointed to a higher station, because the Lord intended to use them in a greater capacity as apostles
- Earlier in Luke 9 they got their first taste of the power that would accompany their new position, when they cast out demons
 - Performing miracles similar to Jesus truly set them apart from the rest of Jesus' followers
 - But now we see that this distinction has gone to their heads a little
- That's why the apostles were concerned when they saw a "regular" disciple presuming to do the same miracle Jesus had assigned to His twelve apostles
 - They felt this person was presuming too much authority or privilege by doing the ministry they believed was reserved to them alone
 - So when they saw a disciple casting out demons in Jesus' name, John says they tried to stop him in the act
 - But in Luke 9:50 Jesus tells John that wasn't the right response, because someone who is not against you is for you
 - Why did they oppose that person...they weren't concerned with what he was doing...they were concerned with who was doing it
 - They were bothered by the idea of an "ordinary" disciple trying to accomplish miracles they believed were reserved for apostles
 - They didn't like someone else gaining the attention they thought they alone deserved
 - But Jesus says that too was a wrong comparison
 - When it comes to serving the Lord in ministry, there are only two teams
 - There is Team Jesus and Team Satan, and the goals of each team are easy to tell apart because they are polar opposites
 - So if a person is doing the same things you would do for Jesus, then that person is on your team – accept them as a partner
 - Moreover, we all get an assigned role on this team according to how Jesus decides we should serve Him and according to the gift of His Spirit
 - Later in Luke 10 Jesus sends out 70 disciples with the power to cast out demons
 - I suspect Jesus did so in part to show the twelve that He can equip anyone He desires to serve Him
 - And since Jesus is the One making those decisions for all of us, none of us can claim

to be a privileged member of the team

- We can't expect to reserve certain ministry for just some people
- Another person's ministry success doesn't come at our expense, and another church's growth is not a bad thing
- If we go about making those comparisons, as the apostles did here, we inevitably invite feelings of jealousy or pride
- And in the end, those emotions don't make ministry better...it gets in the way of ministry
 - There's an old saying that there is no limit to what we can do if we don't care who gets the credit
 - But when we care who gets the credit, we stop ministry and become a stumbling block to others
 - And that leads Jesus into a new section of teaching on stumbling blocks

Matt. 18:6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Matt. 18:7 "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

Matt. 18:8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.

Matt. 18:9 "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

- Before we look at this section, it's important to understand how Jesus is developing the metaphor He began at the outset of this chapter
 - As I mentioned last week, when Jesus began this lesson He pulled a child close to Himself to serve as an object lesson for his disciples
 - Jesus then made several comparisons between His followers and that child
 - First, in v.3 Jesus said that the way we enter into faith is like becoming a child, entering the world humbly
 - Next, in v.4 Jesus moves a step further comparing the way we must serve Jesus in faith to the way a child serves humbly
 - Then in v.5 Jesus said we must receive those who serve us humbly like children as if Jesus Himself were serving us
 - And now Jesus moves to discussing His view of the person who should cause one of Jesus' followers (His children) to stumble in their walk of faith

- Jesus' use of the child metaphor to represent every believer has remained consistent throughout this passage
 - So we need to interpret everything Jesus says in light of the metaphor
 - In other words, Jesus isn't speaking about the fate of children
- He's using the child to stand for all of us, so Jesus is talking about all believers
 - People who teach this passage often miss the fact that Jesus has been using a metaphor and so they incorrectly limit the teaching to children
 - And when we do that we miss Jesus' larger point, which is that Jesus gets really upset when we cause any believer to stumble
- Causing a believer to stumble means leading a Christian away from obedience and service to Jesus, and toward sin and worldliness
 - All of us have been guilty of causing others to stumble from time to time
 - In v.7 Jesus acknowledges that stumbling blocks will be inevitable
 - Many times, we don't even know we're causing others to disobey the Lord
 - Being the cause of someone else's stumbling is never what we want, of course, but Jesus isn't concerned as much with being a bad influence
 - He's concerned with something more sinister, more deliberate
 - He's concerned about behavior like that demonstrated by His apostles
 - He's concerned about organized efforts – whether done out of spite or resentment or jealousy – to inhibit the walk of another believer
 - Jesus says woe to that person, meaning they will be judged for doing so
 - And in fact, Jesus says it would be better for that person to be drowned in the sea than to continue stumbling believers
 - That statement is classic biblical hyperbole...Jesus is speaking in exaggerated terms to emphasize how seriously He views this offense
 - Jesus isn't literally advocating for suicide nor is He suggesting the believer could be condemned for stumbling others
 - A believer will never be condemned for sin, but we will be judged for our service
 - And if our service includes working against others to stumble them, Jesus is saying we will not like the reward we receive
 - It would be better that we cut our life short than to continue piling up more demerits, so to speak
- Continuing with the hyperbole, Jesus says if we have become a stumbling block, we should take serious corrective action to address it
 - Even if it should require we cut off a foot or a hand or pluck out an eye, that is preferable to stumbling a believer and offending Jesus
 - Clearly, Jesus is not literally advocating self-mutilation
 - Remember, in this whole discourse, Jesus has relied extensively on metaphors and figures of speech to make His points

- And now He uses another one to emphasize His serious displeasure for anyone who stumbles believers
- Jesus says there is no earthly sacrifice too great if it will prevent an eternal loss
 - In Jesus' exaggerated example, He says if you could arrange an escape from Hell by cutting off your foot, it would be worth it
 - And in real terms, He's saying take whatever steps are necessary to avoid stumbling others and thereby preserving your reward
- At hearing Jesus' words, can you imagine the look on the faces of the apostles when they realize they had been stumbling a believer?
 - They were trying to stop a man from healing someone infested with a demon
 - And not only were they wrong in how they treated that believer, they were risking their own eternal reward
- In short, they were doing the opposite of ministry
 - The word ministry is *diakoneo* in Greek, which literally means to serve
 - The English word deacon comes from this Greek word, and in a sense, all of us are deacons or servants of Jesus and of each other
- So when we serve someone, we minister to that person, and in our ministering to one another, we make more service possible
 - As I minister to you, I encourage you to walk more closely with Jesus, to think more carefully about your duty as a disciple
 - I teach you, train you, pray for you, direct you and in time as you grow you do the same for others
 - That's the culture Jesus wants in His church...serving one another, praying for one another, forgiving one another, etc.
 - But when I stop operating in humility and stop serving others, ministry stops too
 - And in its place comes selfish pursuits of one kind or another, including selfish pursuits inside the church body
 - I may do things that look very spiritual, but because I do them for myself and not others, they are not true ministry
 - Maybe I do things to get noticed or to make money or to compete with someone else
 - In time, I no longer see humility as my goal nor others in the body as those I serve
 - Instead, I expect to be served and recognized for what I accomplish
 - And I become prideful and boastful of my position in the church
 - And at worst I may work to undermine others in their ministry (as the apostles were doing) so that I look better by comparison
 - In short, we become a stumbling block to others both by setting a bad example and by inhibiting others from serving well
 - And in v.10 Jesus says being a stumbling block to other believers is despising

Jesus' little ones

- To despise a person means to think very little of someone, and that's the opposite of being humble and a servant of all

Matt. 18:10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 18:11 [“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.]

Matt. 18:12 “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

Matt. 18:13 “If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.

Matt. 18:14 “So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

- If we ever become inclined to think too little of a fellow believer, you should remember this...Jesus said in v.10 that person's angels are before the Father
 - To understand that statement, we first must recognize that angels are assigned to individual believers
 - In Hebrews 1:14 we're told that angels were created by God to be ministering spirits
 - Remember, the word minister is the Greek word meaning service, so angels are serving spirits
 - And Hebrews goes on to say that these angels render their service for the sake of those who will receive salvation in Jesus
 - So the angelic realm was created by God expressly for the purpose of serving the elect, those who believe in Jesus Christ
 - And as such, Jesus says angels are assigned to specific believers
 - You and I have angels in Heaven assigned to serve us, and that's something remarkable to contemplate
 - We don't know exactly what kind of service they offer us spiritually, but I suspect it's far more important than we imagine
 - And if our Creator thought enough of every single believer to create and assign angels to serve us, then how ought we look upon each other?
 - Is there is any reason or cause for us to despise one another? To look down on one another? To lead each other to stumble?
 - How do you think God feels when He has died to save a person and given them angels to guard over them, only to see you come along and lead that person into sin?
 - Or maybe we despise the person and judge them as unworthy to serve Jesus, or

at least not as worthy as we are?

- Notice in v.11 Matthew says that the Son of Man has come to save and seek that which is lost
 - In your English Bible, this verse may be bracketed, which is an indication that the earliest manuscripts of Matthew lack this verse
 - Generally, earlier copies of a book are considered more trustworthy
 - So it's likely that this verse was added later by copyists who felt it offered a good summary of Jesus' point here
 - The statement is actually from Luke's Gospel, and even if the line wasn't originally written by Matthew, I agree it's a good summary
 - The point is that Jesus came to save all who believe, and so who are we to think less of any of Jesus' children
 - In fact, we can understand the Lord's heart for His children by comparing it to the way a shepherd seeks after a lost sheep
 - In v.12 Jesus says as a shepherd guards a flock of 100 sheep, he can't let his responsibility for the flock overshadow His concern for the individual
 - Even if just one sheep should go astray, he will leave the 99 for a time to search for the one
 - There is a risk in leaving the 99 because while he's gone looking, something could happen to the flock
 - But still he goes, and before we make the application we should ask why does the shepherd take this risk?
 - Because individual sheep are always going astray
 - I doubt there are many days in which shepherds don't have to search for lost sheep at some point
 - So if a shepherd wasn't willing to go after a lost sheep, soon he would have no flock at all
 - And that's the point...a key responsibility of the shepherd is keeping the flock together and unharmed
 - Jesus says the Father's heart is to rejoice over the return of the one, more than the remaining of the 99
 - That should be the heart of the shepherd too...that we make our ministry about restoration, recovery and return of sheep
 - Not the unhealthy control, containment and condemnation of sheep who get in the way or compete with our work
- Next week we pick up here again and move ahead in a conversation of how to restore stray sheep
 - But as I leave you today, let me suggest a few takeaways I'd like you to consider from today's text
 - First, you're not competing with other Christians, so don't make comparisons

- Not everyone has the same gift or calling, not everyone will use the same methods, not everyone will gain the same results
- Leave judgment to the Master
- Secondly, serve one another in humility and receive service from others in joy as if from Christ
 - Let's value sacrificial service, not look down at those who serve us
 - And if you are not seeking ways to serve your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, you should make that a priority
 - Because serving others humbly is the path to eternal honor
- Finally, become aware of how your words and actions may lead to stumbling, either in your own walk or in their influence over others
 - And when you discover it, Jesus says do anything necessary to curtail that negative influence
 - Because there are eternal consequences

- In a moment of pride and selfishness, the twelve apostles inadvertently became stumbling blocks for another disciple of Jesus
 - John told Jesus about an encounter they had with another of Jesus' disciples who had been trying to cast out demons in Jesus' name
 - Because that man wasn't a part of the inner group of twelve, the apostles assumed he was acting out of turn and tried to stop him
 - But Jesus quickly rebuked his apostles, saying that whoever this guy was, he was engaged in a common mission
 - That is whoever is for you – those who seek to glorify Jesus and serve the Kingdom – that person is on your side
 - And then Jesus pivoted into a teaching on stumbling blocks
 - Jesus charged His disciples with inhibiting the other man's obedience
 - He said they were a stumbling block and declared woe to any follower who became a stumbling block to other believers
 - Speaking in hyperbole, Jesus said it would be preferable to drown or sever body parts than to engage in that behavior
 - I'm sure the apostles were shocked and embarrassed to discover that their treatment of that disciple had been so misguided
 - They thought they were protecting Jesus' honor and preserving good order among His followers
 - But in reality, they were just protecting their own selfish interests
- Jesus ended with a parable about 99 sheep, which explained how the Father sees a wandering sheep like the one the apostles confronted
 - He said the Father rejoiced over a wayward disciple when he is turned back to the flock
 - Wandering sheep are a fact of life for a shepherd, so he's accustomed to chasing them down
 - But when he encounters one, he doesn't beat the sheep until it repents for wandering away
 - Nor does the shepherd excommunicate the sheep from the flock as penalty for having dared leave in the first place
 - No, a good shepherd goes in search of the stray, and when he finds it, he gently leads it back to the flock
 - That was the mission of the Messiah...to seek and save the lost, not to criticize and rebuke them
 - So that's how Jesus wanted His disciples operating in His name
 - But that's not what the apostles did...
 - When they encountered someone they believed to be a wandering sheep, they didn't try to restore him, they tried to shut him down
 - And when that didn't work, they went to Jesus hoping Jesus would take action

against him

- And to justify their actions, pointed to the fact that this disciple was not part of Jesus' inner circle, which just exposed their pride
- So not only were the disciples wrong in their assessment of the man, but they were also wrong in their response to him
 - First, they incorrectly judged the man by thinking he was working against Jesus when in reality he was on their side
 - Secondly, even if they believed the man was sinning, they should have taken steps to restore him not penalize him
- It was their second mistake that prompts Jesus to move into a new section of teaching on how believers respond to a wandering sheep

Matt. 18:15 “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Matt. 18:16 “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

Matt. 18:17 “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matt. 18:18 “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

- We've reached a well-known passage in Matthew's Gospel known as Jesus' instructions on church discipline
 - What Jesus gives us here is a patient, loving and gentle approach to leading a wayward sheep back into fellowship
 - But the passage is so often quoted out of context, that I feel we've lost some appreciation for the larger context of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18
 - And as a result, it can be applied in ways that run contrary to the purpose Jesus had in mind
 - Before we look at the details, the first thing to note is these instructions are not some “Break Glass in Emergency” response to extreme situations
 - Jesus says we follow this process when a brother sins
 - How often do we encounter believers sinning around us?
 - Obviously, this is the everyday, normal way we help one another stay close to Jesus and we should be following it regularly
 - We all suffer temptations to stray, and in fact, we all *will* stray from time to time
 - And when someone departs away from the straight and narrow, Jesus tells us here how to respond in love
 - And to do so without sinning ourselves

- And that process begins in the most obvious of ways...when a brother (or sister) sins and we become aware of it
 - Maybe we see the person do something out of character or perhaps we discover they are engaged in persistent sin
 - Maybe the problem is they have come under false teaching or a corrupting influence
 - Perhaps we realize they are harboring bitterness and an unforgiving heart toward someone else
 - Maybe we see they have become haughty or arrogant or maybe they are simply lax in their walk with Jesus
 - When we see this in a brother or sister, the Bible says we have an obligation to deal with it ourselves
 - We go to him or her in private to confront them about the issue
 - This rule means we don't go to other people before we go to the individual... period.
 - Talking about someone's misdeeds with others before talking to the person directly is a form of gossip
 - So don't share your concern with a pastor or on the prayer chain or in social media or with your small group before talking to the person directly
 - So the first rule to avoiding becoming a gossip is to get comfortable with confronting people about their sin
- We go talk to the person in private as soon as possible with gentleness and patience and a loving spirit
 - Speak to them honestly about your concerns, and hear them out as they respond in defense or explanation
 - You may cry with them, laugh with them, hug them, pray for them...be Jesus to them by seeking to bring a sheep home
 - Private in-person discourse is the only way to engage in that kind of one-on-one ministry with a wandering brother
 - And it's also the most likely way to succeed in winning them back from their sin
 - Because it's much harder for someone to confess and repent in a public forum than in a private moment
 - And when you meet that person, remember that the point of the conversation is to win them back to Christ, *not to you!*
 - The goal is to win them to obedience to Christ, not to win an argument with them
 - You aren't trying to force them into a corner
 - It's not your place to make demands for restitution, or to give them the roadmap for changing their lives
 - Neither do we try to force them to comply or make threats of any kind against them

- This is not an intervention – it's an invitation to repent
- The goal is to encourage them back to the flock, not to exercise authority or control over them
- By the way, when Jesus says go, He means have a personal conversation where you see their face and hear their voice and they can see and hear yours
 - In-person conversation is in view here and there are multiple reasons why that is what Jesus asks
 - First, in-person communication makes clear we are sincerely concerned for the individual
 - Secondly, it reduces the chance for misunderstandings since body language plays an important part in our communication
 - Thirdly, it allows us to see their response in the moment so we can tailor our choice of words to best effect
 - Today, we communicate in ways never imagined in Jesus' day, primarily in electronic forms of communication
 - Email has replaced written letters, texting has replaced phone calls, and social media has replaced face-to-face gatherings
 - These modern methods of communicating have their place, and they are convenient
 - But they are not compatible with Jesus' intent in Matthew 18:15
 - Texting someone they are sinning or sending long manifestos by email generally do more harm than good in these situations
 - We're communicating to that person that we want to make our opinions known
 - But at the same time, we're also saying we don't care enough about that person to invest in a face-to-face encounter
 - You're letting the style of communication overshadow the content
 - Furthermore, texting or email often makes the situation worse because we tend to lower our guard when communicating in those ways
 - The impersonal nature of texting and email can lead us to say things in rude or thoughtless ways...things we never would have said in person
 - How many of us have sent an email or text we wish we could take back?
 - Or have you ever reread some text or email you sent in a heated moment and been surprised at what you typed?
 - While we can say dumb things in personal conversations too, it's far less frequent and easier to walk back in the moment
 - A simple rule of thumb for how to handle difficult conversations is never deliver bad news in writing, only deliver it in person
 - When I've forgotten this rule and delivered criticisms or complaints by an email or text, I've usually regretted it deeply
- So Jesus tells us to meet face-to-face because it's better for us and better for the person

we're trying to help

- So don't take the easy way out...if you have something to say to someone, go to them personally, Jesus says
 - If they disagree with your concern, be prepared to share Scripture to back your concerns
 - Sometimes in the course of your discussions, you may discover your information was inaccurate
 - Maybe the person wasn't doing what you suspected or there was some other reasonable explanation, and therefore your concerns were unfounded
 - If that happens, you'll be thankful you kept the matter confidential rather than spreading false rumors about someone
- On the other hand, if they respond to your concerns in humility and repentance, then Jesus says you have won (or gained) your brother
 - He means you have brought that lost sheep back into the fold walking with Jesus again
 - Obviously, this is the best-case outcome, and if it happens, you have met your goal and the case is closed
- And in other cases, you won't reach an agreement on the matter, and if so, don't press further...depart as friends and remain patient
 - Allow time for the Spirit to use your words to bring conviction to the person's heart
 - Don't demand instant repentance...most people need time and space to respond properly
- This process places love for the person above all else, so by dealing with the matter in person and in private, you have loved that person
 - I wonder how many believers could have been restored if two people had just had a personal, private conversation
 - To approach a misbehaving believer in any other way is not only less likely to succeed, it's also potentially a sin on our part
- If you do not reach agreement and if after some time there is no change, then you are required to take additional steps, Jesus says
 - Jesus says we try again but this time taking one or two more believers with us to confirm the matter
 - When Jesus says "confirm" the matter, He means to confirm the truth of it in the heart of the person acting in sin
 - To explain what He means, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 19:15

Deut. 19:15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed."

- In the Law Israel was commanded to require multiple witnesses to testify to the truth in any matter
 - The idea is self-explanatory: it's easy for anyone to throw false accusations around
 - And if a single accusation were enough to convict a person, then we could all become victims of slander sooner or later
 - So by having two or more independent witnesses confirming a charge, we significantly reduce the likelihood of false convictions
- Now in this case, Jesus is talking about convicting someone in a court
 - He's speaking about convicting a person's conscience by encouraging them to adopt a more honest view of themselves
 - By bringing other witnesses, we increase our chances that the person will see our concerns as valid and worthy of attention
- When one person tells us we are in error and need to change course, we can easily dismiss their concerns as bias or misinformation or lying
 - We call such a response to the truth "denial"
 - We deny that their facts are correct or that their assessment of our behavior is fair
 - So in our denial, we feel free to continue in sin without paying attention to their critique
- But when two or three respectable Christians come to us as a unified front bringing a common complaint, our situation changes
 - Under those circumstances, two or three witnesses confirm the matter to us, meaning they reinforce the truth of it
 - At that point, denying the facts or claiming bias becomes unreasonable and makes us appear foolish
- And hopefully that team effort will cause the person to abandon denial and repent, and if they do, the matter is concluded
 - Once again, the small group has succeeded in restoring a wandering sheep back into the flock
 - And the Father in Heaven is rejoicing over their return
- But what if the person refuses to budge...what if they are so stubborn they won't listen to reason even when presented by a group of trustworthy friends?
 - When we refuse to accept one person's feedback, it's denial, but when we reject correction from a team, it's now become defiance
 - And defiance to Christ and His word is simply incompatible with fellowship in the body of Christ
 - So Jesus says if a small group of two or three can't convince the person to change his or her ways, it's time to go public
 - When the Church is faced with the defiance of a brother or sister, we must bring the matter before the whole body
 - Notice we've gone through two steps of *private* confrontations before allowing

the person's situation to become public

- That tells you how much the Lord wants us to protect the honor of our brothers and sisters in the body
- The purpose in this step is *not* to re-adjudicate the facts or to try the person in a court of public opinion
 - The purpose is to bring awareness of the person's defiance to everyone in the body so that this person has nowhere to hide
 - Everywhere they go and everyone they fellowship with in the body will bring them back to the same conversation
 - They won't be able to escape their sin nor pretend it doesn't matter because it will be the only conversation they have
- The goal of this step is the same as prior steps: to bring the believer to recognize their sin so they will cease wandering and return to the flock
 - It's a form of peer pressure applied in love and in a sincere desire to help a person
 - Hopefully the person's defiant spirit will be broken and in its place will come a soft and repentant heart
- But in the worst case scenario, some believers will be so determined to remain in their sin that they will cut off their nose to spite their face
 - They will accept the loss of all fellowship in the body to avoid having to repent, and when this happens, Jesus says let the person go
 - He says if they will not listen to the counsel of the entire church body, the person is to be set outside fellowship
 - He says let them be as a Gentile and tax collector, which is euphemism from Jesus' day
 - A Jew would not associate in any way with Gentiles or with Jews who worked for the Romans collecting taxes
 - A Jew wouldn't eat with them, allow them to enter their homes or even speak with them
 - Now in the case of Gentiles or tax collectors, such behavior wasn't necessary or proper
 - And as we know Jesus often violated those Jewish norms
 - So Jesus isn't endorsing Jewish treatment of tax collectors and the like
 - He was simply illustrating the degree to which we should cut off the defiant brother or sister
 - We have nothing to do with the person...we bar them from participating in the body at any level
 - Should the church reach that last resort and put a person out of fellowship, the entire body must respect this decision
 - We cannot give the person comfort or sympathy in that situation until they

soften their position and repent

- The whole idea is to use fellowship with the body as the carrot to get them to do the right thing
- And in the end, it's for their own good...because a sheep that continues to wander away from the flock is in danger
 - They stand to risk far more in eternity for their failure to repent than what we are taking from them in the body now

Heb. 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb. 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

Heb. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Heb. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

Heb. 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- Unfortunately, our modern lifestyle undermines the effectiveness of this method
 - In the first century, you would typically find one church in a given city or district under the authority of one set of elders
 - So if a person defied authority in the church and was set out of fellowship, they had nowhere else to go
 - That made this technique especially effective
 - But today, we have at least one church body on every city block and often more than one
 - And these churches aren't working under common leadership
 - So if a lost sheep is placed under pressure to repent, they only need to walk down the street to escape the discipline
 - That's largely why we don't see this process used as often as we should
 - Because people under discipline usually refuse to submit to leadership
 - They take their ball and go home at the first challenge rather than submit
 - Here's the thing about submission...it's not submission when we only obey on things we prefer or support...that's agreement
 - True submission is obeying in matters where we don't agree
 - Running away when you're confronted over your sin is never a pathway to great

spiritual maturity and sanctification

- It didn't work for King Saul, it didn't work for Jonah, and it won't work for us
- Meanwhile, the value of sticking around and submitting to your church leaders is immeasurable
- By the way, the requirement to submit to the church in matters of discipline doesn't turn on whether the facts are on your side or not
 - You can be 100% right on the facts and yet you're still expected to submit to the church body
 - And in the long run, we will be better off spiritually by submitting in all cases even when we're right on the facts
 - Because the purpose of submission isn't to determine right and wrong
 - The value in submission is the humility it produces in our heart
 - Yes, sometimes the Lord exposes our sin to others so they will call us to account for what we did and we will be properly humbled by it
 - But it's relatively easy to submit to discipline when you know you're wrong
 - But it's another thing to remain submitted to authority when you believe you're unjustly accused
 - And sometimes, the Lord will allow us to suffer the injustice of false accusations or unfair judgments to bring us even greater sanctification
 - If you can remain humble and submitted when falsely accused, then you are truly walking in our Lord's footsteps
 - Because that's exactly what He did for you
 - So that's the value of not running away from discipline...the Lord may use it to correct us and humble us, regardless of the facts
 - So if someone brings sin to your attention, receive it with an open heart
 - Don't run away, allow the Lord time to use this process to grow you spiritually
 - Remember, discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful
 - Yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness
- Finally, Jesus is so serious about restoring lost sheep, He tells the disciples that as they apply this process, they will be representing Jesus' judgments on earth
 - In v.18 Jesus says truly whatever you bind or loose on earth has been bound or loosed in Heaven
 - To bind or loose refers to the decision of a court, as in to bind is to convict and to loose is to acquit
 - We last saw these terms used when Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom
 - As we noted then, Jesus is saying that the apostles would have unique power to execute justice within the church
 - So every Christian is to follow Jesus' rules for restoring wandering sheep

- In the Church today we leave final judgment to the Lord
- If someone doesn't submit to Church leaders on a matter, we know that in the end the Lord will judge between us
- If we were wrong and treated the person inappropriately, the Lord will shield them and make our error clear in time
- If they were wrong, then the Lord will address their failure to submit at the Judgment Seat
- But under apostolic rule, the Church experienced instant judgment according to the judgment of the apostles
 - The apostles possessed unique power to exercise authority and Jesus demanded the Church obey the apostles' judgments without exception
 - If and when there was defiance to an apostle's judgment in any matter, Jesus is saying He would back the apostles 100%
- Justice would be swift and sure to set an example for all generations in the Church
 - We remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they defied Peter
 - And you may remember what Paul did to the man in Corinth who disobeyed his authority?

1Cor. 5:1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

1Cor. 5:2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

1Cor. 5:3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

1Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

1Cor. 5:5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- This is what Jesus is talking about...He was so serious about obedience in the body that He invested the early leaders with these powers
 - But He wanted this power exercised with a love for the flock
 - Instead of harboring pride in their status and prejudice toward other disciples, Jesus wanted them to think like shepherds
 - Shepherds aren't men of status and honor...they are lowly and uncelebrated caretakers of flocks
 - A shepherd's goal is to keep a flock together, so when one strays, they make every effort to bring it back
 - Literal shepherds chase over hills and valleys retrieving wandering animals

- Spiritual shepherds confront disobedient brothers and sisters calling them to repent and return to obedience to Jesus
- In all cases, our goal is restoration, not condemnation, maintaining the unity of the flock, not seeking to disqualify individuals within it
 - And though the process Jesus outlines here is important, it only works when applied with loving intent and a pastoral approach
 - And if we pursue it vindictively or in the hope of running someone off, we're the one leading others to stumble
 - And remember what Jesus said about those who would stumble one of His children

- Today we reach the final part of Jesus' discourse in Matthew 18, and probably the most important topic in this chapter
 - This next part of Jesus' teaching is so frequently quoted out of its context that most people have probably misunderstood it
 - So as we walk through it today, we need to do some careful scholarship if we're to follow the thread of Jesus' teaching
 - Beginning by remembering the context of His teaching
 - Because everything Jesus says in this chapter is part of a single, connected conversation
 - It began when Jesus rebuked those twelve men for having interfered with another disciple's efforts to serve Jesus
 - They intervened out of pride and in the process they became stumbling blocks for that individual
 - Then Jesus explained His disgust with anyone who stumbles another brother
 - We need to handle wayward, wandering sheep correctly, and last week Jesus gave us the method to use in dealing with sinning believers
 - The method consisted of three steps, beginning with one-on-one private counsel by an individual and then by a small group
 - Secondly, it graduates to a public call to account before the church
 - Then ultimately it moved to ostracizing the individual as a last resort
 - The whole process is applied in love and in the hope of bringing the person to repentance and a restored place of fellowship
- Then at the end of our passage last week in v.18 Jesus tells the apostles that as the church engages in this process, the leaders represent Jesus
 - He said that in process of carrying out these difficult decisions, the outcome will reflect the Lord's will for that person
 - Whether the church binds (meaning convicts) or looses (meaning acquits) a person, Jesus says the outcome is God-ordained
 - Jesus works behind the scenes to manage the affairs of the church in matters of disciples ensuring that the process reflects His purposes
 - Which Jesus explains in the next part of our passage

Matt. 18:19 “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 18:20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

- As I mentioned, these two verses have been frequently misquoted out of context and usually moved into a context of fellowship or prayer
 - But as you can see, the context here is church authority and discipline

- Notice in v.19, Jesus says “again I say to you...” which indicates that this thought is connected to His previous statement
- We might say it this way: “Let me emphasize this point further...”
- So Jesus’ statement in v.19 is not a new thought...it is a continuation of His earlier thought intended to emphasize it further
 - Jesus says when two believers agree on earth about anything that they may ask, then it shall be done by My Father in heaven
 - Jesus is still on the subject of the discipline process for a wayward believer and we see this by His reference to “two”
- Two believers agreeing on some matter points us back to the correction process He just outlined where two or more go to confront a lost sheep
 - When 2 or more witnesses confirm the matter of a believer’s sin, then that judgment has been done or confirmed by the Father
 - The process has the backing and authority of Heaven, because we are working in unity by the Spirit to carry out Jesus’ instructions
- Likewise, Jesus adds in v.20 that where two or more are gathered in His name, He will be there in their midst confirming the outcome
 - Once again, this promise refers specifically to the process of church discipline and once more we see Jesus using the 2 or more reference
 - So when we work through the disciplinary process, we can know Jesus is working in that moment through us
 - He is in our midst, as it were
 - This is a striking statement of the Lord’s sovereignty in overseeing the adjudication of church discipline through its leaders
 - Jesus is promising to move hearts, direct decisions and drive outcomes in order to arrive at His purpose in the end
 - We may not always like the outcome, especially if we are the one under scrutiny
 - And we may believe that the church’s decision wasn’t right or fair and in some cases, it may be incorrect or unjust
 - But Jesus is telling us that those decisions will happen under His authority despite any perceived flaws and work to the greater good
 - Knowing this we have all the more reason to submit to the process and accept its outcome as God ordained
 - And it also means that when we run away from a church disciplinary process, we disobey Christ
 - Look, Jesus is *really* serious about His Church reaching out to help those who are not walking closely with Him
- Now before we move further in this passage, I want to take a moment to consider other ways in which these two verses are often interpreted
 - I don’t normally take time to do this, but in the case of vs.19-20, there is so much

poor interpretation out there, I feel I need to address it

- The first of these misinterpretations relates to v.19
- That verse says if two or more agree about something on earth, then it shall be done for them by the Father
- When this verse is taken out of context, it's often used to support the "name it, claim it" heresy
- That heresy claims Jesus is promising that the Father will do anything we request of Him so long as we have a group praying with us for it
 - Obviously, that interpretation is not only wrong, it's completely nonsensical and even comical
 - It is nonsense to expect that we can control God
 - Much less that He delights to do our bidding, giving us what we want no matter how selfish or outlandish our requests may be
- This teaching portrays the Creator God as a genie in a bottle, Who responds to us rather than the other way around
 - Word faith proponents manipulate scriptures like these in a calculated and manipulative appeal to the flesh
 - And it's no wonder that this kind of false teaching has found an audience in our day and culture
 - In our age of materialism and instant gratification, people flock to any teaching that says God gives you what you ask for
- The craziest thing about this false teaching is just how easy it is to disprove...you only need to *try it*
 - Try asking another Christian to pray with you for something you want and then see what God does next
 - Ask God that you win the lottery, or that He cure some incurable birth defect, or for the Dallas Cowboys to win a playoff game
 - Clearly these things require miracles, and though God *could* do these things, the real question is *will* He?
- The name it, claim it heresy teaches that Jesus' words in v.19 assure us that He always will...that God's will turns on what we say and do
 - But both the Bible and our real world experience proves the exact opposite
 - God does only as His will desires in all matters, and He calls His followers to pray for His will to be done, not for our will
 - Furthermore, when we do slip into a selfish mindset praying only for things we want, we quickly discover we were on the wrong path
 - For what we wanted will not come to pass in the end
 - So what do the "blab it and grab it" teachers tell us when we point out this inconsistency in their logic?
 - They will usually respond saying we didn't have enough faith to bring it about,

which is a distortion of another New Testament passage

- But even a young Bible student knows that what they are proposing is not biblical theology...it's Abbott and Costello logic
- It's a complete farce, it's a shell game where they keep changing the answers to keep you from noticing the lie underneath
- So v.19 does not promise we can claim anything we want from God and so long as we have others in agreement, God is obliged to give it to us
 - That's not the true God, that's a genie and genie's don't save
 - And any god who would obey our will is simply no god at all
- And then in v.20, we often encounter another misinterpretation that produces an opposite effect from the one associated with v.19
 - Taken out of context, we are told that v.20 says when 2 or more Christians gather in any circumstances, Jesus becomes present with us
 - We typically hear this verse quoted as a positive encouragement to the church body to expect Jesus to be where the church is
 - Yes, when we gather as the body of Christ, Jesus is among us, but the error in this interpretation is in what is implied
 - When we read this verse absent the context, we may conclude that somehow Jesus is less around us when we are alone
 - And that is completely wrong...Jesus is always with us at all times
 - Jesus has placed His Spirit in each of us...100% of His Spirit, and that doesn't change no matter where you are or who you're with
 - If you are marooned on a deserted island, you will have no less of Jesus with you on that island than you have right now here
 - So when we teach that 2 or more are needed to have Jesus present, we're inadvertently suggesting that Jesus comes and goes
 - We're distorting His words and confusing believers concerning the nature of Jesus' presence in our lives
 - To be clear, Jesus delights to see His body gathered and we should gather together regularly
 - But that doesn't limit how much of Jesus we can know and experience on our own
- So v.19 can be twisted to suggest we can have more in our relationship with God than is true while v.20 can be twisted to imply we might get less
 - And the common denominator in both cases is that these verses are taken out of context
 - Anytime we divorce a single verse or passage of Scripture from its surrounding text, we're on the road to misinterpretation
 - Proper context is the key to understanding the Bible properly, because context connects the dots driving us down a path

- I think of context in biblical interpretation like the steel spheres hanging from wires in a pendulum swing
 - As the first ball strikes the second in the swing, the force is transferred and the motion continues down the line
 - If you were to remove one of those spheres in the middle, the action stops immediately because there is no transfer of energy
- That's the way context works in interpreting the Bible...each verse conveys the thought forward one step at a time in a continuous action
 - If we remove one verse from the passage and try to study it in isolation, we've stopped the movement of the idea
 - We've lost the thread of the conversation in the text, which then forces us to substitute our own conversation in its place
 - In this passage the conversation is about a process of discipline and restoration, so vs.19-20 must be understood in that context
- So speaking of thread, where does Jesus go next in this conversation? Well, he takes us to the next logical place, the place we *must* go when believers sin

Matt. 18:21 Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

Matt. 18:22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

- Sometime later, the apostles began pondering Jesus' teaching on restoring lost sheep, and questions came to mind
 - And Peter gathers enough courage to ask Jesus a question about this process, specifically does this process have a reasonable limit?
 - In the case of a brother who sins repeatedly how many times should Peter be expected to show forgiveness to that person?
 - And Peter suggests perhaps seven times is a reasonable limit
 - Peter proposed this limit with selfish intent, because he knew it would make him appear magnanimous by Pharisaic standards
 - Under Pharisaic teaching of the day, a Jew was only required to forgive three offenses by the same person
 - After any subsequent offense, a Jew could rightfully withhold forgiveness from a person on the grounds his duty had been met
 - Because of that teaching, forgiveness in Israel became a thing to be earned and deserved, and it was a privilege that could be easily lost
 - In fact, under Pharisaic rule any failure to follow the Law brought severe penalties that were applied without mercy
 - And opportunities for forgiveness and restoration were extremely limited and

- could require significant restitution
 - So when Peter suggested seven times, he was setting a much higher standard than the Pharisees'
 - And in the process, Peter expected to appear generous by comparison
- Once again, Peter and the rest of the apostles had confused man's way of running a religion with God's way of running His church
 - God ways of viewing mercy and forgiveness is very different than Peter's and Peter's question reveals those differences
 - For example, we can see Peter understood forgiveness to be something handed out by men
 - Because Peter assumes *he* would decide when enough is enough
 - That's what Pharisees did in Israel, and so Peter assumed the same would be true for the Church as well
 - But the problem is mankind has a finite limit to the amount of forgiveness we are willing to extend to another human being
 - We may think we can forgive someone forever but our hearts are wicked and our pride gets in the way
 - So despite our best intentions, eventually we will succumb to anger or resentment or bitterness or just grow tired of the effort
 - Knowing this, we take care in how we hand out forgiveness...we conserve it, ration it, only allocating it when it's most deserved
 - Or more often, only when it best suits our interests in granting it
 - Moreover, Peter and the other apostles had been taught that granting a person unlimited forgiveness simply wasn't wise
 - After all, if a person could simply say "I'm sorry" and all is forgiven, wouldn't that just encourage more misbehavior?
 - Isn't there a proper place for penance to make repeated violations less likely?
 - And what about restitution? Shouldn't the person satisfy us in some way before we extend our forgiveness to them?
 - That's why Peter thought himself generous in offering seven "get out of jail free" cards to his sinning brother
 - He was showing more generosity than most, yet still he wasn't willing to hand out freebies forever
 - At some point a person would have to be made to account for their offense, Peter assumed
- That's how he and the apostles were thinking about forgiveness and it's how we all tend to think about forgiveness in the Church
 - But praise the Lord that this is not how God grants forgiveness in the body of Christ nor is it the way He wants us to operate with one another
 - Jesus explains how it actually works by correcting Peter's standard and

explaining God's view of forgiveness

Matt. 18:22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Matt. 18:23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

Matt. 18:24 "When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

Matt. 18:25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

Matt. 18:26 "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'

Matt. 18:27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

Matt. 18:28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'

Matt. 18:29 "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'

Matt. 18:30 "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

Matt. 18:31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

Matt. 18:32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

Matt. 18:33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'

Matt. 18:34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

Matt. 18:35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

- Peter proposed a generous limit of forgiving seven times but Jesus responds that the standard should be seventy times seven (or seventy seven in the NIV)
 - Seventy times seven equals 490, which is much more forgiveness, but even then Jesus was not setting a literal limit
 - He was simply playing off of Peter's words to show how far God wants us to go in forgiveness
 - In other words, God's requirement is limitless forgiveness...not seven times, not 490 times...but every time

- Believers who respond to our counsel and repent of sin must be forgiven every time they sin because we don't own forgiveness
 - In the body of Christ, forgiveness is not something we control and hand out to one another as we see fit
 - Forgiveness is exclusively offered by the Lord on His terms, and we merely represent Him in the process of restoring lost sheep
 - We don't get to determine when someone deserves forgiveness, because that choice belongs to Jesus alone
- Jesus says every time someone comes to repentance after having sinned, we are to extend forgiveness to that person and restore them
 - They are restored in fellowship and welcomed back into the body without condition and without limit
 - Forgiveness comes with no strings attached, because their sin is against God, not us, and He sets the standard for forgiveness
- Now of course, in the process of restoring someone, the church may stipulate certain standards for future behavior according to the Bible's teaching
 - We may ask the person to respect certain boundaries in their life to help that person remain in obedience
 - We may ask them to make some amends to those they hurt to facilitate reconciliation
 - And in some cases, a serious sin may require removing someone from serving in a position of authority over the body
 - But in all cases, repentance is sufficient to restore full fellowship
 - So we do not have the right to impose our own, more restrictive standards of forgiveness on the process of restoration
 - No matter how often someone makes a mistake...even the same mistake...if they respond in repentance, we forgive them
 - Because as a practical matter, the unity of the body wouldn't be possible otherwise
 - If repeating the same sins disqualified us from other's forgiveness, who could ever remain in fellowship?
 - How many of us can say we've managed to avoid ever committing the same sin twice?
 - Who among us can say we always acknowledge our sin, and then we successfully avoid ever committing that same sin again?
 - Truly, I would like to meet that person, but I'm confident I won't ever find that person because they don't exist
 - We all sin every day and usually in the same ways over and over again
 - And when we do that, aren't we expecting continual forgiveness from those who know us and love us?

- And yet how often will we tell someone else that they've gone too far and we can't forgive them any longer for what they do?
- Jesus says in the body of Christ the only test for extending forgiveness is repentance and there is no limit
- And let's remember that learning to forgive without condition is not just doing a nice thing for someone else...it's doing the best thing for yourself too
 - Chuck Swindoll once said:

"Every time an offense occurs, forgive. Every single time. If you do not, you will never be happily married. If you do not, you will never find a church you'll be content with. If you do not, you will never find a group you can get along with. You'll never be able to work for any company. You're just going to spend your entire existence looking for and expecting perfection but never finding it. That's not a happy way to live. Nor is it realistic."

- Finally, Jesus gives us this wonderful parable to explain why God's standard for His Church is unlimited forgiveness
 - Jesus opens the parable in v.23 by saying "for this reason", meaning here's the reason why I expect you to show such unconditional mercy
 - And in the parable we have a king settling a debt with a slave
 - Indentured servants (slaves) lived and worked in a master's home, and on occasion a master might extend credit to a slave
 - The slave would be granted additional provisions or materials beyond the value of their work
 - These loans had to be repaid through additional hours of work or by some other means
 - In this example, the king has allowed a particular slave to amass an unbelievably huge debt
 - A talent was a measure of weight equal to about 75 pounds
 - So 10,000 talents of silver was a debt of 750,000 lbs of silver, which would be worth \$195,000,000 today...it's ridiculous
 - Could you imagine the look on your spouse's face when they open the credit card bill and see a balance of \$195M?
 - So the day comes for the king to demand repayment, but the debt is so high that there is no way this person could ever repay it
 - Not even the Caesar of Rome could pay back such a debt
 - In fact, the Greek word Jesus uses for ten thousand is "myriad" which was the largest numeral in the Greek language
 - Furthermore, a talent was the largest unit of money in that day (like a \$1,000 bill today)

- So Jesus selected the largest Greek number and the largest unit of money to emphasize how deeply in debt this man was
- Now the king has no choice but recover what he can on his bad loan, beginning by selling the man, his possessions and his family to other masters
 - The slave would be separated from his family, left with nothing and subject to the whims of a new master who knew his poor history
 - So the slave pleads for mercy asking for patience and promising to repay the debt
 - It's a ridiculous promise... imagine a day laborer promising to repay you \$200M? Would you accept that guarantee?
 - Given the person has squandered \$200M already, what are the odds he can amass that fortune for himself? Zero
 - And yet he asks the king to consider his request, but the king does the man one better... the king forgives the debt altogether
 - The king was no fool, so he knew that the debt would never be repaid despite the slave's promises
 - So out of compassion he wipes the slate clean forgiving it entirely
- Then that slave goes to his debtors to collect what he is owed, and despite having received so much mercy himself, this slave shows no mercy to others
 - He finds a fellow slave who owed him 100 denarii, or about 3 months wages, and begins to choke him, forcing him to repay
 - When that slave asks for patience as he had done earlier, he refuses to extend the mercy that he himself received
 - A moment earlier he had been buried under so much debt, he couldn't possibly recover
 - Yet now, though he owes no bills, he acts ruthlessly against one who owes him money
 - When news gets back to the king, he calls the ungrateful slave to account for his lack of mercy to his brother
 - And when he realized how the man responded to his grant of grace, he reverses himself and demands the man pay his debts through torture
 - And Jesus compares the king's response to the Father's view of us when we live with an unforgiving heart toward our brothers
- So let's make the proper application, beginning with the obvious that Jesus is the king and we are His slaves
 - As obvious as that point may be, it's central to understanding the entire lesson Jesus is teaching here
 - Because unless and until we adopt an appreciation of our relationship to Christ, we will not deal with others properly in matters of forgiveness
 - We are under the authority of Jesus, our King, Who has forgiven us an immeasurable sin debt

- And that fact obligates us to respond differently to the sin debts of others who share the same relationship to that King
- First, you cannot possibly imagine how much sin Jesus has forgiven you to date, because you have no idea how much you have committed
 - You may agree that you've done some bad things in your time, but you have no idea how many or how bad
 - Can you imagine what a debt \$200M feels like? Can you even imagine what \$200M in cash looks like?
 - Neither can you fathom how much sin is present in your life from birth...you don't know the half of it
- And maybe in the beginning of your walk with Jesus, you came to him like that slave, bargaining over your debt
 - Perhaps you made promises to live a better life or to make good on your past offenses or in some other way "pay back" Jesus
 - Maybe you went to church regularly thinking you were paying Jesus back, or gave money to the church or said your prayers
- But the reality is you owed so much more than you could possibly pay, Jesus couldn't accept any of those bargains because they weren't enough
 - The only solution was for Jesus to wipe your debt clean to forgive it all, which is why Jesus died for you
 - That was the only payment possible or acceptable to the Father, and by His death, he cancelled your debt, the Bible says
 - You had an unimaginably high mountain of sin debt, and Jesus just took it all away
- Before we can learn to forgive others without condition or limit, we must first learn to live every day with an appreciation of how much forgiveness we have already received from Jesus
 - Then as we approach another believer who is sinning against us, we will have the right perspective on that moment
 - When they confess and repent of their sin, we will be ready to extend forgiveness because we know Jesus has forgiven them
 - And like the slave in the parable, we realize that whatever we may feel that person owes us pales in comparison to what we owed Jesus
 - And if Jesus has wiped clean their debt as He did ours, then we have no right to demand our brother pay that same debt to us
 - Now maybe you're tempted to respond that sometimes we need to set conditions for forgiveness as a form of accountability
 - If we forgive someone unconditionally, won't it give the person incentive to sin again in the future?
 - Oh Christian, be careful the standards you apply, for woe to you should God used the same standard in your case

- Would you want Jesus to approach your sin debt in the same way?
 - Do you want Jesus to withhold His forgiveness waiting to see if you straighten up first?
 - How well do you think you would survive that test?
 - That's not love, and it's certainly not God's heart, and we have no right to do less for your brothers and sisters than Jesus did for us
- If we are hard-hearted against our brothers and sisters in their moments of weakness and repentance, Jesus says the Father will do the same for us
 - To understand Jesus' point, we have to remember that every part of a parable must be translated into literal terms
 - Everything in the parable is a picture of something, not the literal of that thing
 - For example, in the parable the slaves owed money, but in the real world application we don't owe Jesus money
 - Ours is a debt of sin, and that debt must be repaid with a life, not with money, which is why Jesus died on the cross in our place
 - Likewise, in the parable the king tortures the slave when he discovers the slave's ungrateful attitude but we must translate that into a literal
 - So when Jesus says the Father will do the same to us, He means the Father will also hold us accountable for our hard heart
 - But obviously, the Father isn't going to torture us, or cast us into Hell as some might claim
 - Jesus means that just as the slave had consequences, so will the Lord bring consequences upon us both here and perhaps later at the Judgment Seat of Christ
 - Any believer who lives in bitterness, forever holding others' sins against them or mercilessly demanding others pay restitution taking a great personal risk
 - They are testing the patience of God, so although they remain saved by their faith, they may experience other repercussions
 - For example, the Lord may allow them to experience the consequences of their own sins while on earth
 - Or at their judgment, they may discover that their lack of mercy toward others was met with a lowered reward
- Here's the fundamental point to walk away with today...we all sin...we sin a lot...and Jesus died to erase all that debt
 - We gladly accepted His forgiveness when we needed it badly, so we can certainly afford to show a little mercy to one another now
 - None of us owe anyone anything in the area of forgiveness
 - We all owe Jesus everything, and He said forgive one another without limit to encourage the unity of the body
 - That is what it means to grow in the grace of Jesus Christ
 - And if we do this, we'll restore many sheep and keep the body of Christ strong in

faith and obedience

- Today we begin Chapter 19, and the chapter offers a break in the action from what we've been studying over the past month
 - So rather than engage in much review, let's just dive in

Matt. 19:1 When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan;

Matt. 19:2 and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

Matt. 19:3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"

- Right out of the gate Matthew drops us into a discussion of marriage and divorce
 - But before we consider Jesus' teaching on the subject, let's set the scene for this discussion
 - At the end of Chapter 17 and into Chapter 18 Jesus has been in Capernaum, in and around Peter's house
 - Capernaum is the fishing village on the westside of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus made His home for three years of ministry
- Now at the start of Chapter 19, Matthew says Jesus is on the move again, this time going south toward Jericho and crossing the Jordan
 - He eventually reaches a region of Judea east of the Jordan river, an area called Perea in Jesus' day
 - While Jesus is in this area He is followed by large crowds, which is what we see regularly now
 - Furthermore, Jesus heals those who come to Him, though we have no details of those circumstances
- And as a brief aside, we need to remember how exceptional these crowds were for that day
 - Celebrities, as we know them today, didn't exist in that age
 - And generally the rich and powerful were feared, not adored, and therefore people largely avoided them
 - So large crowds like this one following a man through the wilderness was truly extraordinary in that day
 - Surely, nothing like it had ever been seen before in Israel, and for that reason alone the Pharisees were deeply concerned
 - When one man can command such adoration, it's the makings of a revolution
 - And revolution would surely get the attention of Rome and likely bring an end to the Pharisee's power sharing arrangement
 - So they opposed Jesus for much more than religious reasons...they were concerned about losing their way of life
- And therefore, while Jesus is near Jerusalem in Perea, the Pharisees come down testing

(v.3) Jesus with a question

- They ask Jesus to render His opinion on the conditions for divorce, asking under what circumstances may divorce be permitted
 - Now why would these men care what Jesus thought about that issue, and for that matter why would the answer be in doubt?
 - Well, as was often the case with rabbis, there were competing opinions on the matter
 - An old joke says if you ask 3 rabbis the same question, how many different opinions will you get? The answer: 10
- Generally, rabbinical teaching on divorce fell into one of two camps: a conservative view and a liberal view
 - The conservative view taught that the only possible reason to divorce and remarry was for unfaithfulness in marriage
 - The liberal view taught that essentially any offense could be just grounds for divorce and remarriage
- So when the Pharisees asked Jesus to render His opinion on this issue, they were asking Jesus to pick a side in this debate
 - Notice Matthew says in v.3 that this question was being posed to Jesus as a test
 - Whichever way Jesus answered, He would affirm one group of religious leaders within Israel and likely alienate the other
- But the test *wasn't* forcing Jesus to pick sides among rabbis...
 - The test was whether the Pharisees could get Jesus to upset the Romans
 - Jesus is in Perea, and Perea was one of two regions within Judea under the control of Herod Antipas
 - Herod Antipas was one of Herod the Great's sons who inherited a portion of his father's territory after Herod the Great's death
 - Herod Antipas is best known for his conflict with John the Baptist
 - Back in Matthew 14 we learned how Herod imprisoned and ultimately beheaded John the Baptist
 - John offended Herod by publicly accusing him of entering into an unlawful marriage
 - Herod Antipas' brother was Herod Philip, and Herod Philip's wife was Herodias
 - Herod Antipas took a liking to Herodias and made her his wife, which was an act of adultery
 - John called it what it was, and for that he was put to death
- So now that Jesus has entered into Perea, Herod Antipas' territory, the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus into making the same mistake
 - Obviously, Jesus isn't worried about Herod, so He proceeds to answer the question according to the standard of Scripture, which is very conservative

Matt. 19:4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning **MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,**

Matt. 19:5 and said, ‘**FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH**’?

Matt. 19:6 “**So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.**”

- Jesus begins His answer at the place you have to begin in any discussion of marriage: the creation of man and woman
 - The very design of the male and female bodies hint of the union God would later establish and call marriage
 - God designed man’s body and woman’s body to join together physically in a clear and obvious way
 - Moreover, they must join together to obey God’s command to procreate and fill the earth
 - So the design of the human body tells us the Creator intended a man and woman to pair up and form a union called marriage
- Moreover, the *way* God created man and woman makes clear that He intended the union to be inseparable
 - In the Creation account, God didn’t create two people independently and then command them to join together
 - Instead, He created the Man first and then created the Woman from flesh taken out of the Man
- By creating Woman in that way, Adam’s marriage to his wife was literally a reuniting of his own flesh
 - That’s why Jesus says in v.6 that anytime a husband and wife join together, they are no longer two but one flesh
 - In God’s eyes, a husband and wife constitute a *reunion* of flesh, which means that the institution of marriage is inseparable
- In v.6 Jesus says that what God joins in this way “let no man separate”
 - That English translation isn’t very helpful because it sounds as if Jesus is pleading with us not to separate
 - A better translation would be “*may* no man separate” because Jesus is expressing the impossibility of separating the two
 - Since God originated the one-flesh relationship by the way He created Man and Woman there is no earthly mechanism to end it
 - Mankind simply does not possess the authority nor the ability to end it, no more than we can cut our own body in half and still live
- Therefore, on the question of divorce, Jesus points back to the Creation to explain that marriage establishes a one-flesh relationship

- And understanding the Bible's teaching on marriage and divorce requires we distinguish between two aspects of biblical marriage
 - First, a marriage is a covenant established between a man and a woman through the exchanging of vows
 - Then after the marriage covenant is in place, a "one flesh" relationship is established by a physical union of man and wife
- These two aspects of marriage are distinct and in fact, you can have one without the other
 - It's possible to have a marriage covenant without a one-flesh relationship
 - And it is also possible to establish a one-flesh relationship without a marriage covenant
- For example, two people who engage in sex before marriage, which the Bible calls fornication, are not establishing a marriage in that encounter
 - Fornication is not marriage because it is not accompanied by marriage vows, so there is no covenant established
 - However, a sexual union outside marriage does result in an immoral, one-flesh relationship, as Paul says

1Cor. 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!

1Cor. 6:16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."

- A man who joins himself with a prostitute (or has a one-night stand) establishes a one-flesh relationship, Paul says
- And because it's not accompanied by marriage vows, it's an immoral act and not a substitute for proper marriage
- Likewise, it's possible to enter into a marriage without establishing a one-flesh relationship
 - There are situations where someone marries a person who is on their death bed or in prison or about to go off to war
 - Then later that person dies before the marriage can be consummated
 - In that case, a marriage covenant existed because vows were exchanged, but a one-flesh relationship was never established
- So a typical, biblical marriage involves two things:
 - A marriage covenant is formed by an exchange of vows, and a one-flesh relationship is formed by a physical union made possible by marriage
 - This distinction between the covenant and a one-flesh relationship has important implications when it comes to divorce

- A marriage covenant may end in a divorce, but a legal divorce proceeding doesn't end a one-flesh relationship
- As Jesus said, no one may separate what God joins together
- So when a divorce happens, the marriage covenant is dissolved and it exists no longer, but the one-flesh relationship goes on
- Virtually all disagreements over divorce in the Church are the result of a failure to distinguish between these two aspects of marriage
 - And in this case it becomes clear that the Pharisees had missed that distinction as well

Matt. 19:7 They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?”

- The Pharisees challenge Jesus by quoting from the Law in Deuteronomy 24 where Moses gave instructions on divorce

Deut. 24:1 “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house,

- Moses allowed men to issue a divorce certificate if the man discovered some indecency in his wife
 - The Hebrew word used for indecency is *erwah*, which is literally the word nakedness, implying marital infidelity
 - So the Law allowed a man to divorce his wife if she was unfaithful to him
- The Pharisees pointed Jesus to this provision in the Law to challenge Jesus' claim that no man may separate a husband and wife
 - But Jesus wasn't saying that we can't end a marriage covenant
 - Like a covenant, a marriage covenant can be broken, and according to Deuteronomy 24, it can be ended by divorce
- Jesus was speaking of the one-flesh relationship which results from marriage and that, Jesus says, cannot be ended
 - His point was they were focusing on the wrong aspect of marriage
 - The Pharisees were debating the conditions for ending the marriage covenant
- But Jesus is saying that arguing over how to end a marriage covenant is largely irrelevant after you realize the permanence of the one-flesh relationship
 - So Jesus then reminds them of the true reason God allowed men to end their marriage covenants in Deut. 24

Matt. 19:8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.

Matt. 19:9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

- Jesus says Moses didn’t command divorce, rather he permitted it, and there is a big difference between commanding divorce and permitting divorce
 - Nowhere does God command us to divorce, and in fact the entire thrust of Scripture is in the opposite direction
 - We should do everything in our power to avoid divorce
 - And even if there are circumstances in Scripture that allow divorce, that shouldn’t be taken as encouragement to divorce
 - Next Jesus says the reason divorce was permitted in the Law was as a response to the sin of husbands who were unforgiving of their wives
 - Jesus calls it a hardness of heart, and He’s referring to a sinful practice of men in Israel in that day
 - In that day men possessed all the power in marriage while women had no legal rights in marriage
 - A woman could not establish a covenant nor end a covenant by herself
 - So if a husband wanted to end the marriage, she couldn’t stop him
 - A man could send his wife away from his home, leaving her literally homeless and destitute
 - Her only hope for survival would be for some other man to take her in and care for her
 - But before another man would take her into his house, that man would need assurance from her first husband that she wasn’t still married
 - If she was still married, then no man could take her into his home, otherwise he would be accused of adultery
 - Adultery was punishable by death under the Law, so no self-respecting man would take the risk
- So Jesus is saying that divorce was an accommodation for sin, not a license to sin
 - Had the Law not allowed for divorce, hard-hearted men would still have sent their wives away
 - And without a legal way to remarry, those women would have no possibility of rescue
 - Without a legal document proving she could lawfully marry, the woman would likely to die of starvation or exposure or fall prey to evil men
 - So God made a way for the woman to be saved from abandonment
 - With a divorce certificate, she could find a new husband willing to take her in and care for her

- That certificate of divorce was God's grace to women who were mistreated by their husbands and without hope otherwise
- But Jesus tells the Pharisees that provision doesn't mean God endorses divorce or that a divorce is free of consequences
 - Moreover, while a divorce ends a marriage and makes possible a new one, it doesn't end the one-flesh relationship
 - Which is why in v.9 Jesus says that even after a marriage ends in divorce, any remarriage is an act of adultery
- And now we know why a remarriage after a divorce is adultery...
 - Because divorce ends only one aspect of marriage, not the other
 - Divorce ends the marriage covenant but there is no way to reverse a one-flesh relationship once established
- One-flesh relationships exists until death, Paul says

Rom. 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

Rom. 7:3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

- Paul says the only way to be free to remarry under the law is to wait until the first spouse dies
- Because only when the flesh is gone does the one-flesh relationship dissolve
- Now I'm sure you noticed that in v.9 Jesus inserted an exception, saying "except for immorality"
 - Jesus says there is a situation in which a man and wife can be married and then divorce and then remarriage is still possible after that divorce
 - And that one situation is in the case of immorality, Jesus says
 - The Greek word for immorality is *porneia*, from which we also get words like pornography, and it refers generally to sexual sin
 - Interestingly, this Greek word is never used in the New Testament to refer to adultery
 - Notice in v.9 the words immorality and adultery both appear, and they are different Greek words
 - So the question is what specific situation was Jesus talking about when he said immorality?
 - The most common teaching in the church is that sexual unfaithfulness (adultery) is grounds for divorce and remarriage
 - Personally, I don't agree with that interpretation

- Because if engaging in an extramarital affair ends a one-flesh relationship, then we *can* separate what God joined together
- But Jesus said no man can separate that union
- So when Jesus says except for immorality, I believe He was speaking of a very specific situation
 - In Jesus' day it was normal to establish a marriage covenant first
 - And then a period of time would pass before the one-flesh relationship was established
 - The first step of establishing the marriage covenant was called a betrothal
 - A betrothal wasn't merely an engagement, like we do today...it established a marriage covenant
 - Vows were taken, a dowry was paid, and a covenant was established
 - At that point a true marriage existed even though the couple had not yet consummated the marriage or even met!
 - Then weeks, months and maybe even years would pass while the groom was preparing a home for his bride
 - During this time the man and his wife remained apart waiting for the day they could be together
 - During that time, they were legally husband and wife but they had not yet become one-flesh
 - Now if during this time one of them was unfaithful and committed sexual immorality (i.e., fornication), it was grounds for divorce
 - If the marriage ended on that basis, it still required a divorce since a marriage covenant existed
 - But because a one-flesh relationship had never been established, a new marriage was still a possibility for the betrayed spouse
 - This was exactly the situation that Joseph assumed he was facing when Mary turned up pregnant
 - Joseph had been betrothed to Mary, and he assumed Mary had been unfaithful to him during that betrothal period
 - So Matthew 1:19 says Joseph being a righteous man decided to divorce her secretly to spare her humiliation
- I believe this is the exception Jesus is offering here...an exception for those who are married but have yet to establish a one-flesh relationship
 - Under those circumstances, if sexual immorality takes place, then a divorce is permissible
 - And because a one-flesh relationship has not yet been established, then remarriage is also permissible
 - I believe that's why Jesus uses the Greek word for immorality rather than the word for adultery in v.9

- Because He was speaking of sexual sin prior to a one-flesh relationship, which is fornication or *porneia*
- Adultery is the Bible's term for sexual sin after a one-flesh marriage relationship already exists
- So if we find ourselves in a situation where a marriage covenant exists without a one-flesh relationship, then and only then are we eligible to divorce and remarry should sexual sin take place
 - For all other cases when one-flesh exists, then Jesus' standard rule would apply...there is no remarriage after divorce
 - Paul reaffirms this truth in 1 Corinthians 7

1Cor. 7:10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband

1Cor. 7:11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- Paul says the best option is to stay married, but if you divorce, then the next best option is to reconcile with your spouse
 - If you cannot reconcile, the only remaining option is to not remarry again...and there is no fourth option
 - Paul also emphasizes that this instruction is from the Lord, which is Paul's way of saying he's quoting Jesus' instructions
- So to summarize Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce, the biblical rule is that divorce is not permissible except for sexual immorality
 - If divorce happens before a one-flesh relationship has been established, then remarriage is permissible
 - If divorce happens after a one-flesh relationship has been established, remarriage is not permissible
 - And should we choose to remarry after a one-flesh relationship has been established, we commit adultery
- You might ask me what about situations involving divorce and remarriage for reasons other than sexual immorality?
 - What about an abusive marriage where there is unending strife or even physical conflict in the marriage?
 - What if children are in danger, what if reconciliation is simply not possible?
 - What if my ex-spouse has already remarried?
 - I don't have answers for every situation we might imagine
 - Under some circumstances, especially when a spouse or child is in physical danger, it may be best for a couple to separate
 - Or in the worst of cases, a legal divorce may be the best response to a bad

situation, which was the case with Deut 24

- But even then, remarriage is not possible because the one-flesh relationship persists until death
- If you're feeling a little shocked by this standard, then you're not alone...look at the disciples' response to Jesus' teaching

Matt. 19:10 The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."

Matt. 19:11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.

Matt. 19:12 "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

- The disciples hear Jesus' teaching, and they realize that Jesus not only rejected the liberal view of divorce, He took the conservative view a step farther
 - So they respond that if this is truly God's expectation for a relationship between a wife and husband, then it's better to remain single
 - If it's true we only get one marriage per life and the potential for picking the wrong person is so high, better not to pick at all
 - Better to live alone than risk getting hitched to someone who makes your life miserable, especially if we can't separate
 - But Jesus strongly disagrees with that suggestion saying only a few could accept or live by that standard
 - Jesus says there are three groups who will not enter into one-flesh relationships (i.e., eunuchs euphemistically)
 - Some are born unable to enter into a one-flesh relationship due to physical or mental limitations
 - Others are prevented from entering into a one-flesh relationship because they are made eunuchs in service to a king, etc.
 - And thirdly, some may choose not to marry because of the Kingdom, meaning they have a spiritual gift of singleness
 - For that last group, the Lord has gifted them to be content with never experiencing a one-flesh relationship
 - And it is a gift because it's not the natural state of our hearts
 - By that gift, the Lord frees a person's heart to remain 100% devoted to serving Him without the distraction of marriage
 - But apart from these examples, most people will have a strong natural desire for the affections and comforts of marriage

- And if that's you, you should seek marriage because avoiding marriage will only lead to more trouble in your life
- Go marry and once married hold on to that marriage with all your strength until death do you part, trusting God to work in it
- Now as we reach this point in the teaching, I'm fully aware that not everyone will agree with my interpretation of Jesus' teaching, especially of His exception
 - You may hold to the more common interpretation that Jesus' exception was speaking of marital infidelity, adultery during marriage
 - And I acknowledge the possibility that you may be right
 - Perhaps Jesus *was* teaching that any sexual unfaithfulness breaks the one-flesh relationship and permits remarriage
 - And because my interpretation of this Scripture may be incorrect, then as a pastor I must tread lightly in this area
 - Because if I am wrong about this text, I could direct people incorrectly in matters of divorce and remarriage
 - That would have serious repercussions...I might stand in the way of a God-ordained marriage
 - So when there is a reasonable possibility for differences of interpretation of Scripture (as here), we give grace for other views
 - In the case of Matthew 19:9, there is certainly room for disagreement
 - So if someone believes Matthew 19:9 allows for divorce and remarriage in cases of infidelity, we accept your view
 - Agreement with my view is not a requirement at VBVF for fellowship or service or leadership in the church
- Finally, I want to say a word about how we respond to the issue of divorce and remarriage in the lives of our brothers and sisters in the body
 - Sometimes, we have a tendency to treat divorce differently in some respects
 - We may be quick to remember God is against divorce yet we quickly forget God is equally against every form of sin
 - And if we're not careful, we can treat one kind of error differently than others
 - But it's no coincidence that Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce comes immediately after His teaching on forgiveness in the church
 - We all need forgiveness more than we even know, and none of us have unforgivable sins
 - Moreover, we can't single out one kind of mistake and hold it above others in the body
 - Nor can we become judges of everyone else's sin while we overlook our own
 - Mistakes in marriage are no different than mistakes in any other area of life...they are forgiven by the blood of Jesus
 - No one carries a stigma here, no one will be defined by their past mistakes,

because no one is beyond the grace of God

- If you are married today, honor God by remaining faithful to that marriage regardless of your past
- If you are not yet married, then consider Jesus' instructions carefully and take that step with sober appreciation for what Jesus expects

- I'm happy to say we land on a more pleasant topic today in our study of the Gospel of Matthew
 - Our study last week at the beginning of Chapter 19 required we deal with the difficult matter of divorce
 - But this week the topic changes back to the Kingdom of God
 - We study two moments in the course of Jesus' ministry that gave opportunity for a lesson on entering the Kingdom
 - The first of those comes today, and it centers on understanding the place of children in the Kingdom Program
 - We return to the moment of Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees about divorce, and what follows immediately after

Matt. 19:13 Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

Matt. 19:14 But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Matt. 19:15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

- As Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, someone brings a child before Jesus asking that Jesus would lay hands on the child
 - We know Jesus is in Perea, and earlier Matthew said He was followed by crowds and was healing people
 - So it's likely that mothers of small children who were in need of healing were carrying their children through the crowds to Jesus
 - And at some point, a woman must have thrust her child into Jesus' lap while He was speaking on divorce
 - And as this happens, the disciples rebuked the women for interrupting the proceedings and bothering Jesus with something so trivial
 - Because in that time of history and in this culture especially, men stood above women and children
 - Men made all decisions, owned all property, ruled over homes and nations, judged all matters and possessed all authority
 - While women and children took a backseat in all these affairs
 - And children occupied an especially low station in the societal pecking order
 - Parents loved their children no different than we do today, but they saw a child's place in the home and in society differently
 - Infant mortality was high and deadly diseases struck often
 - That reality led to a perspective that children weren't to be given much consideration until they reached adulthood
 - So until they reached adulthood, children were treated more like servants in the

home than family

- Which means children had no prominence or privilege in the home or in gatherings of any kind, and in fact they were typically ignored
 - A child was never the center of adult attention, and adults never deferred to the needs of children in public life
 - You remember Mary and Joseph misplaced Jesus on their return from Jerusalem and had to return to find Him in the temple
 - How could that happen? Because parents didn't give children the same degree of attention or concern as we do today
- Furthermore, in Judaism, children were not seen as candidates for religious conversion or even having need of God's mercy
 - First, all Jews were thought to be included in the Kingdom from birth, so of course in Jewish thinking there was no need to convert a child
 - Secondly, a child had no place in Jewish religious life until he or she reached adulthood – aside from token roles
 - Not until a boy had his bar mitzvah at age 13 or a girl had her bat mitzvah at 12 did a child participate in Jewish religious life
 - But what about a child's sins? Rabbinical teaching held that the sins of the child didn't rest on the child himself but instead rested on the father
 - But at the bar mitzvah, the son became accountable to God for his own sin
 - The boy's father would say prayers at the bar mitzvah thanking God that his son's sins no longer rested on his shoulders
 - After that point, the boy or girl was required to participate in fasting on Yom Kippur and participate in other adult rituals
 - That was the culture of these men, so children never factored into their expectations for serving the Kingdom Program
- So when mothers began interrupting Jesus for the needs of children during this important exchange on divorce, the disciples reacted in a predictable way
 - The disciples tried to stop this breach of etiquette with a rebuke
 - A rebuke refers to a strong word against someone, so you should imagine a stern, swift, even rude response on the disciples' part
 - As they try to stop the women from coming with their children, Jesus, in turn, rebukes His disciples
 - He says let the children alone, or in literal Greek permit the children
 - Before you assume that Jesus was striking a blow against cultural norms concerning women or children, look at the full context
 - Jesus is taking opportunity in this moment to teach His disciples about important Kingdom Program principles
 - We know this because Jesus immediately follows His rebuke by saying the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these

- Which tells us that Jesus was thinking of spiritual matters in this moment, not earthly or cultural matters
 - So then the question becomes what spiritual lesson was Jesus trying to teach His disciples through that encounter?
 - First, let's remember that the Kingdom of God is Jesus' term for Heaven or being saved as we say today
 - More specifically, it refers now to the Kingdom Program, when Christ works through the Church to recruit Kingdom citizens
 - And the Kingdom Program leads us into the Kingdom proper which will begin on earth at the Second Coming of Jesus
- So Jesus is teaching His disciples a principle or truth concerning the Kingdom Program and the Kingdom that follows
 - And the key to understanding what Jesus is saying is found in His phrase "such as these"
 - In other words, Jesus was saying the Kingdom Program is about reaching people who are like these children, including children
 - Jesus wanted to reach people the disciples hadn't given enough thought to reaching
 - So in that sense, Jesus uses children as a metaphor for people that society doesn't value, never sees or hears, and views as unimportant
 - People like children, who are without advocates, without rights and privilege and yet are not beyond God's reach
 - The poor, the outcast, the persecuted – eventually even Gentiles, a group these men never imagined were included in the plan
 - Serving those groups is not just part of the Kingdom Program...that mission lies at the heart of the Kingdom Program
 - And James tells us that it is the ultimate expression of our faith to seek out and serve those who are without power or privilege

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- James says when we direct our religious service toward people who are at the bottom of the scale (widows, orphans), we practice *true* religion
 - What makes it truer religion than serving the rich and powerful in the world?
 - Because we're serving people who cannot offer us anything in return for our service which means we do it with pure motives
 - And pure motives is the key to good ministry
- You know that the poor won't make a donation to your ministry in response to your

service, yet you serve them anyway

- The widow won't introduce you to her high society friends or invite you to play golf with her at the private club
- Nevertheless, if you devote yourself to serving people like that, you're truly doing the work of your Father, not your own desires
- And that was the problem James was facing...a fleshly church doing what they did for the wrong reasons
- So as these women and children were being shooed away by the disciples, Jesus corrects them saying these are the type of people you must serve
 - These are the kind of people Jesus wants to draw to Himself, and when they come to the Church seeking ministry, we are to receive them
 - The people who come with needs and problems are not getting in the way of ministry...they ARE the ministry
 - How ironic was it that disciples sent away mothers and children in need because they were too busy discussing biblical marriage!
 - That is Pharisaic thinking in a nutshell...missing the forest for the trees, straining a gnat and swallowing a camel
 - Spending endless hours debating minutia of Scripture while simultaneously overlooking its plain and obvious demands
 - Spending time discussing Scripture isn't wrong...the issue of divorce is important and deserves to be discussed
 - The problem was they forgot the purpose in understanding such matters...it is so that we serve the needs of the Kingdom better
 - We learn the Bible so we can live like Jesus and serve His purposes during the present age
 - We seek to understand how Jesus thought and acted so we can mimic Him in our daily lives and thereby please Him
 - Jesus called us to build the Kingdom one person at a time, and we do that by valuing everyone that Jesus valued
 - Because at the end of the day, Church and the Kingdom aren't going to be built by winning debates on doctrine
 - The Kingdom will be built by showing the love of Christ to a lost and hurting world and ministering to them in their needs
 - And doing so in order to build a bridge for sharing the Gospel
- And that's the key...we are serving them for the sake of the Kingdom of God, Jesus says, which means that our purpose in our service must be saving souls
 - We will often begin our ministry by serving earthly needs, but if our service never goes beyond the physical, then ultimately it fails
 - Our fundamental purpose in ministry must always be to gain an opportunity to present the truth of Jesus as Savior

- We feed or clothe or heal or comfort or teach or whatever we do for the sole purpose of turning those moments to a presentation of the Gospel
- How we make that turn will vary by circumstances, and the timing could be weeks or months or even years after our service begins
- But it never stops being the purpose of our ministry
- How ironic it would be if we worked hard in doing good things to gain opportunities to present the Gospel...only to never present it in the end
 - We've treated the body in some respect and then left the soul condemned
 - We've solved a temporary problem while neglecting to address the eternal problem
- This short-sighted approach to ministry is an ever-present temptation for the Church and we can see evidence of it everywhere
 - There are many present-day secular organizations that began as Christian ministries of one form or another
 - Harvard, Yale, Princeton and other universities began as Christian entities intent on promoting the faith
 - There are adoption agencies, relief organizations, homeless agencies, and others that were formed as Christian missions
 - Yet today some of these "Christian" organizations prohibit volunteers from evangelizing those they serve
- In effect they are disobeying Jesus' words found here in Matthew 19:14
 - The Kingdom of Heaven will be built on serving the likes of these
 - And that service must move to a presentation of the Gospel if it is to fulfill Christ's intended purpose
- Notice in v.15 Jesus called for the children to return to Him, and He proceeded to lay hands on them
 - Laying hands on a person is a gesture of healing, meaning Jesus took time to heal the children as well as the adults in that crowd
 - Which tells us that Jesus was speaking in more than metaphor here
 - As we've learned in earlier chapters, Jesus uses the faith of a child as a metaphor to explain how true faith looks and behaves
 - But had Jesus been speaking of children here solely as a metaphor, He wouldn't have needed to take this next step
 - His point would have been made without the need to call the children back and heal them after all
 - That tells us Jesus was expecting the disciples to hear His words both figuratively and literally
 - The Kingdom of God is made of such as these children, meaning the Kingdom Program includes the lowly in society
 - But secondly, the Kingdom Program even includes little children, so literal

children are also candidates for receiving the Gospel

- And therefore, we must include everyone in our ministry to spread the Gospel lest we pass by someone God intends to save
- Remember what Paul told us would be true in the Church...

1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

1Cor. 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

1Cor. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

1Cor. 1:31 so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

- Notice Paul reaffirms Jesus’ promise that the Kingdom of God will include such as these, meaning the weak and foolish things
 - Weak and foolish and despised refer to the outcasts of society, but they equally apply to children
 - Children are not weak by choice nor are they foolish for any fault of their own...they are simply too young to do or know better
 - Nevertheless, they too are within God’s reach to bring saving faith, and therefore we cannot dismiss them in the course of our work
- In fact, Paul says that though the world looks down on the lowly, the Lord specifically favors these groups in His plan of salvation
 - Paul says the Lord chooses these above others to receive the news of the Gospel and to believe
 - And that includes children who are often the recipient of God’s grace
- Children of a very young age can be brought to faith by the Holy Spirit, even children too young to express that faith to us
 - And the Bible gives us at least two examples of that happening
 - First, we have an Old Testament example of David, who by his own testimony was brought to saving faith as an infant

Psa. 22:8 “Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”

Psa. 22:9 Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb;

You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts.

Psa. 22:10 Upon You I was cast from birth;

You have been my God from my mother's womb.

- David says that as he exited his mother's womb, he was cast upon God as if God caught David leaving the birth canal
- And moreover, he says God had been David's God from the moment He formed David in his mother's womb
- And then in v.9 David says plainly that God made David to trust in Him – meaning to receive saving faith – from the time David was nursing
 - Traditionally, children in that day were weaned at age 5 so David is saying that saving faith came to him before the age of 5
 - Obviously, the Lord moved early in David's life to author faith in David's heart knowing where God would take David later in life
- And then we have a New Testament example that is even more dramatic...the case of John the Baptist
 - In Luke we're told that John the Baptist was marked out by God for saving faith while still in the womb

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

Luke 1:14 "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Luke 1:15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

Luke 1:16 "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

- While John the Baptist was still in the womb of Elizabeth, the Lord had already given him the Holy Spirit and a mission
 - Clearly, John had never heard the Gospel at that point, much less possessed the intellect to understand it
 - And of course, John had no say so in the matter of how God would use him in service to the Gospel as an adult
 - The Lord sovereignly selected John for his special role and gave John the faith and the Holy Spirit to ensure it was completed
 - And the Lord did these things while John was still forming in His mother's womb
- The point of these two examples is clear to see...we cannot rule out saving faith for anyone at anytime
 - If God can bring faith to David while nursing or to John while in the womb, who is unreachable by God?

- And the same can be said for adults, of course
- If Saul of Tarsus who terrorized and murdered Christians could be converted, then is any adult too hardened to be won over by the Gospel?
- Clearly, we are not all David or John or Paul, but my point is that if God can bring those men to faith in the way He did, He can do it for anyone
 - And since we don't know God's intentions beforehand, we must see every person – even children – as candidates for salvation
 - Because God can move in the heart of a person regardless of age
 - You can be born again by the Spirit when you're 99 or when you're 9
 - The Lord can bring saving faith to a person when they are 102 or barely 2
 - Now as I say that, some will ask how can a 2-year old confess Christ, and the answer is of course a 2-year old can't utter a confession of faith
 - They will not make that confession until they are considerably older and when prompted by someone's invitation
 - But what we're learning here is that the Spirit can bring a person faith years before they are able to give evidence of it
 - And the examples of David and John the Baptist testify to that very real possibility
 - And in fact, doesn't it always work this way for all of us no matter what age we come to faith in the Gospel?
 - Aren't the confessions of our mouths always a delayed expression of the faith in our hearts?
 - Remember Jesus said in Matthew 15 that what comes out of our mouths is always a reflection of what dwells in our hearts
 - So we don't come to faith because we utter a confession...we utter a confession because we have come to faith
 - For example, when we say "I'm hungry," aren't we already feeling the hunger pangs in our stomach?
 - Or when we say "I have a headache," does the pain begin after we say those words or did we say the words because we felt pain?
 - Did you say "I love you" to your spouse, and then you experienced the attraction and emotion?
 - Or did you say "I love you" because you already had feelings for them?
- Likewise, we speak a confession of faith because something has already changed in our hearts
 - And considerable time may pass between the arrival of faith and the expression of that faith
 - Even as adults, many of us held to a belief in Jesus for a time before something led us to speak it out loud
 - And so it can be for a child who confesses Christ at age 6, 7 or even much

older...their faith may have arrived much earlier

- That's why the Bible says that saving faith finds its home in our heart, not in our brain, the thinking organ of our bodies
 - Scripture uses the metaphor of heart and not head to emphasize that salvation doesn't come from an intellectual assent
 - Salvation comes from a change in our spirit, our heart, which is done by the Holy Spirit (which the Bible calls being born again)
 - And changing our spirit is something only God can do, which is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10 that it is by His doing that you are in Christ Jesus
- So parents, take encouragement and comfort knowing that the God who saved you by faith can extend that same grace to your children
 - God's grace is not limited by chronological age and salvation is not out of reach simply because a person cannot speak yet
 - Nor is salvation impossible because someone has grown old and cranky and is openly hostile to the Gospel
 - No one is out of reach of the Lord
- Now does this mean we should evangelize infants? Do we explain propitiation and substitutionary atonement to 2 year olds?
 - No...we need to remember the context of Jesus' words to understand the proper application
 - He said bring me the children because the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these
 - The Greek word belongs is *eimi* which means exists, so Jesus said the Kingdom of God exists for such as these
 - The Kingdom Program, the Church's mission, exists to reach those like these children
 - So our application is simple...our very mission is to reach those who come to us in need, no matter who they are or what their need may be
 - Some will come to us as adults with very adult needs
 - And we minister to them in the expectation that God may work through those relationships to bring a heart to faith
 - The church can't supply every need or accommodate every request, and in some cases the best ministry may be to say no to a particular need
 - But regardless of how we deal with the physical need, we do our best to show kindness and love and regard for the person
 - And we do this not merely for the sake of the need itself, but so that through that connection we might also minister to their soul with the Gospel
 - But sometimes those who come will be children brought by their mothers and fathers, and when that happens we see those children as candidates for ministry as well

- We don't wait for children to reach some age that we think means they are ready to understand the Gospel
- We don't waste our opportunities by entertaining children without offering them meaningful ministry
- I've heard many parents remark to me about how much their young child has retained from my teaching to their surprise
- So the application is simple...minister to everyone, meeting them where they are in their need and offering them more than a physical solution
 - Rule out no one, look past no one, remembering that God is capable of saving anyone
 - He is the Author of our faith, so He can bring faith to people of any age or station of life
 - And He has called us to be His representative to the world, and especially to those the world has cast aside

- Today we are in the second part of Jesus teaching His disciples about entry into the Kingdom
 - Last week we studied a moment when women were bringing their children to Jesus and the disciples objected at the intrusion
 - So Jesus corrected the disciples by saying that the Kingdom of God exists for the sake of such as these
 - In other words, the very mission of the Church is to reach people who are weak, vulnerable and in need...like these children
 - Those with needs aren't getting in the way of ministry, they are the ministry
 - Furthermore Jesus wanted the Church to specifically receive children who come to Christ, knowing God can bring faith to them as well
 - Even very young children can come to faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, we learned
 - So the disciples needed an attitude adjustment...
 - They didn't see children as candidates for His grace for whatever reason
 - They had to expand their understanding of who they will serve and how everyone enters the Kingdom
 - Kingdom Program is fundamentally a process of seeing where God is working and following Him into that work
 - Remember my analogy from months ago of the metal detector as a picture of evangelism...
 - As we meet people, we look for signs he or she may be receptive to the Gospel, and if we get positive signals, we start digging
 - That can happen in young and old, rich and poor – everyone is reachable
 - So if God is capable of saving anyone at any time, we must be ready to receive them all
- That's the first part of this teaching, and now it's time to turn that coin over to see the other side, in a second encounter that Matthew records next

Matt. 19:16 And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”

Matt. 19:17 And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Matt. 19:18 Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;

Matt. 19:19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

Matt. 19:20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I

still lacking?”

- Matthew says the man asks Jesus how he may obtain eternal life?
 - Luke tells us this man is a “ruler” which means he must have been a member of the Sanhedrin council, the ruling religious council of Israel
 - You may remember Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea from John’s Gospel were both members of the council as well
- Mark says the man knelt before Jesus, so we might wonder does he believe in Jesus as the Messiah
 - Yet the man calls Jesus “teacher” or *rabbi* in Hebrew, so it appears he is not yet convinced about Jesus’ claims
 - And then the man asks Jesus what good thing should he do to obtain eternal life?
 - The ruler wants to be included in the resurrection of saints so he may enter the Kingdom of God when it comes
- His question is remarkable because it suggests that contrary to conventional thinking, a Jew was not automatically guaranteed entry
 - Generally, Jews believed they were included in the Kingdom automatically simply because they were born Jewish
 - They interpreted God’s promises to Abraham to be a blanket promise to include all Jews in the plan of salvation
 - So long as a Jew remained in good standing by keeping the Law and respecting the traditions, he or she was Heaven bound
- But that’s the issue for this man...the standard for being considered a “good” Jew had never been adequately defined by the rabbis
 - And that uncertainty meant a Jew couldn’t know for sure where they stood with God
 - How could a Jew know for sure that he or she had been good enough to be included in the Kingdom?
 - How much observance of the Law was enough? How many laws could you break before you were disqualified?
 - Did a person need to equal a Pharisee’s righteousness? Or was the standard lower?
 - The rabbis debated the question but no one could answer with certainty from the Scriptures
 - So the man is haunted by that uncertainty, and he asks Jesus what must he do to obtain Heaven
 - Notice what the man says after Jesus offers an answer at the end of v.17
 - Jesus tells the man to keep the commandments of the Law, and the man replies “Which ones?”
 - The ruler is asking that of all the laws in the books of Moses, which ones are

absolutely necessary to keep to go to Heaven

- In other words, what are God's minimum standards?
- Is there a checklist of the good works that a person must do or is there a list of the sins we must avoid?
- If the ruler could get that checklist, he could organize his life around hitting that mark and then he could sleep at night
- Generally, this is the way every unbeliever thinks about Heaven, at least among those who are even concerned with what happens after we die
 - The world assumes that God has set some minimum standard of behavior that gets a person into Heaven
 - We can meet that standard by doing good things of one kind or another
 - If we do bad things, we can even the scale by doing more good things to offset the bad
 - And if we do enough good in our lifetime, we will go to Heaven
 - Different religions will propose different checklists on what God wants us to do, but every version of this system suffers from the same problem
 - How do we know when we've done enough to enter Heaven? What is good enough?
 - What is God's passing score for Heaven? 70%, 80%, 90%?
 - How do we even know what God considers to be a good work?
 - And if we aim too low only to discover at our death that we didn't make the grade, it will be too late to fix it
- So as this ruler demonstrates, the world has no clear answer to that question...only guesses and opinions
 - And generally, the guesswork goes like this...first, everyone agrees that a perfect person would certainly warrant entry into Heaven
 - But even the most arrogant, self-absorbed person on earth must admit he or she isn't perfect
 - Even if we only misspell a word now and again or drive faster than the speed limit on occasion...we all make mistakes
 - Likewise, the world usually agrees that there will be some people who have no chance whatsoever to merit entry into Heaven
 - When pressed to give an example of someone who won't be in Heaven, people usually pick Hitler
 - Clearly Hitler doesn't deserve Heaven, people say
 - So on the Heaven end of the scale, we place perfect people and on the "Hell" end we place the worst of the worst, people like Hitler
 - But when we move to the middle of that imaginary scale, things get murky...
 - Somewhere between those two points is God's cutline for Heaven, they say, but

the world can't agree on where it is

- That's the central flaw in the world's view of Heaven...everyone assumes there is a standard but no one knows what that standard is
 - And because the standard is unknown, the world lives in fear of death and without a sense of peace about what happens after a person dies
 - Every day billions of people wonder are they good enough? Are they ready to face God and will they be accepted by Him?
 - Then those same people make a mistake, and guilt follows and worry sets in because maybe they've dropped below the line
 - And then they have to make up for those mistakes, which brings its own burden, because how much penance is enough?
 - And what happens to our loved ones who died...were they above the line? Will we see them again?
 - It's life on a hamster wheel...forever chasing an invisible finish line, always wondering if we will measure up on the day the race ends
 - That's the burden the world carries everyday, and some of you remember living like that before you knew Jesus
 - This ruler was living that life, as were many other Jews of that day and of our day today
 - It's life built on a fundamentally flawed view of God and Heaven
 - And the flaw in thinking comes from two incorrect assumptions about us and about God
 - And Jesus corrects the man on both counts with His response
- In v.17 Jesus begins by asking why are you asking me what is good? There is only One Who is good...
 - In Luke's version, the exchange is recorded slightly different

Luke 18:18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke 18:19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."

- In Luke's version, the man calls Jesus "Good Teacher", and in Matthew's version the man says what good things must I do
 - Putting the two versions together, I believe the man asked, "Good Teacher, what good things must I do to enter Heaven?"
 - Jesus' response is essentially the same in both accounts, and in it we find Him correcting two wrong assumptions the ruler made
- First, Jesus asks why are you calling me "good" because only God is good
 - In Jewish tradition, no one called a rabbi "good" because Jewish teaching

recognized that only God was truly good

- But this man called Jesus good using a Greek word meaning intrinsically good, inherently good
- The man is saying Jesus has a good character or nature, and yet the man means it only in a relative sense
 - The ruler wasn't intending to suggest that Jesus was as good as God, perfect and without sin
 - The man meant that Jesus was good when compared to other rabbis or people in general
 - Technically speaking, the man was saying Jesus was *better*, not truly good
- Which is ironic, because had the man known Jesus' true identity, he would have called Jesus "good" in the literal sense!
 - Had the man possessed saving faith in Jesus, this is the moment he would have declared it
 - He would have declared Jesus to be truly good because He was Christ, the Son of God
 - But that's not where the man's heart is in this moment...he's simply acknowledging that Jesus is above the cutline
- But Jesus corrects the man saying only God is intrinsically good...which means that God's standard for measuring goodness is not relative
 - God doesn't grade goodness on a scale like weight or height or intelligence... goodness is a single point
 - Jesus says that only God is good....there is no sliding scale
 - So goodness isn't being better than someone else, as the ruler had assumed about Jesus...it's about being as good as God
 - But Jesus, and the rest of the Bible, says that no one equals God's goodness

Psa. 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

**They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds;
There is no one who does good.**

**Psa. 14:2 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there are any who understand,
Who seek after God.**

**Psa. 14:3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt;
There is no one who does good, not even one.**

- Some people may be better than others but no one equals God
 - And equally God is the standard that God Himself has set for entry into Heaven
- So the entire world operates thinking their goodness must rise above some cutline in the middle of their scale, when in reality it's not there at all

- You can't get into Heaven by being better than Hitler or better than your loser brother-in-law or cranky boss
 - You can't assume because you pay most of your taxes, don't steal (except for using your parent's Netflix login), and only lie when circumstances demand it that you are above the line
 - In fact, everyone assumes they are above that imaginary line...no one I've met assumes they are below the line
- But Jesus says God's standard is way higher than the world ever imagined it to be...
 - The standard to get into Heaven is not 70%, 80% or even 90%...the standard is perfection, it's 100%
 - So just one sin is all that it takes to bar a person once and forever from Heaven
 - Which is why Paul wrote

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

- In that well-known verse, Paul's phrase "the glory of God" is his way of describing the standard of God, the goodness of God
 - Everyone has sinned, and as a result everyone has fallen short (or failed to measure up) to God's standard of goodness
 - And therefore, no one will ever be good enough to enter Heaven
- So Jesus' first response corrects the man's wrong standard for entering Heaven...but unfortunately the man doesn't get it
 - So Jesus moves quickly to addressing his second wrong assumption by playing along with the man's question
 - Jesus answers the ruler saying if you want to receive eternal life, just keep the commandments
 - And then the man replies "Which ones?" meaning which laws must I keep?
 - We can clearly see that the man continues to assume that God grades on the curve...only some of the laws must be kept
 - So Jesus, continuing to play along, begins listing a few of the ten commandments
 - But Jesus consciously selects certain commandments that He knows will please the man
 - Specifically, Jesus selects commandments that regulate our dealings with other people including...
 - Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your parents, and love your neighbor
 - Jesus is setting a trap for the man's ego so He can expose a second false assumption the man is making
 - These are laws that every upstanding Jew would have claimed to have kept his whole life

- No righteous Jew murders or commits adultery or dishonors parents, etc.
- So the man eagerly responds I have kept all these from my youth! He feels he's doing really well at this point
- But then Jesus' trap begins to take effect, because notice what the man says next...he asks Jesus what am I still lacking?
 - Jesus just told the man he only need do six laws to enter Heaven, and the man is convinced he has met that standard already
 - So we should expect he would be elated at this point, happy that he had found his answer, right?
 - But he wasn't satisfied...he assumes he's still lacking something and he wants to know what that something is
 - Why wasn't he satisfied with Jesus' answer?
 - I think it's because something inside him knew that Jesus' checklist wasn't any better than any other standard he had found
 - You can ask any religious person what is the standard for Heaven and you always get an answer and everyone has a different one
 - And because no one agrees and the rules are always changing, the question remains...which standard is correct?
 - Jesus said the standard is equaling God's perfection, but since he wasn't listening, Jesus began playing the man's game to expose its limits
 - Jesus gives the man 6 laws knowing it will please him but also in a way that it wouldn't satisfy him either
 - In doing so, Jesus points out the impossibility of finding a standard of performance that satisfies our soul
 - Because in the end our sin continues to convict us
 - Inside every person God has placed a conscience and our conscience is a witness testifying against us
 - It knows our every flaw, and so it's always telling us that we can't measure up to the standard of Heaven
 - So that even when someone gives us a checklist for Heaven that we believe we are meeting, something inside us still isn't satisfied
- That was this man's problem...he knew instinctively he was still lacking something, and he was desperate to learn what it was
 - That's why there is no peace for anyone who tries to work their way to Heaven
 - Anyone working their way to Heaven is forever trapped in a cycle of doing and then falling short followed by guilt and worry...
 - Because God has programmed our conscience to never be satisfied with our own standard and to keep seeking the truth
 - The problem is the world's flawed understanding of God and of ourselves
 - On the one hand, we make a bad assumption about how God grades us

- We assume His standard for Heaven is less than perfection, because that's the only standard we can hope to meet
- And on the other hand, we make a bad assumption about how we can contribute to gaining access to Heaven
 - We assume there is a recipe, a checklist, a process we can accomplish which will meet God's standard
 - And Jesus has exposed both flaws...he exposed the man's wrong standard by reminding him only God is good
 - And now He's about to expose the man's wrong thinking about how to meet God's standard for Heaven

Matt. 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Matt. 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

- In v.21 Jesus tells the man if you want to receive eternal life, sell all you have, give the money to the poor and follow me
 - Jesus adds one more task to the ones already mentioned promising this one will make you complete
 - But as the man hears this requirement, he goes away grieving
 - Why is he sad? Because he was very rich, Matthew says
 - We might think he would have been happy to finally receive the checklist he has always wanted
 - Furthermore, the man is almost finished with the list
 - Jesus gave him seven rules altogether and the man says he's already done six, so he's most of the way there
 - He only needed to do that one final thing and he could enter Heaven, Jesus said
 - Surely, the prospect of receiving Heaven was enough motivation to do one more thing...to sell everything you own
 - But Jesus didn't just pick some random requirement...he picked something He knew the man wouldn't be willing to do
 - The ruler was so attached to the world and to his wealth that if Heaven required giving that up, he couldn't accept it
 - I think he leaves sad not because he concluded he couldn't get into Heaven
 - Rather, I think he left sad because he rejects Jesus' rules, and so he still hadn't found an answer to his question
- The world will say it wants to know God's standard for entering Heaven, but in reality they only want a standard that meets their desires

- So they go to one religion and they're told what they must do to enter Heaven, but if they don't like that answer, they go somewhere else
 - Then they go to a second religion, and they get a second answer but they still don't like that answer either
 - So they keep shopping for an answer until they find one they like
 - And when they do find it, they declare they have found God's standard for entering Heaven...how convenient
- This man came to Jesus seeking answer, and at first he liked what Jesus told him... why? Because he thought he could meet that standard
 - But a voice inside him kept nagging him, telling him there must be more to God's standard for Heaven
 - So he presses Jesus again, and Jesus sets the trap asking a very rich man to do the one thing he wasn't willing to do
 - Which leads the rich man to reject Jesus' standard and go away sad
- But in reality, Jesus did give this man the full answer to his question
 - Notice in v.21 the Greek word for complete is *teleios* which could also be translated perfect
 - So what Jesus said to this man is if you want to enter Heaven, you need to be *perfect*
- And how do we become perfect? Jesus then told the man to stop trusting in his wealth, turn his back on the world and come follow Jesus
 - If you want to be perfect, you need Jesus, not the world
 - And if the man would do these things, not only would he receive the Kingdom, but he would also have treasure waiting there
 - So even what he turned away from on earth would ultimately be restored to him in a much better form
- The standard to enter the Kingdom is perfection, and the means for obtaining perfection is found in following Jesus
 - To enter Heaven we must equal the righteousness of God, the perfection of God
 - But since we are all imperfect, there is no method, no checklist of things we can do to achieve that standard
 - Even if you think you've kept all the laws of the Bible from your youth, you still fall short of the glory of God
 - So the Bible tells us that the only way to meet God's standard of perfection is to receive God's perfection assigned to us by faith
 - An analogy of a taking a test can help explain how this works...

Imagine a test that requires you to get a perfect score, otherwise you fail the course. To keep the math simple, you need to get 10/10. Except as you glance down at the list of questions you realize you know none of the answers.

Thankfully sitting next to you is the star pupil – Jesus, who’s already finished the test and has got 100% As hard as you try, you know your answers won’t stack up, but before the teacher comes to collect the papers, and before you know what’s happening, Jesus swaps His paper with yours!

That’s essentially the Gospel – you needed 100%, you couldn’t do it, but Jesus could so He gave you His test score

- Paul says it this way

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- Jesus lived a perfect sinless life, and then he took the penalty for our sin on the cross
 - So as we put our faith in Jesus’ sacrifice for our sake, God credits us with Jesus’ sinless life
 - We receive credit for Jesus’ perfection, while Jesus takes on our sin
- As Paul tells us plainly:

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Our salvation comes only by the grace of God, which precludes the possibility of claiming we had anything to do with our salvation
 - For if our works played any part in our salvation, then we might be able to boast about that before God
 - And God will not have us boasting that we saved ourselves because that is simply not the truth
- So Jesus did give this man a checklist for entering Heaven...but that checklist had only one point on it
 - Stop trusting in your own works and start following me
 - This man trusted in his own righteousness and the life of comfort he had achieved through it
 - He was a religious ruler, a privileged member of the Sanhedrin, and by that position he had become very wealthy
 - So when Jesus said you must turn your back on your wealth and your status, He did so knowing the man’s heart
 - Jesus was exposing the man’s dependence on these earthly things and his

unwillingness to obey Jesus as God

- But the man could not agree and went away grieving
- This man is a perfect representation of every unbeliever on earth, and of all of us before we came to faith in Jesus Christ
 - We weren't all rulers or rich, but we were all depending on something in this world
 - And we were all searching in futility for a standard and method to find our way to Heaven
 - But God has told us from the beginning that wasn't going to work

Deut. 30:11 “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

Deut. 30:12 “It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’

Deut. 30:13 “Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’

Deut. 30:14 “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

- In the Law, Moses told Israel the commandment to please God isn't too difficult
 - You don't need someone to go to Heaven and find God's checklist, like the ruler was seeking
 - You don't need to search the world over for a method of earning God's approval so you can enter Heaven
 - Because earning your way to Heaven is simply impossible...the standard is way too high and there is no checklist that can reach it
- So instead the Lord made it much easier for us...Moses says the word is very near you in your mouth and in your heart
 - That word is a confession of faith in Jesus Christ
 - If you believe in Him, trusting in His claim to be God and in His death in your place, then confess that belief
 - And by your faith and your confession you will be credited with Jesus' perfection and in that way, you will receive eternal life
- That's the second lesson Jesus taught His disciples on entering the Kingdom...that the Kingdom is ours not by our own righteousness
 - It only comes because we receive Jesus' righteousness

- Today we conclude a series of three teachings Jesus gave His disciples on entering the Kingdom of God, or as we would say, going to Heaven
 - Our series started three weeks ago with Jesus rebuking His disciples for their reluctance to minister to children
 - Jesus taught them that the underprivileged, including young children, will be part of the Kingdom of God
 - Therefore, the Church must be prepared to serve those groups
 - And then last week, Matthew related a second moment when a rich ruler asked Jesus which good works are necessary to enter the Kingdom
 - Jesus responded by reminding the man that only God is good
 - And then Jesus proved to the man that there was no checklist or formula that could make him equal to God's goodness
 - Our sin disqualifies us from Heaven, because only perfection may enter the presence of God
 - So Jesus offered the man the real solution: to follow Jesus and trust in His righteousness rather than in his own
 - Across these first two lessons, we learned that God is in the business of bringing men and women and even children into the Kingdom by faith
 - He can do so at any time and without human intervention, as He did for David and John the Baptist and even the apostle Paul
 - Moreover, we learned that God must do this work for us, because we are incapable of working our own way there
 - That's why Jesus uttered the phrase "It is finished" on the cross
 - He was declaring that all the work necessary to reconcile us to the Father had been accomplished on our behalf
- The only way to enter the Kingdom, to go to Heaven, is to be born again, to be given Christ's sinless spirit through our faith in the word of Christ
 - We would expect everyone to be receptive to a salvation made so easy
 - Why would anyone reject such a simple and powerful truth?
 - Well, in fact, many do reject it, and that raises the next question in this series
 - Why do people turn away from so great a salvation? That's the question Jesus answers today
 - Matthew's account picks up again where we left off at the end of last week's encounter between the ruler and Jesus
 - Having just told the ruler he must leave his wealth behind if he wants to enter the Kingdom, Jesus then addresses His disciples

Matt. 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

Matt. 19:23 And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 19:24 “Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

- As we learned last week, Jesus demanded the man leave his wealth as a test of his heart
 - Jesus knew he wouldn’t be willing to meet that test, and in that way Jesus revealed the man’s unwillingness to accept Jesus’ authority
 - That ruler was so attached to his wealth that he chose it over Jesus’ word
 - But the man’s problem wasn’t greed or selfishness...the problem was he trusted his wealth could get him to Heaven
 - In fact, he trusted his wealth more than he trusted Jesus’ word
 - Which is why Jesus turns to the disciples and says it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom
 - This is a well-known but often misunderstood statement
 - We suppose Jesus is saying that wealth has such a corrupting influence that it holds the power to block our entry into Heaven
 - Some will even tell us that being rich is an instant disqualification from Heaven, but neither view is accurate
 - But notice Jesus didn’t say it’s impossible for a rich man to enter...He said it’s hard
 - So having wealth doesn’t disqualify us from Heaven, nor will giving all our money away gain us entry
 - Remember, there are no “good” works that can gain us Heaven, and that even includes the good work of giving away money
 - The standard for entry into Heaven is not how little *wealth* you have, it’s how little *sin* you have
 - And the amount of sin you may have if you are going to enter Heaven is zero... none
 - Which is why we cannot work ourselves into Heaven, not even by giving away all our wealth
 - We only enter by trusting Jesus’ perfect life lived on our behalf, which is why Jesus told the ruler to come follow Him
- So how is wealth an impediment to salvation? Because for some, wealth is their proof that they are already Heaven-bound
 - And this thinking was especially prevalent in Jesus’ day and in Pharisaic culture
 - Under Pharisaic Judaism, wealth was viewed as divine favor or a sign that God approved of a person
 - If a person was wealthy, God had assigned that reward to the person because they lived an especially righteous life

- Conversely, poor people were thought to be under God's judgment for sin in their life or in their parent's lives
- Of course, it just became license for greed because it encouraged unrestrained pursuit of material wealth
 - In particular, it legitimized the Pharisee's accumulation of wealth
 - Pharisees used their religious positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people
 - And then they taught others that their wealth vindicated them
- So wealth had become a sign of God's endorsement, and rich people were thought to have an automatic entry into Heaven
 - That's why Jesus says it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven
 - Jesus wasn't saying that wealth by itself disqualifies a person from Heaven
 - The problem with wealth and the easy life it creates is in how it deludes a person into thinking they have no need for God's mercy
- Wealth's effect on a heart can be understood as the opposite of the effect of experiencing a crisis or trauma
 - As you've heard it said, there are no atheists in foxholes
 - When someone fears for their life – or they endure a difficult set of circumstances – questions of life and death come to mind
 - Because of that trial, the person may become intensely interested in knowing where they stand with God
 - In that way, God can use difficult circumstances to draw a person's heart toward Jesus and away from the world
 - Now Jesus is saying the opposite is also true...when someone is too satisfied with life, they lose interest in what comes next
 - And the most powerful spiritual sedative known to the world is wealth
 - Wealth allows a person to have everything life can offer, and as a result he or she gives little or no thought to the life that follows
 - In fact, wealth is so powerful Jesus says that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to find his way to Heaven
 - There is no trick to understanding Jesus' statement...just take it at face value
 - Can a camel get through the eye of a sewing needle? No
 - Likewise, can a rich man find his way to Heaven? No, not if that man sees his wealth as proof that he's already there
 - Jesus was denying the Pharisee's view that their wealth vindicated them
 - Wealth is not proof that Heaven has already come...it's a poor substitute that inoculates a person from seeking true riches
 - So as long as a rich man thinks of his wealth in that way, it will be impossible for him to enter the Kingdom

- This false view of wealth is not limited to first century Judaism...it still exists today
 - Today, there is a form of false teaching in the church claiming that wealth is proof of God's favor...it's called the prosperity Gospel
 - This false teaching claims that God wants to make us wealthy, and that if we do our part, then He will gladly do so
 - Conversely, if you lack wealth, then there is something in your relationship with God that is lacking and needs to be corrected
 - And the false teacher tells us the way to pleasing God is to give our wealth to the teacher so that God may return it to us
 - And when you give, they claim you "release" God to bless you with even greater wealth
 - Of course, this is no Gospel (good news) at all...it's heresy
 - The only thing this teaching accomplishes is making those false teachers even richer at the expense of those they deceive
 - Like the Pharisees, these false teachers will point to their own wealth as proof their teaching is true, saying their wealth vindicates them
 - It's all just the latest version of Satan's favorite con game, because there is only one person getting richer (not you)
 - Nevertheless, millions have chosen to believe in this lie because they desperately want it to be true...
 - They've believed in a false gospel, and as a result they have no interest in the real one
 - Remember what Jesus said would be true of the church in the last days:

Rev. 3:17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

- Jesus said the church of the last days would point to its wealth as proof that it was in need of nothing
 - In other words, the last days church will say our wealth vindicates us before God when in reality they need salvation
 - Truly, a rich man cannot enter the Kingdom because once a heart has found "heaven" in earthly riches, it stops looking
 - That's what happened to the ruler...he wasn't interested in Jesus' way to heaven if it required leaving his earthly heaven behind
- Now look at the disciples reaction to this teaching

Matt. 19:25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?"

Matt. 19:26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- In Greek, the text in v.25 emphasizes the degree of shock among the disciples
 - They were *very astonished* by what Jesus just said
 - And as a result, they ask Jesus who can be saved?
- The disciples have been taught their whole life that wealth was evidence of God’s favor resting on that person
 - From a first-century Jew’s perspective, the rich were the ones guaranteed heaven
 - The only question was whether *poor* people could enter the Kingdom
- But now Jesus flips that thinking on its head saying the rich are *less* likely to enter the Kingdom, and the disciples are stunned
 - If a rich person isn’t able to enter Heaven, they wonder, then who can be saved?
 - It shows us just how wide-reaching this false teaching had become in that day under Pharisaic culture
 - It’s even ironic to realize that the disciples began their service to Jesus believing in a prosperity heresy
- But in a way, their question is right on the mark...how *can* anyone be saved?
 - How does anyone put aside trusting in this world so that they might trust in Jesus?
 - Because wealth isn’t the only thing blocking people from seeking a way into Heaven
 - People place their trust in intellect or in physical beauty or career achievement or social status or fame or ancestral background
 - In all cases, the achievement of these desires become an excuse to put aside concerns over what comes after death
 - And since we’re all prone to these misplaced affections, how does *anyone* rise above the noises so as to hear the voice of God?
 - The odds seem so low and so the disciples ask incredulously how can anyone make it?
 - And then Jesus confirms their suspicions saying in v.26 that with people this is impossible
 - Now to understand what Jesus is saying, we need to understand what is “this” in His statement?
 - And based on the context, the “this” is salvation, finding the Kingdom
- So Jesus says that if salvation requires people turn from trusting in wealth or anything else in this world to follow Jesus, then salvation is impossible
 - Because people don’t make that turn on their own, because the human heart is desperately wicked and it will not seek God on its own
 - Last week I read from Romans 3 where Paul told us that there is none who seeks

for God, none who do good, no not one

- So if salvation required that God wait for people to turn away from the world and toward Jesus, it would never happen
- Notice this time Jesus doesn't say it's hard or unlikely...Jesus says it's impossible
- But what's impossible with man is possible with God, He says
 - The power to turn a heart away from the world and toward the Lord belongs to God alone
 - Remember what John said in the prologue to his Gospel

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

John 1:5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

John 1:11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

John 1:13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- The Light came into the world but the darkness, that is the world, did not comprehend the Light
 - The world did not know Jesus, not even those who were His own and should have recognized Him yet didn't
 - But to those who were given the right to become children of God, they received Him
- Those who were born again received Him
 - Not those born of blood (that is not because of family associations)
 - Not those born of the will of the flesh (that is not because of any good work they did in the flesh)
 - And not born by the will of man (that is not because of some personal choice to follow Jesus)
 - It was only because they were born again by God that they turned to the Light
- That's what we've been learning throughout this three-part teaching of Matthew 19
 - Entering the Kingdom is a work that God does to bring us to Himself
 - That work was centered on Jesus' sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross

- Jesus did everything required to bring us into the Kingdom, and all we do is receive that work by faith
- But we're also learning that our receiving of Jesus' work required that God first change our hearts
 - He brings faith to us by His Spirit because it's impossible for the human heart to turn away from the world on its own
 - He can bring faith to adults and to children, rich and poor, and in His eternal purposes He favors the weak over the powerful
 - So that in all these things, no one may boast before God
- So wealth stands in the way of entering the Kingdom and so does any worldly attraction that removes our incentive to seek for God
 - But as we sit here this morning having already placed our faith in Jesus for salvation, how should we view wealth?
 - Wealth itself is not an enemy, and wealthy Christians are not disqualified from Heaven
 - On the contrary, wealthy Christians possess great potential to impact the Kingdom by their wealth if they put it to work for Jesus
 - In fact, the Lord Himself has assigned great wealth to godly men throughout history
 - Abraham was wealthy, Joseph was wealthy, David and Solomon were wealthy and there are wealthy believers today
 - The problem is not wealth itself but our love for it and our dependence upon it

1Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

- For a believer, wealth can be dangerous if our desire for it competes with our affection for Christ
 - It can tempt us to set aside fellowship, prayer, study and the personal sacrifices of serving Jesus and the Kingdom
- And in place of those things, a love for money leads us to devote more time and attention to the accumulation, storing and spending of wealth
 - And love for money makes us more susceptible to foolish schemes or dishonest choices that lead to ruin
- In those ways, our desire for earthly wealth can rob of us of obtaining eternal riches
 - Because as Jesus said, store up your treasure in Heaven, not on earth
 - That was the important detail the apostles were missing

Matt. 19:27 Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?”

Matt. 19:28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matt. 19:29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

Matt. 19:30 “But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

- When Jesus came upon Peter by the Sea of Galilee, He told Peter to drop his nets and follow Him
 - When Peter obeyed that command, he wasn’t just trading one desk for another or a cubicle for a corner office
 - Peter walked away from his entire livelihood
 - He abandoned his business and his only means of support, immediately becoming a poor man
 - That’s why he says he and the other disciples left everything...because they did
 - But why did he do it? We assume Peter possessed great faith and that’s why he was willing to make personal sacrifice to obey Christ’s call
 - That’s true, but Peter was also operating based on the Pharisees’ teaching concerning God and wealth
 - He was expecting that the Lord would repay his sacrifices with new wealth, just as the Pharisees received riches serving God
 - Then Peter hears Jesus say wealth stood in the way of the Kingdom, and Peter panics and cries foul
 - He tells Jesus we’ve left everything behind, so what will there be for us then?
 - Peter’s worried that all his sacrifice will amount to nothing
 - But it’s a classic example of living without eyes for eternity... forgetting this world is temporary and the next is permanent
- In v.28 Jesus reassures the disciples that there is great reward for those who serve Jesus but that reward won’t come in this life...it awaits for the next
 - Jesus says there is a reward system in the Kingdom, and that system involves two parts
 - First, there will be rewards in the form of privilege or authority in the Kingdom government
 - In the life to come when Jesus returns to the earth, the Bible says He will establish a government to rule over the nations on earth

Is. 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Is. 9:7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

- The Lord will rule the world from Jerusalem, and all the world's government will answer to Him in perfection
 - And in v.28 Jesus says that when the Lord returns at the regeneration (meaning the resurrection) we will share his rule
 - And in particular, the twelve apostles will receive special positions in the Kingdom ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel
 - The tribes of Israel will live in the Promised Land separated according to tribe
 - And each of the twelve will govern over one of those tribes
- That's a great privilege when you consider that these men will be ruling over the tribe's namesake too
 - In other words, Reuben won't rule over the tribe of his name...neither will Judah, Asher, Joseph and the rest
 - That tells us how important the apostles' service was and how much the Lord was prepared to reward them for that service
- But there is a second part to the Lord's reward system in the Kingdom
 - In v.29 Jesus says that as we make earthly sacrifices to serve Him like losing family or possessions, He will replace them with heavenly equivalents
 - In fact, they will be replaced many times over Jesus says
 - To understand this promise you must realize that the Kingdom life is a real life
 - It's a time living on this earth in a glorified body that will never sin or die
 - And we will have homes and farms and engage in meaningful endeavors and enjoy the fruit of our labors
 - Like today, we will have possessions and these possessions will be assigned to us according to a reward system
 - And that reward system takes into account our service and sacrifices to Jesus now
 - And sacrifice is the key, because serving Christ always involves a degree of sacrifice
 - We are called to give time and energy to Kingdom work, and that time and energy has to come from somewhere

- For example, in Peter's case he couldn't stay on his fishing boat making a living while also spending time serving Jesus
- Those two pursuits were mutually exclusive, and so he had to choose one over the other – and so it will be for us
- Every time we choose to obey Christ, we're simultaneously saying no to something else, something our flesh preferred
 - Serving Christ may mean spending less time at work: less time selling, less time making widgets, less time climbing the ladder
 - And that probably means less money to buy nice things like houses or farms or whatever
- Or perhaps the Lord calls you to work hard but to use the wealth it yields to advance the Kingdom work of others
 - At the very least serving Christ will mean less free time, less opportunity to pursue things we enjoy or relationships we desire
 - And as we make those sacrifices, Jesus says there will be a great reward in the Kingdom for those who give up much
 - In v.29 He promises we will have many times as much in the Kingdom, and we will have an eternal life in which to enjoy it
- So there is a prosperity teaching in the Bible after all... but the Bible's prosperity teaching says sacrifice now to prosper later
 - It's good for a believer to pursue wealth...just be sure you pursue it in the right way
 - Like everything else in our walk with Jesus, living by this truth depends on faith
 - If we don't trust the Lord, then we will devote our lives to pursuing wealth here, trying to turn this world into heaven
 - And we may very well obtain it...but we do so at a cost because what we gain we enjoy only for a very limited time
 - Then when we enter the Kingdom we may find that sacrifices will come
 - That's why Jesus ends saying the first will be last and the last will be first
 - He's speaking about this eternal tradeoff...where we can have our reward now or later
 - Those who pursue being first now are making a trade
 - The effort to be first now comes at a cost and that cost will not be evident until we enter the Kingdom
 - In the Kingdom, those who have made themselves first in wealth or power or privilege will be surprised to learn these were not Jesus' priorities
 - And those who sacrificed worldly achievement to build the Kingdom will be pleased to see those sacrifices returned many times over in the Kingdom
 - They will enter into a life of great rewards and truly the last shall have become first
- Next week we start Chapter 20 with a parable Jesus uses to explain the criteria He will

use to assign us wealth in the Kingdom

- So we put aside further conversation on that point until then
 - Meanwhile, what should we do? Is it wrong to be wealthy? Is it wrong to achieve success in the world?
 - Should we be worried about how we will be judged?
- First, only you can know what the Lord has asked of you in service and sacrifice to Him, so we all need to search our hearts on that question
 - If the Lord asks you to make a sacrifice, then make it knowing He is trustworthy to reward you greatly in the Kingdom
 - Or if the Lord calls you to success and wealth today, then consider how you can put that wealth to work for the Kingdom
- In the end, what you do is between you and Jesus, but make your decisions understanding the Kingdom reward system
 - Whatever you do, don't think that wealth in this world is an end to itself
 - Because when you do that, you've stopped trusting in Jesus and you've started trusting in yourself

- As we begin a new chapter in Matthew, we continue in a topic that I introduced last week: the rewards the Lord assigns to believers in the Kingdom
 - At the end of Chapter 19 Peter hears Jesus say that wealth is not an assurance of the Kingdom and can make entry harder
 - But Peter assumed Jesus was repudiating wealth under any terms
 - And since Peter and the other men had left behind all their earthly wealth to follow Jesus, he gets worried
 - In v.27 Peter asks Jesus what will there be for him and the other apostles as reward for their sacrifices?
 - Peter imagined himself empty-handed at the start of the Kingdom and he was greatly concerned
 - So Jesus reassures him in v.28 that in the Kingdom they will receive many times more of what they have sacrificed in the present age
 - And by His answer, Jesus revealed there are types of reward assigned to believers in the Kingdom
 - First, in v.28 Jesus said believers will be rewarded with authority to rule over people and nations in the Kingdom
 - The Lord rules the earth as King and in His government there are positions of authority for believers to occupy
 - Jesus even reveals to the apostles that they will hold positions ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom
 - Those are very senior government positions, and that hints at the criteria Jesus will use in assigning positions
 - We will come back to this topic in Matthew 25 where we get confirmation of this grading system
- Secondly, in v.29 Jesus says we will also be rewarded with material rewards

Matt. 19:29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

- As we consult Mark’s version of this same moment, we find a slightly different wording

Mark 10:29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake,
Mark 10:30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

- Mark indicates that these material rewards will happen in the “present age” rather than in the Kingdom
 - And in the present age, those rewards come in the context of the Church itself
- For example, following Jesus may mean leaving behind family who oppose your faith and even disown you for pursuing it
 - You may lose relationships with your parents or siblings, Jesus says
 - In the west today, these sacrifices are not as common, but in first century Israel, a Jew who professed faith in Jesus lost everything
 - They were disowned by family, made pariahs in their own culture and eventually persecuted to death
- Even today in Israel or among conservative Jewish families, becoming Christian is taken very seriously and often divides families
 - And among some non-Jewish cultures, especially Muslim and Hindu, believing in Jesus can involve real sacrifice and danger
 - So Jesus’ words ring true in our day as they did in that day
- But Jesus says as we make those sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel, He will grant us new and better family relationships in place of what was lost
 - We will find a new spiritual family in the church, one that is eternal and bound together by the love of God
 - And those new relationships will take priority over the old ones, as Paul explains 2Cor. 5:16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

2Cor. 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- After we come to faith, we are to give priority to the new relationship established by our faith in Jesus
 - Paul says the spiritual relationship we have with a person takes priority over any earthly relationship we may have with them
- So if you have a boss or family member or spouse who is a believer, then that Christian relationship is more important than the earthly one
 - Your boss is a brother or sister in the Lord before he or she is your supervisor
 - You obey and serve them well because of that spiritual relationship more so than because of the earthly relationship
- And that same priority applies for parents, siblings, and spouses
 - Your believing family members are your brothers or sisters in the Lord *before* they are mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife
 - Because the spiritual relationship will last into eternity while the earthly

relationship ends at death

- So the family relationships we lose in the course of following Jesus will be replaced in the present age and into eternity by spiritual relationships
 - And likewise, Jesus says we may also lose farms, and if we do, we will receive new farms many times over *in the present age*
 - Now as we consider that statement, we face a dilemma
 - Because we know that believers today do not automatically lose farms as they join the Church, much less gain new farms
 - If that were true, we would certainly find it much easier to grow a church! Join our church and get your farm!
 - No, this is clearly not what Jesus meant
 - So what did Jesus mean when He said we may lose farms and receive many more farms in the present age?
 - In that day, families typically lived together in small communities and worked the land together sharing in its production
 - As sons grew up in the home, they eventually took wives and built additions onto the father's house
 - In the course of time the father died, and his sons inherited the family estate
 - They then continued working the farmland and preserving it for the next generation
 - So that over generations, families would grow larger and as they gained more wealth, they might acquire more land
- So Jesus is using the term farm in that context to represent the family inheritance, the wealth a son enjoyed in serving the family
 - But what if that son was to be cut off from his family because of his faith in Jesus?
 - He then lost not only his parental and sibling relationships, as Jesus said, but he would lose his inheritance
 - He will lose the farm, so to speak, which meant losing everything he owned
 - You may remember back in Matthew 8 when Jesus was confronted by a man reluctant to follow Him

Matt. 8:21 Another of the disciples said to Him, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”

Matt. 8:22 But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.”

- The man was asking for a delay to allow him time to receive his family inheritance before choosing to follow Jesus
 - He didn't want to forfeit that wealth by leaving his family

- That was Peter's concern...he walked away from the family business, so now he wants assurance that he hasn't given it up for nothing
 - And Jesus responds by saying He will not only replace family relationships, He will also replace the lost inheritance
 - If you lose your earthly inheritance as a result of following Jesus, don't worry because Jesus has an even better one waiting
- The Bible says that as we come to faith in Jesus, we are qualified by that faith to share in Christ's inheritance

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

- The Father qualified us to share in Christ's inheritance by causing us to be born again into God's family
 - Because we are born again into Jesus' family, we are spiritually related to Jesus, we are His heirs and share in His inheritance
 - That's why Mark wrote we have these farms in the present age
 - Jesus meant we have received the promise of an inheritance now as a result of our faith
- Moreover, we have already received a portion of that inheritance even now

...in Him Eph. 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Eph. 1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

Eph. 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Eph. 1:14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

- Paul says we "have obtained" our inheritance, in the sense that it has already been assured to us
- And as proof of that, the Lord gave us a downpayment of that inheritance
- Our downpayment is the Holy Spirit, Who is our assurance that we have something waiting for us after death
- So the Lord has promised us an inheritance and has already given us a downpayment of it in the form of the Holy Spirit
 - That future inheritance is worth many times more than whatever earthly inheritance

you might have coming now

- And if following Jesus causes you to leave that earthly inheritance behind...
- Or maybe it causes you to walk away from that big bonus or that investment opportunity or that richer retirement plan...
- You have already received in this age the promise of a much better inheritance to come
- But we won't receive the fullness of the inheritance until we leave this age and enter the Kingdom
 - Because like any inheritance, we can't possess what it promises until a death takes place...

Heb. 9:15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Heb. 9:16 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.

Heb. 9:17 For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

- Jesus died to establish a new covenant in His blood, and by His death, we received the promise of an eternal inheritance
 - And like Jesus, we can't receive what's promised by that inheritance until after we pass through death
 - That's why we call this inheritance our eternal reward because we won't see it until we reach the Kingdom
- So an eternal inheritance has been reserved for you, and you've already received a downpayment on it in the Holy Spirit
 - In that sense you've already received many "farms" in the present age
 - Your inheritance is currently reserved for you in Heaven, and once you pass through death you will receive the balance of it

1Pet. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pet. 1:4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

- Meanwhile, you have opportunity to increase your reward in the Kingdom
 - All believers will share some of the inheritance, a minimum share if you will

- Remember in Chapter 19 Jesus told Peter that all who receive eternal life will also receive an inheritance
- So all believers will have something waiting in the Kingdom...we all have somewhere to live, something to possess and enjoy
- But some will receive a proportionally greater share than others as a reward for good service and sacrifice now

Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

Col. 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

- And the parable we study to end today demonstrates that principle

Matt. 20:1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

Matt. 20:2 “When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Matt. 20:3 “And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place;

Matt. 20:4 and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went.

Matt. 20:5 “Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing.

Matt. 20:6 “And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’

Matt. 20:7 “They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

Matt. 20:8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’

Matt. 20:9 “When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.

Matt. 20:10 “When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.

Matt. 20:11 “When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner,

Matt. 20:12 saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’

Matt. 20:13 “But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no

wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Matt. 20:14 ‘Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.

Matt. 20:15 ‘Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’

Matt. 20:16 “So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

- Let’s make some observations about the parable...we start with the comparison being made
 - Jesus says this is a parable about the Kingdom, so He’s explaining an aspect of the reward system for the Kingdom
 - The story starts with a landowner who hires day-laborers to work in his field
 - Altogether he hires four different groups of workers, starting with the first group at about 6AM
 - For that first group, the landowner settles up front on a fixed amount, which was the minimum wage of the day
 - A day laborer in Jesus’ time was typically paid one denarius, which was a bronze coin, for a full day of labor
 - To receive less than a denarius was being cheated, though it might be possible to earn more on occasion
 - Then later the landowner hires more workers at the third hour which would be 9:00 AM
 - Though part of the work day had already gone, still the landowner wants to get as much done as he can
 - But notice these workers are not told what they will earn for their labor
 - And this makes sense, since they are working less than a full day, therefore they couldn’t expect to receive a full days’ pay
 - They simply trust the man to pay them as he desires
 - And again at the sixth hour (noon) and the eleventh hour (5:00 PM) the landowner hires additional workers
 - And once again, there is no agreement for how much will be paid for their labors
 - Hiring people so late in the day automatically limited how much work they could do, so naturally one might expect to be paid less
- Finally, when it came time to pay each worker, the landowner began by paying those who had come to the field last
 - Much to the surprise of the other groups of workers, the landowner pays the fourth group a full denarius
 - They worked less than 25% of a full day and yet they received a full day’s wage
 - We don’t hear what he pays the second and third groups, because they aren’t important to the point of the parable

- The emphasis in the parable is between those who came to the field first and those who came last
- And when those who came into the field first saw how much the landowner paid those who came last, they made a wrong assumption
 - They assumed that if the fourth group earned a full denarius for working barely three hours, then they would get much more
 - After all, they worked four times longer in the field, so certainly they deserved four denarii or more!
- But when it came time to receive their pay, the landowner paid them exactly what was customary for a day's labor: one denarius
 - And as they see this, they are disgruntled and accuse the landowner of dealing unfairly with them
 - To which he replies, I gave you exactly what I promised
 - And if I desire to do more for others, what business is that of you?
- Notice the landowner also calls them out for being envious
 - They weren't seeking justice, for the landowner had not been unjust with them
 - They were being envious and greedy wanting for themselves what someone else had rightly received
- So now, let's understand what Jesus is teaching us about the Kingdom beginning with some basic questions
 - First, why did the landowner pay the late workers so much? A denarius was the pay for a full day of labor, so why did this landowner overpay?
 - It's not enough to say he was generous, because parables are grounded in real-life situations
 - The characters in parables always act in rational ways, which is important to understanding and applying parables
 - And it's not rational for a successful businessman to pay more for labor than is required unless there is a good business reason to do so
 - Even a generous landowner wouldn't throw his money away
 - So we need to ask what rationale would a landowner have for overpaying his workers in this way?
 - Think back to the arrangement this man made with these later workers
 - He didn't set the amount of their pay, and they knew they would work less than a full day
 - So they immediately realized they had better work harder than usual in the hope of gaining a full day's wage
 - They assumed that if they impressed the landowner, they could earn more
 - That's the only rational reason you pay a full day's pay for a partial day of labor
 - The men who worked only 3 hours accomplished nearly as much as those full

- day-laborers because they hoped for a better reward
 - And since this was a fair and generous landowner, he was willing to reward their extra effort
 - Meanwhile, the first group received the minimum wage they deserved and expected
- That's a picture of the material reward system in the Kingdom to come
 - Everyone receives a minimum share of the inheritance
 - In a sense, we could say that when you were saved, Jesus hired you to work in His field and guaranteed you a share of reward
 - No matter when you entered service, whether early as a child or late in life as a senior citizen, you will receive a share
 - No matter how hard you serve or what you make of your opportunities, you will receive a share
 - Everyone will receive a minimum amount of the inheritance of the Kingdom... no one will be homeless or destitute
 - So there is a minimum wage, so to speak, and there is also opportunity to earn more through greater service to Jesus
 - We can work harder than others, making the most of the time we have been given in Christ's field
 - And if we do so, we do it knowing we work for a generous Master Who is willing to reward that labor
 - Ultimately, all reward is a matter of God's grace, not something God owes us
 - But He makes it available according to our service to Him
- Notice at the end, Jesus repeats that the first shall be last and the last first
 - In the parable, the last group was rewarded proportionally greater than the first group
 - Yet that final group had only a very small window in which to serve
 - Because those in the last group served so well, they were rewarded first and proportionally greater than the first group
 - The landowner took their limited opportunity into account and rewarded them based on what they did with what they had
 - So in that sense, they were last in opportunity but first in effort and therefore first in reward
 - So, Jesus' reward system takes into account the amount of opportunity each believer has to serve Him and what we do with it
 - Those who make the most of their opportunity will be rewarded proportionally more than others
 - It's a system that is both generous and fair and it's intended to motivate our good service

- For example, I think we can all agree that Billy Graham worked hard for many years in service to Jesus
 - But he also had a lot of opportunity to make a major impact for the Kingdom
 - He lived for decades, he was a talented speaker, he had powerful friendships with world leaders, he preached to stadiums, etc.
 - So we might assume that his reward will be considerably greater than the minimum
 - But at the same time, we should expect a man in his position to make a big impact
 - But what about someone at the other end of the spectrum? Someone like the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus
 - Let me remind you of what transpired between them

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”

Luke 23:40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”

Luke 23:41 “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Luke 23:42 And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

Luke 23:43 And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

- One thief was insulting Jesus even as that man was dying in the same way
 - But the other thief was believing in Jesus, as evidenced by his request of Jesus to receive him into Jesus’ Kingdom
- But we know this man wasn’t believing when he first hung on that cross
 - Matthew reports that at the beginning of the crucifixion, both thieves were hurling abuse at Jesus
 - But at some point, one of these men had a change in heart, likely because of what he experienced in that moment
- So he was like those workers who entered the field at the eleventh hour
 - He barely had any time to serve Jesus, and moreover he was nailed to a cross, so he couldn’t go anywhere
 - He knew he would die in a few hours at most, so we might assume he couldn’t have received more than the minimum
- But the parable teaches that our reward will be based on what we did with the opportunity we received
 - And clearly this man received a far lessor opportunity than did someone like Billy

Graham

- So we should ask what did this man do with his opportunity? He did all that he could do...
- He worshipped and glorified Jesus and he witnessed to the only unbeliever within reach
- And unlike Billy Graham, the thief's story is recorded in the pages of Scripture, so clearly the Lord views his ministry as important
- Obviously, I don't know how the Lord will reward either of these men
 - But I won't be surprised to discover they were equally rewarded
 - Billy Graham did many great things, but he had a lot of opportunity
 - The thief had only a brief moment of service, yet he too did a great thing with it
 - Each had to run the race set before him, and since both ran well, we assume both received their denarius
- Similarly, we all have a share in the inheritance of the Kingdom, but we also have an opportunity to gain more by serving Jesus better
 - And service always involves sacrifice
 - Jesus will call us to sacrifice our time, talent and treasure to pursue a Kingdom agenda
- In another parable in Luke 16 Jesus explains the value of sacrifice now, and at the end of the parable, Jesus sums up His point this way

Luke 16:9 “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

Luke 16:11 “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

Luke 16:12 “And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

- In speaking about how we use our wealth while on the earth, Jesus says we ought to prioritize it for Kingdom purposes
 - We should make spiritual friends with our wealth, He says, so those friends will welcome us into heavenly dwellings
 - In simple terms, He means putting our resources to work now to bring people into the Kingdom and to build them up in the body

- And then when we enter the Kingdom, Jesus says those sacrifices will be remembered to our credit
 - Those we helped will welcome us into eternal dwellings, which is a reference to our Kingdom home and the rewards we receive
 - And then notice what Jesus says...He is watching to see how faithful we will be in the very little He's given us here
 - And if we are faithful in the use of our resources now, then He knows we can be counted faithful with true Kingdom riches
- This is the Bible's true prosperity teaching...
 - We all will share in Christ's inheritance, and if we're faithful in that which we've received here, we may receive an even greater reward
 - Christ is fair and generous, taking into account the degree of opportunity and rewarding us on that basis
 - Therefore, knowing we serve a kind and fair Master, we should make it our ambition to please Him
 - In the future, we will return to this topic in Chapter 25 to learn about the other half of the reward system: our place in the government

- Last week's teaching began a discussion of how the Lord assigns us rewards in the Kingdom
 - We learned that every believer will receive a share of Christ's inheritance, referring to the eternal treasure of the Kingdom
 - That treasure may be land, homes, other possessions...wealth that we will use and enjoy for eternity
 - Every believer receives a share of that inheritance
 - But we also learned that we can earn a greater share based on how we use our time, talent and treasure here to serve Jesus
 - When Jesus evaluates our work at the Judgment seat of Christ, He will take into account our opportunities
 - He understands that each of us had a different starting point in life of service to Him
 - Some of us become Christians sooner, some live longer, some receive greater gifts & more resources, some have higher callings
 - So our reward will be based on what we did with the opportunities we received
 - Those with more opportunity are called to greater service while those who received less opportunity will naturally serve less
 - But the point is to run the race that God sets before you as well as you can and until you reach the end
 - Now, if you're like me, you think about this concept every day
 - You consider whether you've organized your life and your use of your time, talent and treasure to optimize your reward
 - And if so, that's good, because that's the reason Jesus placed this truth in the Bible for us to know
 - He wants to motivate us to live with eyes for eternity, knowing there is a far greater life waiting for us in the Kingdom
 - And He incentivizes us to do what's necessary now to make the most of the time He's given us
- From there, Matthew returns briefly to a recurring theme from earlier chapters: Jesus' prediction of His death in Jerusalem
 - Nevertheless, we haven't left the topic of reward behind entirely, as you will see as we move forward in the chapter today

Matt. 20:17 As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them,
Matt. 20:18 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death,
Matt. 20:19 and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.”

- Let's remember where Jesus is at this point...earlier He traveled south from Capernaum eventually reaching an area east of the Jordan river
 - He stopped in Perea, a territory controlled by Herod Antipas, and while he was there, He taught on marriage and on serving children
 - Then He addressed the rewards of the Kingdom, and now Jesus is on the move again toward Jerusalem
 - This will be Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, because His final Passover is quickly approaching
 - And it's for that reason Jesus has been repeatedly telling His disciples what will happen when they reach Jerusalem
 - And now for the third time, Jesus gives His most detailed explanation yet
 - Jesus says when He reaches Jerusalem, He will be taken into custody by the religious leaders
 - He will be tried, convicted, sentenced to death, tortured by Gentiles (meaning the Romans)
 - And then He will die and finally resurrect after three days in the grave
 - Jesus has said essentially the same thing twice before, but here He spells it out plainly and in complete detail
 - Still, like the two earlier times, the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying
 - The problem was they didn't realize their generation of Israel had already lost the opportunity to receive the Kingdom
 - They couldn't appreciate that the kingdom wasn't going to appear in their lifetimes
 - They were expecting the exact opposite...they expected the Kingdom to appear any day
- And all the recent teaching on the Kingdom, including Jesus' recent teaching on Kingdom rewards, had only increased their anticipation
 - And now He's moving steadily toward Jerusalem and there's a growing anticipation that something was going to happen
 - So in their minds, Jesus was only a few days or weeks away from setting up the Kingdom
 - They're like children excited as the end of the school year approached and summer vacation was right around the corner
 - And as we'll see later, crowds will gather to welcome Him as King when He enters the city, laying palm branches before Him
 - But Jesus continues to remind the apostles that the Kingdom isn't coming right now, at least not in the way they expected
 - Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die, not to rule
 - And He's explains this to them here in so much detail so they will understand

that this plan was Plan A for God

- Genesis 3:15 foretold the death of the Messiah, as did other prophecies in Isaiah and the Psalms and elsewhere
- So Jesus was entering Jerusalem willingly to die on a cross as had been planned from the beginning
- But once more, Jesus' words do not make sense to these men
 - How is it that they could hear these things and not at least understand them enough to ask follow up questions?
 - In fact they are so ignorant that even after Jesus' death they do not put the puzzle together
 - They are devastated after the cross, and they believe their movement has failed and they are lost
- But at that time, the Holy Spirit will bring Jesus' words back to mind
 - And as they consider what they heard in that earlier day, it will all begin to make sense to them
 - And this was exactly what the Lord wanted
- If we look at Luke's account of this same moment, we read this:

Luke 18:34 But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

- Luke tells us that as Jesus spoke these words to the men, the meaning of Jesus' statement was hidden from them
 - Specifically, the Lord chose not to overcome their ignorance in that moment but to leave them in the dark
 - He could have brought them understanding in that moment, but this wasn't the right time
- So why tell them something yet not allow them to understand it in the moment?
 - Because any understanding of these things at that time would have been useless to them and even counterproductive
 - If they had understood what was about to happen, they probably wouldn't have gone with Jesus into the city
 - They might have even tried to stop Jesus or to stop Judas when he leaves to betray Christ
- Jesus wanted them to be there with Him so they could experience all that happened without interfering in it
 - But then He alerts them to these things in advance so that later He can bring that knowledge back to their minds

- And in that moment of recall, they can finally make sense of God's plans
- Luke describes the moment when the Lord finally lowers the scales from their eyes and allows them to understand

Luke 24:36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you."

Luke 24:37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

Luke 24:38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

Luke 24:39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Luke 24:40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

Luke 24:41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

Luke 24:42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish;

Luke 24:43 and He took it and ate it before them.

Luke 24:44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Luke 24:45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

- Only after the Lord open their minds to understand the Scriptures could they understand what He had been telling them
- Meanwhile, they remain in the dark, and perhaps the best proof of that ignorance is found in the next scene in Matthew's Gospel

Matt. 20:20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.

Matt. 20:21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."

Matt. 20:22 But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."

Matt. 20:23 He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

Matt. 20:24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.

- Two of Jesus' apostles were James and John, and their father was a man named

Zebedee

- This James is not to be confused with James, the half-brother of Jesus, who also wrote the eponymous New Testament epistle
 - And John, of course, is the apostle who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John and the book of Revelation
 - Their mother is present with them at this time, and we know from the Gospels that their mother was Salome
 - Salome was related to Mary, which means James and John were cousins of Jesus, humanly speaking
- So Salome bows before Jesus and requests He command that her two sons sit on either side of Jesus in the Kingdom
 - In this context, to sit on the left and right refers specifically to positions of authority in the government
 - A ruler traditionally assumed a seated position when holding court
- And the ruler's most trusted advisors would stand very close, one on either side so the ruler could seek their counsel quickly
 - The most honored position was to the right hand and the second most trusted position is to the left
 - So this woman is asking that her sons be awarded the highest positions in Christ's government in the Kingdom
- Now it would be easy to criticize Salome's brazen effort to advance her sons' religious careers
 - There is a stereotype of Jewish mothers in that regard, pushing their sons to accomplish great things
 - There was a Jewish mother pushing her twin boys in a baby carriage one day when she encountered a friend on her walk
 - The friend asked her what were the names of the two babies
 - And the mother replied, this is Solomon the lawyer, and this is Eli the doctor
 - But every parent can identify with the desire to see their children succeed, and typically we do anything we can to help them
 - So Salome should not be blamed in this situation
 - Salome is a devoted disciple of Jesus herself, accompanying Jesus in His travels, just as we see here
 - Later, Salome will be one of a handful of women who remain with Jesus throughout His entire ordeal on the cross
 - And she accompanies the two Marys who bring spices back to the tomb and discover it empty
 - So we can't question her sacrifice and devotion to Jesus...and moreover, we can't blame her for initiating this request either
 - Because we learn from Mark's account that the sons themselves were the ones

who actually initiated this request

- It was their idea to ask Jesus for this honor, but they had their mother put the question to Jesus to hide their arrogance
- Now where did they get the idea they should ask for this honor? Because Jesus just taught them that the Kingdom will feature two kinds of rewards
 - We learned last week about the material rewards of the inheritance, but Jesus also mentioned receiving positions in Christ's government

Matt. 19:28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- He told them that His government in the Kingdom will have positions that His disciples may occupy
- This is the second half of the reward system that will exist in the Kingdom
- Apparently, when these men heard about this reward, James and John thought they saw an opportunity to climb the ladder
 - They figured that if they asked Jesus for this privilege before their peers thought to do so, they might get a step up on them
 - And as they put this question before Jesus, can you imagine the looks on the faces of the other disciples?
- Well, we don't have to work very hard to imagine the scene, because Matthew tells us exactly how they responded
 - In v.24 we're told the other disciples were indignant
 - Indignation is anger at what is perceived as unfair treatment
- So these disciples were angry at the idea that their two friends would throw them under the chariot
 - I must imagine that the one most indignant at that time would have been Peter, who Jesus had already said would be the Rock
 - So the other guys resented their power play and saw it for what it was: a shameless attempt to take honor for themselves
 - So no doubt they were watching to see what Jesus would say in response
- And in response, Jesus first teaches them what the true criteria will be for assigning the reward of authority in the Kingdom (and it's not who asks first)
 - In v.22 Jesus tells them they do not know what they are asking
- Jesus is saying two things
 - First, these men did not understand what criteria will be used to assign positions of honor in the Kingdom

- Because if they had understood the criteria for receiving authority they never would have been asking this question
- Their request and the heart behind it, actually disqualified them from such a reward
- Secondly, if they had understood the criteria for receiving honor in the Kingdom, they probably wouldn't be seeking for the top positions
 - Which is why in v.22 Jesus goes on to ask them if they were able to drink the cup that Jesus was about to drink?
 - Of course Jesus was referring to His death on the cross, which was the moment Jesus received the wrath of God in our place
- The Bible speaks of God's wrath as something that is stored up, held in cups or bowls to be poured out at an appointed time
 - So drinking the cup refers to receiving God's wrath for sin, and this is a very difficult thing to do
 - In fact, Jesus Himself asks the Father to remove that cup from Him when He prays to the Father the night before He dies
- After Jesus asks these men can you receive this same cup, they quickly – and ignorantly – answer yes
 - Now this wasn't a trick question, because just a moment earlier Jesus explained in detail what He would soon experience
 - He was now asking them if they were prepared to do the same, and they say they are, so Jesus confirms it will be the case
- They would share in His cup, meaning these men would know persecutions and suffering just as Jesus did
 - In James' case, he was the first of the apostles to die for the faith
 - While John was the longest living apostle, which meant he suffered in a different way by enduring persecution the longest
- But even though they would know persecution, nevertheless Jesus says in v.23 that He could not promise them those high positions
 - Jesus says that decision is reserved for the Father alone, Who has prepared places of honor for specific people in the Kingdom
 - So why did Jesus tell them they would share in His sufferings if He couldn't guarantee them the reward they requested?
 - Because the criteria for receiving honor is not whether we experiencing suffering but whether we have a heart to accept it
 - And right now these men were missing that heart...but in time their sufferings would show whether they had gained it
 - This is the criteria for assigning the reward of honor in the Kingdom government... do we have a heart like Jesus to do as Jesus did?
 - In the case of material rewards, we obtain greater reward by giving Jesus greater service and sacrifice now

- But for the reward of greater honor, we will receive a greater place in the government by being more like Jesus now
- Or said another way, our material reward will be determined by what we *do for Christ*
- But our position of authority in the Kingdom will be determined by who we *become in Christ*
- And Jesus sums up what it means to become like Christ by pointing the disciples to His example

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

Matt. 20:26 “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,

Matt. 20:27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;

Matt. 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

- In explaining how to qualify for honor, Jesus starts with a negative example to serve as a contrast
- The world sees honor and authority in the opposite way that leads to Kingdom honor
- The rulers of Gentiles see positions of authority as opportunity to lord over their subjects
 - To lord over someone means to take full advantage of your authority and power to serve yourself at the expense of those under you
 - The rich and powerful of our society all think this way
 - And in fact the main appeal of power is its ability to allow us to do what we want and to have what we want
 - And it’s the way Roman Caesars and virtually all leaders of that day operated, the great men of the Gentiles, as Jesus calls them
 - But lording wasn’t limited to Caesars...it was also the way of the Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus’ day
 - They lorded over the people of Israel too, using their power and influence to enrich themselves at the expense of the people
 - It’s what we see today among religious elites and powerful false religious institutions
 - And it’s also the way the world sees honor, and sadly it was the way Jesus’ disciples were also thinking
- But Jesus says that is *not* the way to receive authority and honor in the Kingdom, nor is it the way honor is found today in the Church
 - Let’s ask ourselves who among us do we honor? Who in the church do we hold up as

a great person in our midst?

- What kind of person deserves to have everyone else take note of them as they enter a room?
- Who should receive our admiring glances and our words of praise? Who should draw a crowd and an invitation to lunch?
- Who should we model ourselves after and who we admire the most?
- The elders? The pastor? The wealthiest among us? The most attractive among us? The smartest among us?
- No, Jesus says, but rather the one who is the greatest servant in this body, the one who seeks to serve others before his or herself
 - It's the one who wants you to be lifted up, the person who makes sure you have the best seat and the best parking space
 - The person who notices you need a comforting word or a quiet prayer
 - The person who say they will clean up so you can go home early, the person who offers to do that chore so you can relax
 - Do we even know who that person is in this body?
- The greatest among us is the one who acts the most like Jesus in this regard
 - Specifically, in v.27 Jesus says we honor the one who has made his or her goal serving others
 - And they do so not for the sake of receiving attention or even reward but simply because that's what Jesus did for them
- And the ultimate example of Jesus serving others was His willingness to drink that cup of wrath, to lay His life down for us
 - Jesus says in v.28 that Jesus did not come to earth to be served, and yet that is exactly what He could have expected
 - For if there was ever anyone Who could rightly deserve to lord over us, it would be Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of kings
 - But Jesus chose humility and obedience over power and privilege
 - He came to ransom His life for others, which is the ultimate form of service, the ultimate slavery, to lay your life down for another

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

Phil. 2:4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

Phil. 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Paul says we should do nothing out of selfishness or conceit, which means thinking ourselves and our desires more important than others in the body
 - And don't look out for your interests merely or only, but also consider the interests of others in what you do, how you act, what you say
 - And the standard or mark we should strive to meet is the example set by Christ
 - He existed in the form of God, and you can't get more powerful, more honored, more important than that
 - Jesus was literally at the top of the ladder, the highest point in the Universe's Organizational chart
 - But He set all that aside, leaving the right hand of the Father, giving up His equality with God for a time, being made in the likeness of man
 - Then He moves further, humbling Himself to accept an incredibly painful death He didn't deserve to suffer
 - So Jesus moved from a place of supreme and unequalled honor to the lowest place a human being can occupy
 - He became a slave of everyone and everything to reconcile us to the Father
 - To the question, "What would Jesus do?" there is only one answer: become a slave
 - And what was the result of that humility? Paul says that as a result of what Jesus did in becoming our slave, so to speak, He was exalted
 - He was given the highest name, meaning He will be granted the most supreme position of honor among all God's Creation
 - No one will possess more power in the Kingdom, no one will possess more fame, no one will possess more wealth
 - Every single living being who has ever lived will recognize His authority and honor Him for Who He is in a day to come
 - That's the formula, that's our model...the one who is most humble now will be most exalted later
 - And humility isn't merely an act of sacrifice...it's a heart that wants to see others raised up and works to make that possible
 - When we truly see ourselves as a servant, we are truly content to see others

honored now

- Because we know we will receive our honor in the Kingdom like Christ
- In the words of John the Baptist: I must decrease so that He may increase
- And why did the Father choose this criteria for awarding positions of honor in the Kingdom?
 - Because it advances the goal of the Kingdom program: it glorifies the Lord as we serve others in His name
 - Those who serve others in humility are also those who gain the most spiritual maturity, who are the most sanctified
 - And those who are the most sanctified, exhibit the most godliness in their lives and reflect the most glory upon Christ

2Tim. 2:19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

2Tim. 2:20 Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.

2Tim. 2:21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

- We’re called to be humble and to be a servant like Christ, to become a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful to the Master
 - And in the meantime, they will also be the ones who do the most good works now working to sanctify others in the body of Christ
 - And when you serve others by teaching or praying or feeding or healing others, you are also helping them obey Christ better
 - You strengthen them for service, and you set a good example, which may inspire them to do the same
- So it makes sense that the criteria for receiving honor in the Kingdom should be based on who is the most Christ-like now
 - Those who pursue spiritual maturity and purity are those who prove themselves best prepared to rule with Jesus
 - And those who demonstrate they have a heart like Jesus will be those best qualified to represent Him in the Kingdom
- And conversely, when we act like the world and like these two brothers, we tear down the work of Christ in the hearts of other people
 - Remember how the other disciples felt when they saw this power grab taking place...they were indignant
 - That’s how other believers feel when they see us trying to make ourselves more important or more privileged than they are

- Especially if we are attempting to make more of ourselves than is truly deserved
- We are undermining our own sanctification, and we are inspiring discord, jealousy and divisions within the body
 - Jesus says recognition and honor in this church must always be based on who serves the most in humility
 - And if we seek to lord over others or to elevate ourselves at the expense of others should be corrected in love
- The standard for seeking honor is exactly the same as for seeking wealth: make sacrifices now to receive your reward in the Kingdom
 - We use our resources now to serve Jesus sacrificially trusting that we will be rewarded with greater things in the Kingdom to come
 - And we seek to serve others now, without claims to privilege and honor, knowing that service now will lead to honor in the Kingdom

- We've reached the final major section of Matthew's Gospel, a section that takes us through the final week of Jesus' earthly life and the days after His death
 - In this section we'll study Jesus' entry into the city, the Last Supper, Jesus' trial and crucifixion, His resurrection and His post appearances
 - On the calendar, these events take place over a very short period of time, barely 6 days according to Matthew's account
 - But the retelling of these events requires almost a third of Matthew's Gospel
 - So obviously, they are very important and worthy of careful consideration
 - And even before we begin that study, we have a brief moment at the end of Chapter 20 to cover, which bridges us into the final section

Matt. 20:29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him.

Matt. 20:30 And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Matt. 20:31 The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Matt. 20:32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

Matt. 20:33 They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened."

Matt. 20:34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

- As you remember, Jesus had been in Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan river
 - But then Jesus crosses the Jordan back to the western side and now He's headed up to Jerusalem for the last time
 - And the road up from the Jordan River valley runs by the ancient town of Jericho before reaching Jerusalem soon after
 - Jericho is set in a mountain range that runs parallel to the Jordan river on the west side of the valley
 - The road first passed through the ancient Jericho of the Old Testament times which Joshua and the Israelites invaded
 - The OT Jericho was in ruins by Jesus' day, so about a mile away stood a new settlement of Jericho built by Herod the Great
 - That city was built around Herod's summer palace, where Herod later died
 - Today there is also a third Jericho, a modern Arab Jericho which extends toward the Jordan river
 - So in Matthew's account, Jesus has passed by the old Jericho and was now entering Herod's Jericho where He encounters two blind men
 - The other Gospel writers only mention one of these men, who Mark names as Bartimaeus

- But by Matthew we learn there were actually two men involved, so perhaps Bartimaeus was the more insistent or more vocal
- The men hear that the Messiah was approaching, so they begin to cry out loudly for Jesus to have mercy on them
 - They say Lord, Son of David, which is a term that refers to the Messiah's role as King sitting on the throne of David in the Kingdom
 - In effect, they are declaring Jesus to be the King over Israel
 - Which leads some in the crowds to become uncomfortable with their cries
 - Matthew says in v.31 that some in the crowd were telling them sternly to be quiet, meaning they were being rebuked
 - Luke reports that these people were in the front of the crowd:

Luke 18:39 Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

- Remember, this scene is taking place near Jericho, home to one of King Herod's four palaces
- So men loudly proclaiming Jesus is rightful heir to the throne of Israel is a statement of insurrection to the Romans
- So no doubt the crowd was nervous about that, but for the same reason, we can see their statement as a clear demonstration of faith
 - These men knew where they were and how dangerous their speech might be, yet they persisted as Jesus approached
 - They keep yelling out for Jesus in a desperate hope for mercy
- Being blind is never easy, but in ancient times it was an especially terrible fate
 - The blind were unable to work for the most part, and as a result Jewish society viewed them as worthless and a burden
 - And to make matters worse, the Pharisees taught that blindness was a judgment from God
 - So Jewish society felt justified in withholding their pity leaving blind people with literally no source of support
 - As a result, the blind were limited to begging for subsistence, and without the ability to see, they were vulnerable to anyone and anything
 - They might be cheated or abused by strangers if not ignored altogether
 - And they were susceptible to animal attacks and to exposure to the elements
 - So we understand their persistence and desperation, because for them healing could be the difference between life and death
 - But we also understand that after Jesus was rejected in Chapter 12, He no longer heals crowds indiscriminately

- Back in Chapter 12 we found another time when people were asking if Jesus the Son of David?
 - And at that time the Pharisees said no, Jesus was Satan, and the crowds agreed with their assessment
- That led Jesus to reject this generation of Israel and withdraw the offer of the Kingdom
 - Since that time Jesus only heals those who first demonstrate faith in Him and usually only in a private moment
 - So certainly these men have demonstrated faith by their persistent cries and so Jesus will attend to them
- When Jesus reaches them, He stops and calls for them to come to Him for a private audience
 - Mark describes the moment this way:

Mark 10:49 And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.”

Mark 10:50 Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

- The same crowd that earlier had been trying to silence the men now encourage the men to stand up and answer Jesus’ call
- So Bartimaeus stands up, and as he does, he casts aside his cloak
- This is a very interesting and telling gesture because a cloak was an indispensable part of ancient attire
 - For the common man, a cloak was one of the most important possessions he owned
 - A cloak protected a person against cold and rain, it was a shield against the harsh sun and a tent during sandstorms
 - It was his blanket at night and in desperate times, it might be sold for a night in a shelter and a meal
- So a cloak was not cast aside casually, and that was especially true for a blind man
 - When a blind man casts anything in the midst of a crowd, he would not expect to find it again
 - Because the moment that cloak left his hands, someone in that crowd would have picked it up and made it his own
 - A blind man is helpless to stop theft, since he couldn’t identify his property, let alone the thief
 - So a blind man always holds on to what he owns tightly
- But not Bartimaeus...he casts aside his cloak when Jesus called for him
 - And this suggests Bartimaeus was expecting to be healed and with his eyesight restored, he knew he would find his property

- It's the mark of someone who had absolute confidence and faith in Jesus' power to heal
- So in v.32 Jesus asks the man what do you want from Me, since all they had asked was for mercy
 - So the men specify they want their eyes opened, and moved by compassion Jesus grants them their sight
 - And they then become disciples of Jesus, following Him to Jerusalem
 - In Mark's Gospel we see the connection between faith and Jesus' healing even more clearly

Mark 10:52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

- The connection between faith and healing during the latter part of Jesus' ministry is clearly evident, but we must be careful in what we do with this truth
 - It's true that faith is a prerequisite for receiving the blessings of a relationship with Jesus
 - As the writer of Hebrews says

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- Without faith it is impossible to please God, and our faith includes an expectation that we will be rewarded
- And at times that reward may include a temporary physical healing of one kind or another
 - I say temporary because eventually we all die...no healing lasts forever
 - And that's where this truth can be distorted and manipulated until it's made into a lie
- Generally speaking, faith is a prerequisite for pleasing God and receiving reward or blessing
 - But just because we have faith doesn't mean we will always receive what we want, especially in the area of healing
 - As I just said, we all die eventually, so eventually our requests to be healed will be answered no
 - And that's a good thing, because the death of this body makes possible the receiving of the next body, which is much better
- So be wary of any teaching that suggests that God will always heal you
 - Saying that God will always heal us when we have faith is the equivalent of trying to push on a rope

- A rope only works in one direction...it's only useful for pulling, not for pushing
- Similarly, faith is necessary for pleasing God and receiving reward, but that relationship only works in one direction
 - We can't turn that formula around on God by declaring that reward *always* comes for those who have faith
 - Faith is necessary to receive blessings like healing, but it is not sufficient...God's will must also be inclined to grant us healing
 - And self-evidently, God's will is not always for us to be healed
- Returning to our text, Matthew includes this moment on the road to Jericho because it foreshadows what's about to happen as Jesus enters Jerusalem
 - In a few days, Jesus will be met by hundreds if not thousands alongside the road leading from Bethany into Jerusalem
 - As they greet Jesus, they will declare Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord
 - They will celebrate the arrival of their King, Who they assume is preparing to rule over their nation
 - But Jesus isn't coming to rule, and so as He did with these blind men, Jesus does not acknowledge their call for Him to be King
 - He will only respond to those who come to Him in faith
 - The nation of Israel as a whole will not receive their kingdom in this day
 - And Jesus will soon die for their sins...we will study that moment now, beginning with the next section

Matt. 21:1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,

Matt. 21:2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me.

Matt. 21:3 "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

Matt. 21:4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

Matt. 21:5 "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION,
'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU,
GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY,
EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"

- Jesus' entry into Jerusalem comes from the east, and the east side of the city is marked by a series of mountain ranges and valleys
 - On the top of the two ranges to the east stand two small villages called Bethany and Bethphage

- Bethphage stood directly the east side of Jerusalem on top of the Mt. of Olives
- At this point, Jesus stops walking and directs two disciples to enter Bethphage looking for a donkey
- In fact, Jesus gives the men explicit instructions on where to find a donkey and her colt, and to bring both the mother and the foal to Him
 - And if someone asks what they are doing, Jesus says just tell them the Lord has need of it and they will immediately allow it
 - This is the only time in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus refers to Himself as Lord (Yahweh), which is the proper name of God
- Mark says this happened just as Jesus predicted, when a crowd did object to the disciples trying to take the animals
 - Yet the crowd relented when the disciples gave the response Jesus commanded
 - And so they brought the two animals back to Jesus
- As strange as all this sounds to us, it wasn't altogether unusual for someone to borrow a donkey or for a dignitary to ride a donkey
 - Just as we have rent-a-car services today, it was common to have rent-a-mule services for travelers in that day
 - Mules and donkeys were a common form of transportation in that day, especially near a large city like Jerusalem
 - And a donkey was not associated with poverty or degradation
 - They were an appropriate way for a dignitary to enter Zion
 - Horses were extremely rare in common day life and almost exclusively used for war
 - Mules and donkeys, on the other hand, were associated with peace
 - So kings and princes would commonly ride mules and donkeys in peace time instead of horses so as not to send the wrong signal
 - You may remember that Solomon rode a mule to his inauguration in 1 Kings 1
 - Luke tells us that this foal had never been sat upon, so Jesus was getting a rent-a-mule with zero miles on it and it had that new-mule smell
 - In Jesus' day, an animal reserved for royal use could not be used for common purposes
 - So by requiring an animal that had not been used for any common purpose, Jesus was indicating He was royalty
- Obviously, the Father has made this provision available for His Son which means God was working well ahead of time to bring it about
 - Consider all the things that had to happen at just the right time to make this possible
 - The Lord first had to bring the coal to birth at the right time and place
 - Then He had to ensure someone tied it up at the right place and time
 - And then He had to prepare the hearts of the people to accept the disciples'

explanation

- This is such a simple and obvious display of God's sovereignty
 - We like to say God didn't make us robots, but that doesn't mean He doesn't control our actions
 - Everything happened according to God's will, and yet the people involved made personal choices according to their own desires
 - Yet behind the scenes the Lord moved hearts and heads to achieve a specific outcome...and the Lord does this all the time
 - His sovereignty over all details on earth is what gives us confidence to place our faith in His word
 - Including in His promises that He will provide for us according to our needs
 - You may have heard Christians saying God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, which is a verse taken from Psalm 50
 - And when we say this, we mean it literally as an encouragement that God has the means to provide us anything we need
 - Everything in the Universe belongs to God, so He can put it to work in any way He wishes
 - In this case, someone owned those animals, yet they were God's property, so He made the decision to give these animals to Jesus
 - And time and time again, the Lord makes provision for Jesus in this way
 - Jesus lived during His entire ministry owning nothing in human terms...Jesus Himself said He had no place to lay His head
 - Yet because God owns everything ultimately, when Jesus needed something, He received it just in time
 - We're going to see this happen again when the time comes for Jesus and the disciples to share a Passover meal
 - Furthermore, nothing we own is truly ours, because it remains God's property even as He allows us to possess it for a time
 - Think of your possessions like a book you borrow from the library
 - We have checked it out, and we possess it for a time and enjoy it while we have it, but eventually it goes back to the library
 - And after it does, someone else is going to check it out and enjoy it
 - So while it may have felt like our property for a time, we knew it wasn't forever
- We should approach our possessions with that same understanding...our needs are met by God and what we possess belongs to God
 - So when we truly need something, we should have confidence to know the Lord will provide it in the nick of time through some means
 - I'm not saying those means will be supernatural...they are most often natural
 - But they will often come in surprising ways, and usually just when we need

them most

- Which means we must have patience to wait if we are going to see the provision the Lord has planned for us
- And when we do receive things through whatever means, hold on to them loosely knowing they are only passing through your hands
 - They remain the Lord's possessions, and just as He gave them to you for a time, they still remain the Lord's property
 - And one day He will ask you to pass them on to someone else, whether while you are alive or after you die
 - It's better for you to release them while you're alive while you may still gain the credit for generosity than to hold on to them
- If we live with this outlook, two good things will happen
 - First, we will waste much less time worrying about possessions
 - We all spend way too much time and energy focused on gaining and maintaining possessions that we lose in the end
- Secondly, if we wait for God to provide what we need to serve Him, our faith will grow tremendously
 - Because nothing builds your faith faster than recognizing how little you need and how much you depend upon God for it
 - I had a missionary friend once tell me that Christians in developed countries miss the blessing of dependence on God
- A missionary is typically very aware of their dependence because they lack for most things and live off donations, etc.
 - It's living as close to Jesus' lifestyle as we can get today, and it forces us to recognize God provides everything
 - Similarly, when we lose a job and feel the insecurity of no paycheck for a time, we're reminded of our dependence on God
 - So expect the Lord to provide according to your need (not your wants)...and don't hold on to what He gives you too tightly
- But now to the bigger question....why did Jesus need to ride a donkey now after having walked everywhere for the entirety of His ministry?
 - Matthew gives us that answer in vs.4-5 quoted from Zechariah 9
 - In Zechariah 9:9 Israel was told that their Messiah would arrive in a humble fashion, riding on a colt, a juvenile donkey
 - The first coming of the Messiah was a ministry of humility, in keeping with His plan to make Himself a sacrifice for our sin
 - So in keeping with that humble mission, He enters Jerusalem in a particularly humble fashion that fulfills the Scriptures
 - And as we begin the final week of Jesus' earthly life, we're going to see a lot of Scripture fulfilled

- And we're going to correct a lot of misconceptions and false traditions about the events of this week
 - In particular, the timeline of the events that follow offers us an opportunity to do both
- We will study this moment in greater detail in weeks to come, but for now we can see how the timeline offers fulfillment of one Old Testament prophecy
 - Jesus is about to enter the city of Jerusalem through the east gate, on a Sunday, the first day of the week
 - Mark says Jesus arrives at the temple late in the day so He quickly leaves to spend the evening outside the city in Bethany
 - Following Sunday night, Jesus will return to the Temple each of the next three days prior to Passover
 - Over these days, Jesus will teach in the temple grounds and be interrogated by various religious leaders trying to discredit Him
 - Those four days Jesus spends in the temple from Sunday through Wednesday are a fulfillment of Scripture
 - Specifically, Jesus is fulfilling a commandment associated with the Passover feast described in Exodus
 - In Exodus the Lord gave Israel the Passover observance, where He told them to select a lamb on the tenth of Nisan

Ex. 12:3 “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household.

Ex. 12:4 ‘Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb.

Ex. 12:5 ‘Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

Ex. 12:6 ‘You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.

- The lamb was selected on the tenth of Nisan, and it was kept in the house of the family for four days until the fourteenth
- During these days the family would continually inspect the lamb looking for any spot that might disqualify it
- Then at twilight on the 14th, the spotless animal was sacrificed and consumed that night...nothing was to remain at morning
- We know from John’s Gospel that Jesus was our spotless Passover Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world so He too must be inspected for four days
 - The tenth of Nisan fell on a Sunday the particular week Jesus’ died

- So Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on that day, and He immediately proceeds to the house of God for four days of inspection
- Starting Sunday and continuing for part of each of the next three days, Jesus is inspected by the religious leaders
- This process of inspection will show once again that Jesus is qualified to be our sinless, spotless Lamb
- So this entry into Jerusalem is not an opportunity for Jesus to reign or rule over Israel...He is entering to fulfill the Passover
 - Therefore, each detail in the account reflects the requirements of that feast
 - And even the timing of the events will mirror the Passover so that even as Israel celebrate the feast Jesus is at work fulfilling it
- We will study the events in detail, the timeline in detail, the movement of Jesus in and out and around the city in detail
 - We will trace it all so that we can see the sovereignty and wisdom of God at work to bring all these events to the appointed end
 - By the way, in the middle of it all we have the single most important discourse that Jesus gives on the subject of end times
 - Be sure to be a part of this study

- Today we study the entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem in preparation for His death on Passover
 - Last week we followed Jesus walking up the road from Jericho and into Bethany and Bethphage
 - He summoned His disciples to retrieve a young donkey waiting for Him in Bethphage
 - And now Jesus will ride the donkey into the city through the east gate of the city walls
 - Also remember from last week that this is the tenth of Nisan, the first month on the Jewish calendar
 - We're four days from Passover and Jesus is entering the city on a Sunday, the day we traditionally call Palm Sunday
 - And though Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the Passover on three prior occasions during His earthly ministry, this time is different
 - And the crowds gathered outside the city seem to sense that difference, as we see in our study today

Matt. 21:6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them,
Matt. 21:7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.

Matt. 21:8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

Matt. 21:9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

**“Hosanna to the Son of David;
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
Hosanna in the highest!”**

- After the disciples retrieve the donkey from Bethphage and bring it to Jesus, they place their cloaks on the donkey to form a make-shift saddle
 - And then Jesus sat on the coats and the donkey began to take Him into Jerusalem, just as Zechariah 9 foretold would happen
 - And as the donkey moves down the road, members of the crowd place their coats on the ground for the donkey to walk over
 - While this may seem odd to us, it was a well-understood tradition in that day
 - Within the ancient east, it was customary to greet a king's arrival in this fashion
 - We can see a simple example of this when King Jehu of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was coronated

2Kings 9:13 Then they hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under

him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, “Jehu is king!”

- So the crowd places coats under Jesus and in the path of the donkey as a symbolic statement that Jesus is the king
 - Clearly, the people are hoping that Jesus’ arrival in the city will lead to His coronation and the start of the Kingdom
- But notice in v.8 that while most were placing coats on the road in honor of the king, others chose to use palm branches
 - Matthew says only that they were branches of trees, but John tells us they were specifically palm branches
 - Palm branches had a distinct meaning for Jews of that day: they were a symbol of national liberation
 - It’s like the way the French lined the roads of Paris waving tiny American flags when our troops liberated their city in WWII
 - Similarly, the Jewish people waved or lay down palm branches to indicate their joy to greet a liberator
 - The Jews first used this symbol to greet the Maccabees when they defeated the Greeks to liberate Israel in the 2nd century
 - In 1 Maccabees, a historical account of that period, we read:

Simon and his men entered the fort singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving, while carrying palm branches and playing harps, cymbals, and lyres (1 Macc 13:51).

- In fact, Jewish coins that were minted in that period and in the centuries after had a palm branch as the symbol of the nation
 - So palm branches became a symbol in first century Jewish culture of a military conquerer liberating the nation
- So we have two groups with different perspectives greeting Jesus as He arrived into Jerusalem
 - Some in this crowd greeted Jesus with coats on the ground while others greeted Him with palm branches
 - The first group saw Jesus as their Messiah sent to defeat Satan’s Kingdom and establish the Kingdom of God on earth
 - But the second group saw a Moses-like conquerer coming to defeat Rome, liberate Israel and establish a new Davidic Dynasty
- Remember I told you last week that during our study of Jesus’ final week, we will be doing some myth-busting along the way
 - Traditions play a big part in our Easter celebration, and some are proper and true to the Bible

- But there are some traditions that are extra-biblical (not in the Bible) and a few are actually unbiblical (against the Bible)
- And one of those unbiblical traditions is the way we typically commemorate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem
- We commonly call that day Palm Sunday to remember the ones who were laying down palm branches in front of Jesus
 - But the ones in Jesus' day who had the palm branches were making a political statement, not a religious statement
 - They were celebrating a military leader bringing a political victory, not a Messiah preparing to rule over God's Kingdom
- Therefore, that's not how we should remember that moment either
 - The better way to remember Messiah's entry into Jerusalem would be to call it the day Cloaks Sunday
 - Because it was those who lay down their coats who recognized Jesus as Messiah
- Obviously, this is not a major point of theology, and I'm not suggesting we start a movement in the church over it (#cloaksnotpalms)
 - I'm using this simply as an example to illustrate how we tend to accept traditions without question, and without fact-checking
 - And if we do this, we will eventually adopt behaviors and beliefs that aren't correct and some of those errors may be significant
 - Many false doctrines have grown out of tradition (e.g., infant baptism, calling ministers "priests", etc.)
- But there's an even bigger problem when we accept tradition blindly
 - Eventually, we may start to see tradition as equal to Scripture or we may come to value our traditions *over* Scripture
 - When that happens, we will stop looking to Scripture for our spiritual answers and rely only on what our traditions tell us
 - So when we discover that our tradition contradicts the Bible, we need to have the humility to say, "I was wrong" and change
- Back to Matthew, the crowd is greeting Jesus with coats and palm branches, and the crowd is also singing to Jesus from Psalm 118
 - They sing "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" taken from that psalm
 - It's a Messianic greeting that rabbis taught Israel to proclaim when the Messiah arrived
 - Everyone was singing it, indicating that the crowd was there to greet Jesus as the Messiah
 - But remember in that crowd there were two different views of understanding what the Messiah was coming to do for Israel
 - As usual, there were Pharisees following Jesus and as they hear the crowd singing

this Messianic greeting, Luke tells us they object

Luke 19:39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.”

Luke 19:40 But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!”

- The Pharisees recognized the meaning of the crowds chatting of course, and they move to silence the crowd
- They ask Jesus to rebuke them, which effectively means they were expecting Jesus to renounce any claim to being Messiah
- Of course, Jesus does the opposite...He tells the Pharisees that if this crowd didn't proclaim Psalm 118, the rocks would have done it
 - Jesus is affirming a basic and powerful biblical truth best summarized by Isaiah 55:11

Is. 55:11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- The Lord says that His word is the most powerful force in the Universe and it will always accomplish what God desires
- The Lord speaks of His word like it's an agent sent forth with a mission
- And the Lord says it will not return without succeeding in the matter for which He sends it
 - And Psalm 118 declared that as Messiah arrives, “Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord” would be sung in recognition of His arrival
 - And since that word has gone forth, it would be accomplished...nothing will stop it, not even the Pharisees
- In fact, Jesus says that even if the Pharisees had somehow managed to silence the crowd, then the rocks themselves would have cried out
 - The Creation itself is bound to obey the word of God, because His will be done!
 - So the only question is whether we will participate in that obedience or not
- On that day, some in the crowd were willing to participate in obeying Psalm 118, but there were others (like the Pharisees) who were not willing
 - Which takes us back to Chapter 12 again, when Jesus declared that the nation of Israel had committed the unpardonable sin
 - When Israel rejected Jesus' claim to be Messiah, Jesus declared they would not see the Kingdom set up in that day

- And if you remember, Jesus gave the nation an ultimatum, which we found recorded in Luke

Luke 13:34 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

Luke 13:35 “Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”

- Jesus told Israel that since they would not receive Him as Messiah in that day, the Kingdom would be withheld from them
 - Israel’s house (meaning their temple, their ruling dynasty, their nation) would become desolate for a time
 - And Jesus would not return for Israel until they say “Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! “
- There’s that phrase again from Psalm 118...that’s the Messianic greeting that Jesus said would mark His return and the arrival of the Kingdom
 - And now we see the crowd doing exactly what Psalm 118 requires
 - So are we now seeing that Psalm fulfilled as Jesus rides into Jerusalem? Is this the moment He brings them the Kingdom?
- No, and the Pharisees’ continuing dispute with Jesus over His identity proves that it isn’t the moment
 - And Matthew inserts a statement in Chapter 21 to make clear that not everyone was on board with this Messianic declaration

Matt. 21:10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?”

Matt. 21:11 And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

- Notice that many in the city was asking what’s the fuss all about and who was this man coming into the city?
- Despite Jesus’ three-year ministry of miracles and teaching, there were still many in Jerusalem who didn’t even know Him
- And even among those who did know of Jesus’ ministry, they only identify Jesus as a prophet from Nazareth and not as the Messiah
 - Matthew’s point is that there was anything but a consensus about Jesus’ identity
 - So though we see this crowd embracing Jesus as He arrives, they were certainly in the minority

- And that's why this is not the moment that the Kingdom arrives for Israel
- Because when Jesus made His proclamation in Luke 13, He was stipulating the requirement for His return to Israel and for receiving the Kingdom
 - And His standard was that *all* Israel must accept Him before He returns
 - If an individual Jew accepts Jesus as Messiah, that individual is saved by their faith just as we were
 - But that doesn't bring about Jesus' Second Coming nor does it result in the Kingdom arriving for the nation of Israel
 - Only when every living Jew on earth receives Jesus as their Messiah will Jesus return
 - All Israel, the entire nation, must receive Jesus as Messiah, and when that happens, Jesus will come to them
 - And at that time, Israel will be singing Psalm 118
 - But at this moment, only some are singing it, while others like the Pharisees are trying to stop it
 - It was the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus that caused Israel to lose the Kingdom in that day and we see that continuing here
 - A future generation of Israel will declare Jesus to be Messiah without objections and He will return to them in that day
 - By the way, if you're wondering how all Israel comes to proclaim Jesus as their Messiah, you find the answer in Zechariah 12
 - And we will study that passage as part of our Revelation study
- As Jesus enters the city, He goes directly to the Temple, and as I explained last week, this will be His pattern for the next four days
 - Jesus is fulfilling the requirements of the Passover, which required that the Passover lamb be kept in the household for four days
 - During those days, the lamb is inspected to ensure it's spotless and without defect
 - So as our Passover Lamb, Jesus too must be inspected for four days in His house, the temple
 - Sunday is the first of those four days and on this day, the Lord makes a statement about the purpose of the house

Matt. 21:12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.

Matt. 21:13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."

- Passover was one of three feasts on the Jewish calendar when adult Jewish males made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem

- As many as three million Jewish men (often accompanied by their families) would descend upon Jerusalem during this week
- As Jesus enters the Temple grounds, He encountered a common and sad sight
 - The court of the Gentiles surrounding the temple building itself was transformed at Passover into a merchant's bazaar
 - Two principle forms of commerce took place at this time in the temple
- First, money was being changed, much in the same way we change our money at an airport when we take a trip to a foreign country
 - For Jews living under Roman occupation, the Temple was a bit like visiting a foreign country
 - Under Roman rule, the only coins that could be used to buy and sell in Judea were Roman coins
 - But the the temple authorities considered Roman coins to be idols since they bore the imprint of the Caesar's image
 - Since the temple authorities forbid the use of Roman money in the temple, Jews who came to the temple had to exchange their coins
 - Soon in the outer court of the temple, enterprising businessmen sent up booths to exchange Roman coins for a fee
 - Worshippers would enter the court, exchange their drachmas for shekels, and then make their offering to the temple in shekels
 - Of course, the temple authorities took a cut from the profits of those businessmen as payment for allowing them to operate
- But the commerce didn't stop there...the worshippers usually needed to purchase a lamb to sacrifice at Passover
 - Because when a family traveled long distance for the Passover, it was impractical to bring the animal with them
 - Worshippers often traveled for many miles on foot to meet the obligations of the feasts and temple service
 - So instead of bringing the animal with them, they brought money to buy an animal in the temple grounds
 - And you can be sure that those animals were priced accordingly...like buying a sandwich in the airport
 - This was yet another source of profit for the temple priests
 - After changing their money (for a price), the family then went to the lamb booth to buy a lamb
 - The priests were profiting on both transactions
 - And if a families tried to avoid those fees by bringing their own lambs to the Temple, the priests still found a way to fleece their flock
 - The priests required that every lamb brought for sacrifice be inspected to ensure it was spotless and suitable

- Spotless means no evident defect, and the priests went to extraordinary lengths to inspect each lamb
 - And almost without exception, they managed to find a disqualifying defect with every lamb brought into the temple
- So what did the family do if their lamb was found to be defective?
 - If a family's lamb was disqualified, how did the worshippers meet the obligations of the Passover?
 - Well, the priests had a solution...they offered to take the defective lamb as a "trade-in" toward a new, spotless lamb
 - So then the worshipper exchanged some money, traded in their used lamb for a brand-spanking new, certified spotless lamb
- So the priests made money on the sale of these "certified spotless" lambs but they weren't done profiting
 - Because when the next unsuspecting family entered the temple with their defective lamb, they were likewise directed to buy a replacement
 - And the lamb that second family purchased was none other than the same "defective" lamb traded in earlier by the first family
 - Apparently, in the meantime that lamb had experienced a miraculous healing of some kind
 - In other words, the entire temple operation around Passover (and at all times of the year) had become a scam to make money off
 - So Jesus comes into the grounds of the temple, and He appears to go crazy, and in a sense He is going mad
 - He's experiencing righteous anger on behalf of all those worshippers who came with honest intentions
 - And as they came, they were abused financially and spiritually by evil and greedy men...and that makes Jesus angry
 - As Jesus turns over the tables, He quotes from Isaiah 56 where the Lord promises that Israel will have special place in the Millennial Kingdom

**Is. 56:5 To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial,
And a name better than that of sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.**

**Is. 56:7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."**

- Prayer is an act by which we humble ourselves before God and acknowledge Him in all

His ways

- And the temple would be a place where that kind of heart would be welcomed and encouraged and honored
- Instead, the environment Jesus encountered in the temple in Jerusalem on that day was exactly the opposite of what God intended
 - Those who came with a heart of humility and submission to God had become targets for con-men and scoundrels
 - Those men were taking advantage of the worshippers' willingness to be obedient and submitted to God's will
 - Those merchants and priests were taking advantage of that heart of prayer for their own advantage
- And that makes Jesus mad, violently angry in fact, and we should remember that when we think about those who continue to fleece the flock today
 - Of course, their con-man's schemes have changed over time...we don't change money or buy lambs today
 - But there is always a new scheme and they always work the same way...they turn our desire to obey God into opportunity
 - They tell us that when we do what they tell us to do, we're pleasing God and He will reward us for it
 - This makes our Lord angry and one day He will bring His wrath down on those who take advantage of believers

2Pet. 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2Pet. 2:2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

2Pet. 2:3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2Pet. 2:14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

2Pet. 2:15 forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

- We know that bad actors are abusing many in the church today, but it's always been that way
- Just be assured that your Lord is not fooled and He will handle it His way
- On this day in Jerusalem He handled it by shutting down business, at least for a moment

- And we should follow His example in that regard...never allowing our pursuit of God to become a pursuit of earthly things
- And God forbid we should turn another believers' desire to obey God into an opportunity to enrich ourselves at their expense
- That's the main reason that VBVMi doesn't charge for our services or materials...we never want to cross that line
 - It's also why this church doesn't pass the hat...we want our motives to remain pure
 - We don't want to be mistaken for one of those other ministries that are trying to fleece the flock of God
 - So we have positioned ourselves far from that line to avoid even the appearance of impropriety
- I encourage you to test your own heart in these things...knowing that the Lord dwells in your body...you are the house of God in this age
 - So for this time, the Lord wants your house to be a house of prayer
 - And you can't serve God and wealth at the same time
 - Pick one and if you're unsure of which one to pick, ask me

- Here's a good test to know if you truly understand the Gospel
 - Answer the question, "How could Jesus' death on the cross be a payment for your sin?"
 - And the answer is because Jesus was sinless
 - The Bible says that we die because we are sinful, yet Jesus being without sin was not deserving of death
 - So His death became a payment available to cover our sin
 - So the key to Jesus' saving power was His sinlessness, but how do we know Jesus was sinless?
 - The New Testament writers testify to that truth

1John 3:5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1Pet. 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

1Pet. 2:22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

- These authors knew Jesus personally, and they testified under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus never sinned
- But there is still another way we see Jesus' sinlessness demonstrated: it's proven by the intense scrutiny He received in the days before He died
 - During the week Jesus died, He spends four days – Sunday through Wednesday – in the temple teaching and healing crowds
 - And each day as Jesus entered the temple grounds, He was met by religious leaders who test Him in front of the crowds
 - Their tests are constructed as no-win scenarios where no matter how Jesus responded, He will upset someone
 - Either Jesus offends His followers or the Romans authorities, and either way it will discredit Jesus and undermine His authority
- That period of testing was necessary for Jesus so that He may demonstrate His righteousness publicly

- It validated that Jesus was the perfect sinless sacrifice, our Passover Lamb
 - So just as the Passover Lamb is inspected for four days prior to Passover according to the Law, so was Jesus
 - And today we begin our study of the four-day examination process Jesus experienced in the temple grounds
- The temple structure of Jesus' day had been expanded well beyond the original design provided in scripture
 - The original design for the tabernacle involved three principle sections
 - An outdoor courtyard, where sacrifices were made and burned
 - The Holy Place inside the tent where only priests could go
 - And the Holy of Holies where the mercy seat, the ark and God's presence were located and only the high priest could go
- The move from a tabernacle to a temple resulted in a new courtyard being built around the first, called the court of the women
 - And by Jesus' day, Herod had enlarged the temple and added still another courtyard called the court of the Gentiles
 - This outer area was called the court of the Gentiles, because it was not technically part of the Temple
 - This is the area where Jesus turned over the tables
- So the outer courtyard, not being part of the Temple structure, was open to all people, so long as they observed proper decorum
 - This is also the area where Jesus spent His time teaching in the four days prior to Passover
 - And on Sunday, His first day in the temple, Jesus spends only a short time there according to Mark because the day was ending
 - And immediately, Jesus is met by the needy seeking healing

Matt. 21:14 And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

Matt. 21:15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant

Matt. 21:16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?"

Matt. 21:17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

- The first day Jesus entered into Jerusalem was Sunday, the 10th of Nisan, and as He entered Jesus upset the tables of the money changers

- And of course, this in turn upset the priests and religious authorities, which then led them to make accusations against Jesus
 - That scrutiny began immediately, for after the commotion dies down, the sick who frequented the temple come to Jesus
 - And as they come, Jesus acting in compassion in the Temple grounds begins to heal them
- The temple was a natural place for the needy to congregate for two reasons
 - First, for those seeking miraculous healing or simply God's favor, the temple was the obvious destination
 - But secondly, the temple was the best place for the destitute to beg for help from visitors flocking into the city
- Those who were blind or lame were usually poor as a result, so begging was their only way of subsistence
 - Because temple crowds were consistently plentiful and more inclined to be generous to the needy, it was the place to beg
 - Even today, the only place in Israel where public begging is allowed by Israeli law is in the Old City of Jerusalem
- In v.15 Matthew says that as Jesus performs healings, children in the crowd respond in spontaneous shouts of Hosanna to the Son of David
 - That statement was an undeniable declaration that Jesus was Messiah
 - So naturally it upsets the religious leaders again who hate it anytime people say Jesus is Messiah
 - They ask Jesus a rhetorical question, saying don't you hear what the children are saying?
 - They expect Jesus to intervene to prevent the children from blaspheming by calling Jesus the Messiah
 - Obviously, it has never occurred to them that Jesus might actually be the Messiah
 - Which is odd, since Jesus was healing people miraculously in their midst
 - Yet at the same time, mere children understand what these miracles mean
 - So Jesus responds in v.16 saying that these children should not be silenced because they were fulfilling Scripture
 - Jesus quotes from Psalm 8:

Psa. 8:1 O LORD, our Lord,

How majestic is Your name in all the earth,

Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!

Psa. 8:2 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength

Because of Your adversaries,

To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.

- David says God establishes His strength through the mouths of children
 - David is saying that God chooses to vindicate Himself against His enemies by mocking self-righteousness and self-importance
 - Wise and learned adults who deny the obvious will be brought to shame by children who gladly confess the truth
 - Though a child can barely comprehend the theology or doctrine nevertheless the Lord will bring them spiritual truth
 - So in that way the Lord establishes His strength through weak things of the world to shame the so-called wise
 - Jesus quotes that psalm in response to His accusers to show them that the word of God foretold that moment
 - A time when learned adults would scoff at the work of Messiah so it falls to children to gladly declare the Messiah's arrival
 - I think this explains why children may readily accept truths that adults won't... it's a sign of God at work
 - And the Bible says it's a shameful thing when children possess greater knowledge or power than adults
 - When the Lord was preparing to judge the Northern Kingdom of Israel, He told them they would be mocked by their own children

**Is. 3:4 And I will make mere lads their princes,
And capricious children will rule over them,
Is. 3:5 And the people will be oppressed,
Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor;
The youth will storm against the elder
And the inferior against the honorable.**

- When God judged the northern tribes, He did away with their kings leaving the people leaderless in exile
 - And children took their place, leading them capriciously, the youth overtaking the elder, the inferior over the honorable
 - And that's what's happening here...the Lord is chastising and mocking Israel through the mouths of their children
- Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus thanked the Father for operating in this way because it brought the Lord greater glory

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

- When an “infant” understands something that scholars miss, it draws our attention
- It forces us to acknowledge that such an upside-down result can only mean one thing: the Lord has made this happen
- So the first test Jesus faced in the temple grounds... was the leaders challenging Him to defend His identity
 - And when challenged in that way, Jesus didn’t defend Himself...He pointed to Scripture as His defense
 - And in effect, Jesus let children defend Him which mocked the religious leaders for their ignorance
 - Not only were they ignorant of Who Jesus was, they were also ignorant of what Scripture said, which was a strong rebuke
 - These religious leaders prided themselves on their deep understanding of Scripture
 - But in this moment, they remained silent because they had no answer for Jesus, and so Jesus passed the first day of testing
 - Now Matthew says Jesus left the temple and went to Bethany for the night
 - Bethany was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, so Jesus had friends there to give Him a place to sleep
 - And since Jerusalem and the surrounding area was full of nearly 2 million visitors for Passover, He had no hope for a room there
 - This will be Jesus’ pattern for the four days He spends in the temple before His crucifixion
 - He comes into the city each day by way of the east gate and leaves at night to sleep in the nearby town of Bethany
 - And the next morning Jesus rises to re-enter the city
 - But before Jesus reaches the temple for a second day of testing, Matthew records an interesting moment along the way to Jerusalem

Matt. 21:18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry.

Matt. 21:19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, “No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered.

- Jesus becomes hungry on the walk into the city, and looking for breakfast, He spies a fig tree alone on the road
 - As He approached the tree, He sees that the tree had no fruit on it
 - And in response, Jesus curses the tree declaring it will never again produce fruit and as a result the tree withers away
 - This was not the normal time for ripe figs in Israel

- Passover happens in March/April timeframe, and figs are a summer fruit
- So why curse the tree?
- Because the tree was advertising something it didn't actually possess
 - When fig trees in Israel produce leaves, they also produce small buds that later ripen into figs
 - These "pre-figs" called *paggim* in Hebrew are green but still very edible
 - The Song of Solomon mentions the ripening of these pre-figs

**Song 2:13 'The fig tree has ripened its figs [*paggim*],
And the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance.
Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
And come along!'"**

- So Jesus came upon a tree with full leaves, which should have meant that it also had *paggim* fruit available, but in this case it didn't
 - The tree was advertising something that it couldn't deliver, and Jesus chose to make this tree an example to teach a lesson
 - Jesus cursed the fig for failing to bear fruit in the expected time, and in the process the Lord established a metaphor of Israel
- In the Bible, the people of Israel are commonly pictured by three different plants: grape vines, olive trees and fig trees
 - In this situation, Jesus uses the tree to picture Israel's lack of spiritual fruit in the expected time of the Messiah's arrival
 - That week was the expected time for Israel to bear fruit...the time God appointed for the Messiah to arrive
 - The prophet Daniel told Israel exactly what year their Messiah would come to them
 - And days earlier the crowds had declared Jesus' arrival as He rode into town
 - Meanwhile, Israel was acting as if it wanted to know its Messiah
 - It was keeping the Law, it was observing the feasts like Passover every year
 - It had religious leaders teaching about the Messiah and anticipating the Messiah
 - Like leaves on the fig tree, Israel appeared to be ready to produce spiritual fruit
 - But all that ritual observance was empty of true spiritual fruit because it was not accompanied by faith nor was it guided by the Spirit
 - The nation was in the grip of Pharisaic Judaism and the self-righteousness it produced
 - So like the fig tree, when Jesus came to Israel expecting it to produce spiritual fruit, it was found barren
 - So like the tree, the nation will now be cursed for a time and unable to produce any

fruit at all

- The nation would be removed from her land and lose the physical temple causing the nation to cease observing the Law
- This is the desolation the Lord pronounced back in Chapter 12 when He told Israel He was leaving her house desolate
- So this moment was an object lesson for the disciples so they might appreciate the meaning of what was coming
- Now we can understand the historical metaphor easily especially with hindsight, but there's also a spiritual lesson here for us
 - And to appreciate our lessons we first need to study the next part of the teaching
 - Now Matthew's account makes it sound as if the tree withered immediately as the disciples looked on
 - But Mark clarifies that the scene actually took place in two parts
 - First, Jesus cursed the tree in the morning on one day and the disciples found the tree withered on the next morning
 - Matthew just combines the moments into a single scene for the sake of simplicity, and we see their reaction next

Matt. 21:20 Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, “How did the fig tree wither all at once?”

Matt. 21:21 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen.

Matt. 21:22 “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

- The disciples apparently didn't find much interest in the lesson Jesus was teaching about Israel, at least not in that moment
 - Instead, they took interest in the power of Jesus' word to make a tree wither on command
 - They ask how He could wither a tree with just a command, and Jesus responds that they shouldn't be amazed by that
 - In fact, they could make the same happen if they had faith without doubt
 - If they have faith, they could command a mountain to be cast into the sea
 - Just ask something in prayer and believing it, you will receive it
 - From Jesus' response often comes false teaching in one form or another that tell us Jesus is promising believers we get anything we want
 - We just have to believe we will get it and it's ours
 - Sometimes it's expressed as “believing on God for X” (like one TV preacher said

he “believed on God” for a new jet aircraft)

- But that is an abuse of the text built upon an improper use of the word faith
 - The false teachers have defined believing as a confidence in our desire or expectation that something will happen
 - In other words, our faith is in the outcome...but that’s not what Jesus means when He says we must be believing
- Remember, faith always has an object...we have faith in something and it’s that “something” that is worthy of our belief
 - It’s not the power of our faith or the strength of our desire that makes anything come true
 - If you want proof of what I’m saying there is an easy way to find out...go command a mountain to move and see what happens
 - No matter how much you might want it to happen, it won’t happen
 - Try commanding a chair to move or a pencil or even a grain of sand
 - Has anyone ever reached the point where they move a mountain into the ocean? Has no Christian ever had faith then???
 - Obviously, there’s more to what Jesus is saying than merely our desire to make something happen
 - Jesus is saying that the power to do anything resides with God Himself, so when we have faith in God’s plan of action, we can be a part of it
 - The disciples wondered how it might be possible to cause trees to wither with just a word
 - To which Jesus says they could have done this same miracle if they had believed God was prepared to do it
- Here’s a couple of examples: pretend you told a mountain to go into the sea, and it did what you asked...how did that happen?
 - What power caused it to happen? Did you do it with your power? Did your belief make it happen?
 - No, God is the only One with power to make it happen, so clearly God did it
 - So did God respond to you like a genie in a bottle? No, you responded to Him
 - You commanded the mountain to move because you believed God desired to make that happen
 - That’s what Jesus means when He says that in prayer we ask God and then believing in what He reveals to us, we may command it
 - Here’s a second example...you believe your seatbelt will save you in an accident
 - But it’s not your faith in that seatbelt that makes the seatbelt strong enough to save you
 - You didn’t imagine the seatbelt was strong and then the seatbelt became strong
 - The seatbelt was made strong by engineers who had the power to make it strong...

you put your trust in those engineers to do their job

- And moreover, those engineers followed government safety standards that specify how strong it must be
- So your faith in your seat belt isn't in the strength of your desire that it will be strong
- Your faith is based on your trust in the government (not feeling so safe now, huh?)
- Likewise, your faith to make anything happen isn't based on your ability to imagine it or desire it be true
 - Jesus is saying that your faith in what God is prepared to do will allow you to declare it in advance and be part of that work
 - So unless and until God reveals something to you, you have nothing to believe it
 - But if the Lord reveals to us that He intends to move a mountain, we can say to that mountain "move" and it will as God does it
- That's how we produce spiritual fruit...we know God's plan in advance because He reveals it, and then we join in that work
 - We must abide in Jesus, we must listen to Him, know His word, respond to His lead, and as we do we can take part in miracles as He does them
 - We can't name our own miracles nor does God give us what we want merely because our desire is great enough
 - But we can produce spiritual fruit by abiding in the Lord
 - That was the lesson of the fig tree for Israel...they should have abided in the Lord so they could receive the Messiah in His day and produce spiritual fruit
 - And that's the lesson for these disciples and for us today
 - The ability to produce spiritual fruit belongs to God alone, so we must abide in Him if we hope to produce fruit ourselves
 - Jesus has high expectations for our witness, but our witness must be more than just "leaves"...it must include fruit
 - In Israel's case, they had many leaves that suggested they were prepared to produce fruit
 - They possessed the Law and observed the feasts like Passover, and by these things they advertised they knew the way to God
 - But when Jesus came looking for fruit, there was nothing there
 - And in its place, they practiced self-righteousness through empty rituals
 - It was so empty that when their Lord came to them to fulfill the very rituals they practiced, they didn't recognize Him
- And we too have been given "leaves" that are intended to advertise spiritual fruit to the world
 - We don't keep the Law, and so our leaves look very different than Israel's but they

are still there

- What are our leaves? The Bible says our leaves are the good works we do in faith to please Christ

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

Matt. 5:15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- If we bear the fruit Jesus has asked us to bear (i.e., the good works), then we are fulfilling our purpose
 - But if we fail in that mission, either by doing nothing or by giving a false testimony, then we are liable to turn out like that fig tree
 - Jesus describes this problem in John 15

John 15:3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

John 15:4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:6 “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

- Jesus told His disciples they were clean already because of Jesus’ word, so the passage begins with a clear declaration that they are all saved
 - Then what follows is a teaching for the Christian to understand Jesus’ expectations for our service to Him in faith
 - It depends entirely on abiding in Jesus and abiding means remaining connected to Him
 - We can’t act independently from His power, authority and direction and expect to do anything
 - In the same way that a branch can’t operate without a connection to the vine
 - So we can’t bear fruit unless we are following Jesus’ lead, doing as He says and serving with His power working through us by His Spirit
 - If we substitute our own plan or if we serve our own interests or in our own power, we stop abiding in Him
 - And as a result, we stop bearing fruit, meaning we don’t produce works that bring glory to Jesus or serve His eternal purpose
 - We may have leaves like going to church, reading our Bible, etc. but we’re not

fulfilling our purpose

- The one who does not bear fruit, like the fig tree, will dry up and be tossed aside, Jesus says
 - Remember, the branches were already “clean” so this isn’t a conversation about salvation but of bearing fruit
 - So Jesus is speaking in metaphor
 - A dried up branch is pruned and tossed aside, which pictures believers losing opportunity to bear fruit in the future
 - So just as Israel lost its opportunity to bear fruit in Jesus’ day, so will we lose that opportunity if we don’t abide in Jesus
- In my experience Christians spend far too much time worrying about their own salvation and other peoples’ works when it should be the other way around
 - We should be worried about helping others come to faith and focus on our good works done in faith
 - I like to say that only true Christians worry about whether they are saved
 - Unbelievers don’t worry about whether they are truly saved, because they don’t know the difference
 - They think going to church is enough or being “born” a Christian is enough... they never question it
 - So if you worry about not being saved, your worry is actually evidence that you understand the importance of knowing Jesus
 - Like Jesus said, your faith has made you clean, so let’s move on to the real work... abiding in Jesus for the purpose of spiritual fruit
 - Don’t be like Israel and that fig tree...don’t show leaves without fruit
 - Don’t call yourself Christian and do the Christian rituals without actually producing the spiritual fruit that Jesus expects
 - So instead of worrying about your salvation and unbelievers’ works, worry about their salvation and your own works
- Look what Jesus has placed in front of us...He saved us by the power of His death as our sacrificial lamb
 - We did nothing to bring ourselves into Heaven
 - As Jesus told His disciples, He made us clean by His word
 - But then He’s asked us to produce fruit in keeping with our witness for Him
 - We can’t just do the rituals that Pharisaic Judaism did, brewing leaves without fruit so to speak
 - We are called to bear true spiritual fruit by our good works
 - But now we’re learning that even our good works aren’t done on our own...we just abide in Jesus
 - Go where He says to go, do what He says to do, and He will accomplish the end

result in His power

- Bearing fruit is the easiest job in the world, which is why Jesus says His burden is light
- And when it's all said and done, He will reward us for that work
- His grace never ends...

- We return to Jesus' four days of testing in the temple before His death on the cross, let's clarify the timeline of these events
 - All four Gospel writers give us a view on the events of this week, and it's Mark who gives us the clearest timeline for these early days
 - In Mark 11 we learn that Jesus enters the Temple for the first time on a Sunday but He spends very little time there that day
 - Matthew tells us that on that same day Jesus is confronted by His first test
 - Children were calling Jesus the Messiah, and the religious leaders challenge Jesus to silence them
 - In response, Jesus quotes Scripture to show the children were the obedient ones rather than the religious leaders, and so He passed His first test
 - Then Mark says Jesus returned to the temple on the second day, Monday, and on the way that day Jesus withered the fig tree
 - On that day Jesus upsets the tables of the money changers kicking them out of the temple
 - And as Jesus puts a stop to the corruption, He quotes from Isaiah declaring the temple to be His house, meaning Jesus was the Lamb brought in for the Passover
 - Jesus then passed His second day of testing by sanctifying God's house removing the leaven (sin) in preparation for the Passover
 - Now Matthew's account combines the events of these first couple of days to make it seem as though they all happened on the same day
 - But in reality we've reached the third day of Jesus' testing, a Tuesday, and a lot happens on this day
 - This will be by far the longest day of testing for Jesus
 - In fact, the events of this day, Tuesday, are recorded from Chapter 21 until Chapter 26 of Matthew
 - And it will consist of multiple encounters with three different groups of religious leaders
- In Israel at this time, there were three principle groups of religious leaders opposed to Jesus' ministry
 - First, there were Sadducees, who represented the liberal end of the religious spectrum in Israel
 - They had a majority of seats on the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling religious council in Israel
 - And because they controlled the Sanhedrin, they also controlled the temple and all temple business
 - For this reason, the Sadducees were also called the chief priests
 - Sadducees received their income from the operation of the temple, including both from the commerce in the temple and from tithes

- They opposed Jesus for two reasons
- First, because He took a literal, conservative view of the Scriptures, in contradiction to the Sadducees' liberal views
- And secondly, because Jesus' opposition to the greed and corruption of the temple operations threatened the Sadducees' source of wealth
- The second group were the Pharisees, who were conservatives in the religious spectrum
 - Though they were only a minority on the Sanhedrin, they were the religious leaders of the culture
 - Pharisees were in charge of the daily religious life of the Jewish people
 - They had authority over training and appointing rabbis in local synagogues, and they were the judges of the Law
 - For that reason, Pharisees were also called the elders of Israel
 - Pharisees gained their wealth from the money given to local synagogues and by taking bribes in judging court cases
 - They opposed Jesus because He threatened to upset Pharisaic rabbinical rule systems founded in the Mishnah
 - If Jesus put an end to the Mishnah, then the Pharisees' power base and sources of income would dissolve
- Finally, there were the Herodians, who occupied a moderate place on the religious spectrum of Israel, somewhere between Pharisees and Sadducees
 - Herodians were religiously conservative like Pharisees, but they were socially liberal like Sadducees
 - But unlike Pharisees or Sadducees, these moderates were attracted to Rome's culture and economic power
 - They approved of Roman rule and its positive economic impact on Judea, and they supported Rome's appointed king, Herod
 - Because they aligned with Herod, they took the name Herodians
 - Herodians gained their wealth from working closely with the Roman authorities, making money through their political associations
 - So naturally Herodians opposed Jesus when He called Himself a king and offered to set up a new Jewish kingdom
 - A new Jewish kingdom would have meant the loss of their profitable relationships with their Roman benefactors
 - Therefore, they fought against Jesus to protect their income
 - So we have Pharisees (or elders), Sadducees (or the priests) and the Herodians all opposing Jesus for different reasons
 - And on this day they all become unlikely bedfellows uniting to attack Jesus in the temple
 - They hope to discredit Him in front of the huge Passover crowds and put an end to His ministry

- So the pressure on Jesus to handle these attacks well is tremendous
- It's the rabbinical equivalent of the Super Bowl or the World Cup
- These attacks will come in waves of religious leaders coming to Jesus to ask tough questions designed to trip Him up
 - In between these moments, Jesus will respond in teaching, often through parables
 - And even after Jesus leaves the temple at the end of the day, He will teach His disciples privately on the events of the last days
 - Jesus is running out of time, so He is packing in as much as He can before His death
- So with that overview, let's now look at the first attack on this third day of testing in the temple

Matt. 21:23 When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"

- The first attack is brought by two of the three main religious groups: Sadducees and Pharisees
 - Remember the priests are the Sadducees and the elders are the Pharisees, and they sit at opposite ends of the political spectrum
 - Normally, they are rivals and enemies but today they prove the adage that the enemy of my enemy is my friend
 - They've come together as representatives of the Sanhedrin in an official capacity to inquire about Jesus' authority
- In v.23 they challenge Jesus to explain His source of authority to teach with Israel
 - Under Pharisaic rule, no one could teach on religious matters unless they were properly trained by a reputable authority
 - To some extent, churches today still follow this standard
 - Many churches require their ministers to have a degree or certification before they can teach or pastor a flock
- In Jesus' time, a teacher of the word gained authority to teach by being trained and approved by a qualified rabbi
 - And that qualified rabbi would, in turn, have received his training by a recognized rabbi, etc.
 - So the Pharisees required that new rabbis receive training and approval authority from an unbroken chain of approved rabbis
- You can see this principle at work in Paul's ministry, when Paul validated his authority before a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem in Acts

Acts 22:3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

- Paul was a Pharisee before he came to faith in Jesus Christ
 - So Paul defended his authority before the crowd on the basis of who trained him: Gamaliel, a highly respected rabbi in that day
 - Paul was trained by the Harvard or Oxford of his day, and in the eyes of his audience that gave him authority to teach
 - Now in reality, Paul’s authority to teach didn’t come from Gamaliel...it came from a much higher authority – Jesus
 - But in that moment, Paul chose to highlight his Pharisaic training to gain the confidence of his skeptics and put doubts to rest
- So in the same way, the religious leaders were asking Jesus to defend how He had been trained and where He had received His authority to teach
 - Of course, Jesus’ authority to teach and His knowledge of the Scriptures had no earthly source either
 - John says Jesus is the Truth, so Jesus’ was the Author of Scripture, meaning His teaching authority came directly from Himself
 - But Luke also tells us that because Jesus became a man, He had to grow up under the instruction of the Holy Spirit
 - So Jesus’ authority also came from the Father, Who gave Jesus His mission to come to earth and taught Jesus to know all things
 - So the answer to their question was that Jesus had personal authority as the Word, the Son of God, and He was given authority by His Father
 - But interestingly, Jesus doesn’t give these men a direct answer
 - He knew these men didn’t believe in His claims to be the Messiah and the Son of God
 - So He knew they wouldn’t have accepted Jesus’ explanation anyway
 - They wouldn’t have said, “Oh, that’s very helpful, now we understand, enjoy your time in the temple.”
 - In fact, had Jesus given them this answer, they would have called His response blasphemy because He was equating Himself with God
 - More than likely, that was exactly what these leaders were hoping would happen...that was the trap
 - Jesus says His authority is His own, or from God, and then they would have used that response to accuse Jesus before the crowd
- So instead Jesus takes advantage of a traditional rabbinical method of discourse to shine the spotlight back on these men and their dishonest motives

Matt. 21:24 Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

Matt. 21:25 “The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?” And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’

Matt. 21:26 “But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.”

Matt. 21:27 And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” He also said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

- In v.24 Jesus responds to their question by asking them a question, which was an acceptable rabbinical practice
 - Rabbis commonly tested one another by posing questions to questions
 - A group of rabbis could conduct an entire conversations with nothing but questions
 - Dr. Fruchtenbaum tells a story of a Gentile who asked a rabbi why do you always answer questions with another question?
 - And the rabbi responded, “Why not?”
- So in v.25, Jesus answers His accusers by posing a question of His own: was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?
 - Jesus is referring to the baptism ministry that John conducted on the shores of the Jordan river
 - Did John operate with the authority of God, meaning was John’s ministry legitimate and holy?
 - Or did John operate on his own authority and initiative, and if so, then his ministry was a fraud
 - So Jesus is asking the religious leaders to render a judgment on the legitimacy of John’s ministry
- Now how does Jesus’ question about John’s legitimacy address the religious leaders’ question about Jesus authority?
 - Well, remember Jesus’ public ministry began at the baptism of John
 - Well, if the Pharisees said John’s ministry was from Heaven, then Jesus could respond that He received His authority from John
 - And since the Pharisees answer had validated John’s authority, then they would be in no position to discredit Jesus’ authority
 - But Jesus knew these men weren’t going to say that John’s ministry was from Heaven because they opposed John from the beginning
 - John never studied under a rabbi and certainly the rabbis never authorized his ministry, so John was not one of them
 - Moreover, John publicly called the Pharisees vipers and hypocrites to their faces
 - So if the religious leaders said John had Heaven’s blessing, then they would

have condemned themselves in front of the people

- On the other hand, these men couldn't say that John was a fraud, because when John was murdered by Herod Antipas, he became a hero
 - In the eyes of the Jewish people, John was a martyr of Israel for standing up to the Roman authorities
 - If they said that John was a fraud, it would be like someone in a Boston Irish Catholic pub calling the pope a fraud
 - It would have been political – and perhaps *literal* – suicide
- So they couldn't say John's ministry came from Heaven nor could they say John was operating on his own authority
 - The hunters have now become the hunted, and Jesus has them in a trap, so in v. 25 they huddle to reason out how to respond
 - They recognize that if they answer in favor of John, then they look foolish for having opposed him
 - But if they go against John's ministry, then they risk the crowd's anger at them
 - So they try to save face by answering that they simply didn't know where John received his ministry
 - It was a coward's play...an attempt to save face realizing Jesus had out maneuvered them
 - And everyone in the crowd knew that they were simply refusing to answer just to save themselves
 - So Jesus says in v.27 He could legitimately refuse to answer their question
 - Why? Because these religious leaders never intervened to stop John's ministry in his day
 - They allowed John to continue baptizing by the Jordan...it was Herod who ultimately stopped it
 - So the logic of Jesus' question works out this way...
 - If the Pharisees permitted John's ministry to continue though they didn't know the source of his authority...
 - Then why were they demanding to know the source of Jesus' authority?
- Religious authority (or teaching authority) in Jesus' day wasn't so different than it is in our day
 - We don't rely on rabbis to validate our authority but that doesn't mean we don't recognize authority at all
 - In fact, we follow the very same standards that Jesus followed in His own ministry
 - By that I mean, we have both personal authority and authority from Heaven
 - First, we have personal authority to minister based on the spiritual gifts we have been given by the Holy Spirit

- The very fact that the Lord has given us a spiritual gift presupposes that He intends us to use it
- You can see your spiritual gift as evidence that God has given you authority to minister in His name
- Because if He didn't want you to minister, He wouldn't have equipped you for that ministry
- And the Bible says that we are all equipped in this way
 - Paul says in Romans 12 that we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us
 - In a sense Paul means we minister according to the authority God gives us
- So with the gift of prayer, we have unique authority to minister to others in prayer, and with the gift to teach, serve, give or whatever the same
 - Each of us is to exercise them accordingly, and we have that authority from God
 - We don't need someone to allow us to minister with our gift, because we have the Lord's authority to do so
 - And the Spirit will direct us in that ministry as we abide in Him
- On the other hand, we are also like Jesus in that we are under authority as well
 - Jesus was His own authority but He was also under the authority of the Father
 - Jesus Himself said:

John 12:49 “For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.

- And we likewise do not minister on our own initiative
- We have been placed under authority in the body of Christ, so we are expected to use our gift in ways that fit within the body
- Simply put, ministry can't be like living marooned on a deserted island
 - We can't pretend that we are free-agents able to minister by ourselves in all respects and without accountability to anyone
 - Yes we have authority to minister from God, but we also have been told by God to submit to leaders and participate in the body
 - So we must balance the two, just as Jesus balanced both
- And balance means you don't wait for someone to tell you that you have authority to minister to the body of Christ
 - The Lord has already told you that when He gave you a spiritual gift
 - But as you move out in ministry to serve others, you must operate under the authority of church leaders God has appointed
 - They help share your ministry, directing it where it will be best used and discipling

you in the process

- If you receive that instruction and direction in humility, your service will be more effective and fruitful
 - The Lord will work through the gifts of your leaders to make you a better minister to others in your gift
 - That's how authority worked in Jesus and how it works in our lives as well
- So having silenced the religious leaders, it was Jesus' turn to put them to the test

Matt. 21:28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’

Matt. 21:29 “And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went.

Matt. 21:30 “The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go.

Matt. 21:31 “Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.

Matt. 21:32 “For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

- Jesus poses a question to these men in the form of a parable
 - In the parable, a father had two sons, and the father calls upon the sons to help him work the family farmland
 - Naturally, it was expected that sons would obey their father's request
 - Moreover, it was reasonable to expect them to contribute to the family business
 - But on that day, the first son flatly denies the father's request, which was an act of rebellion and almost unheard of in that day
 - That son was rightly deserving of condemnation and in some situations he might have been put to death for insubordination
 - Frankly, there was few things worse in the minds of the culture than a rebellious son
 - But later this rebellious son has a change of heart, and feels regret for his actions
 - At which point he then goes into the field, perhaps a little late but at least he's there in the end
- Then we have the second son, who has the opposite reaction...he agrees to the father's request, but his agreement was only for show
 - While he doesn't openly rebel against the father's authority as his brother did, he still disobeys

- In fact, the second son disobeys without ever experiencing a change in heart
- He never enters the field, so he has an outward appearance of obedience but his heart is completely opposed to the father
- So then Jesus asks the religious leaders the obvious question...which son actually did the will of his father?
 - Clearly neither was perfect, but only one ended up in the field at the end of the day...and that was the truest test of obedience
 - It wasn't who expressed more willingness or who gave the most lip service to the father...it was the one who obeyed in the end
 - Only the first son actually obeyed the father
- So in v.32 the religious leaders give the correct answer: the first son did the will of the father which allowed Jesus to set the trap
 - Jesus compares the first son to prostitutes and tax collectors, those who openly disobey the Lord for a time
 - But in the end, they responded to John and Jesus in repentance, proving that in the end they did the will of the Father
- And then Jesus compares the second son to the religious leaders, those who showed superficial obedience but never recognized their own sin
 - And as a result, those who were openly rebellious would be in the Kingdom while these hypocritical leaders wouldn't
 - Because what matters is where we end our lives, not where we begin them
- Because we all start in the same place...sinners without a hope for redemption
 - It's why the Bible says we all need the grace of Jesus, because we are all born with the same problem: sin
 - But the religious leaders went to the end of their lives thinking themselves righteous and without sin
- For the same reason, these men never acknowledged John's righteous ministry of calling people to repentance
 - Even though John's ministry bore obvious spiritual fruit, they still refused to believe
 - John called prostitutes and tax collectors to repent and when they heard John's call, they did repent
 - These changes of heart were miracles and clear evidence that John's ministry was a movement of the Spirit
 - Ordinarily the religious leaders would have applauded results like that and embraced any rabbi with that kind of power to convert
 - But as Jesus points out in v.32 they refused to acknowledge God's clear and obvious work
 - And because they turned a blind eye to John's anointing they were also turning a blind eye to Jesus
 - Because it's the same problem...their hearts had no interest in serving the

Father

- Because they didn't need a Savior, they didn't receive Jesus, and even before that, they wouldn't receive John's call to repent
- These men were like that second son wanting the appearance of obedience but not willing to make the sacrifices to obtain it
 - Much less did they desire the relationship that comes through repentance and obedience
 - It's the definition of self-righteousness, caring only about the outward appearance and not the inward reality
- So Jesus passes His first encounter on this third day in the temple
 - He shows that His authority cannot be challenged by the rabbis
 - And He exposes their false motives and self-righteous attitude
 - And in the process, Jesus demonstrates His own righteousness
 - But He's also sowing the seeds of His own destruction as these men get more and more desperate and angry
 - So realize that as we minister in the gifts we receive and under the authority of the Lord, it won't always mean we make people happy
 - Many times, the result may be unhappiness
 - But sometimes that unhappiness becomes repentance and that's what we're ministering for...the chance to bring a soul into the Kingdom by the Lord's power and authority

- Which is easier? To look righteous or to be righteous?
 - We can look righteous externally by what we say and do, but the person we are inside is our true self
 - And the conflict over external behavior vs. inward righteousness was at the heart of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees
 - And that issue was most evident during the encounters between Jesus and the religious authorities on the Tuesday before He died
 - Jesus is in the temple teaching and preparing to give His life as the Passover Lamb, and the religious leaders are trying to discredit Him
 - We're studying this conflict which lasts through Chapter 23
 - And we return to a tense moment between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees in the morning of that day
 - Jesus has just told a parable where He compared these men to a son who said he would obey the father but in reality had no desire to obey
 - And now Jesus tells a second parable to explain why the religious leaders were so set against Jesus as their Messiah
 - It was external righteousness vs. internal righteousness

Matt. 21:33 “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.

Matt. 21:34 “When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce.

Matt. 21:35 “The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.

Matt. 21:36 “Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.

Matt. 21:37 “But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

Matt. 21:38 “But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’

Matt. 21:39 “They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Matt. 21:40 “Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?”

- Jesus' asks His accusers to consider another parable of a vineyard owner
 - A moment earlier, Jesus had presented these same men with the parable of the two sons
 - In that parable, Jesus compared the religious leaders to a son who had only external righteousness

- The son said he wanted to do his father's will but in reality, he was all hat and no cattle
- He gave His father lip service when in reality he never intended to do what the Father wanted
- The hero of the story was the other son, who disobeyed initially and openly but in the end he repented and obeyed
 - That son represented the prostitutes and tax collectors who flocked to Jesus
 - They were different than Jesus because they never pretended they were righteous...they knew they were sinners
 - So because they repented, they were forgiven
- Now Jesus moves the conversation along with a second parable and it's one of the most important in the Gospels
 - This one parable explains Jesus' contentious relationship with the religious leaders of Israel
 - It's built on several Old Testament pictures and almost every detail in the parable has allegorical significance
 - Let's start by reviewing the context of the events, and they are somewhat unique to ancient Israel
- The parable is about a man who owned a vineyard, and in ancient times, much like today, land value was determined by what it produced
 - People put their land to work so that they could receive the value of it
 - But if a landowner possessed a large tract of land and couldn't farm it all himself, he would hire others to work the land
 - Then the land would still produce income for the landowner, and he shared that income with those who worked the land
- So as the story goes, this landowner invests his time and money into preparing his land to produce grapes
 - He digs irrigation channels around it, plants the best vines, removes stones, installs the needed equipment and builds a watch tower
 - The landowner did everything he could to create the optimal circumstances for his land to produce fruit
 - And then the owner leaves on a journey and places the land in the care of custodians hired to work the land
 - These custodians have invested nothing and they own nothing...they simply received a stewardship to manage
 - Their responsibility is to produce fruit and ensure a great crop, which has value to the vineyard owner
 - If these workers do their job properly, then not only would the owner profit but so would they
 - The owner will share proceeds of the harvest with those who worked the land,

so they have incentive to do well

- But soon these custodians become self-deceived by their positions of responsibility and they come to see the land as their own
 - They decide they would rather have the entire harvest for themselves rather than settling only for their share
 - They come to believe they owned everything and owed no one anything
- So when the time came for the harvest, the landowner sends first one slave and then another to collect his rightful produce
 - But time after time the custodians of the field beat and abuse and even kill these slaves
 - And in response to this outrageous behavior, the landowner shows extreme patience and mercy
 - The landowner sends slave after slave hoping to change the hearts of those working his land, but the rebellion continued
 - So the landowner gives his custodians one last opportunity to do the right thing by sending his son to represent him
 - Surely the custodians will respect the landowner's son, since the son is the heir of the land and represents the father's interests
 - The owner hopes his son's appearance will communicate to these men the seriousness of the situation
 - But when these men see the son coming, they react to him in an opposite way
 - Because he is an heir of the land, they say if they kill the son, then the land will have no heir and will be theirs forever
 - So they throw the son out of the vineyard and kill him
 - This is a ridiculous plan and it shows how self-deceived these men are
 - Obviously, a landowner isn't going to turn a blind eye to such treatment
 - And Jesus asks the Pharisees, what should the owner do?
- Before we look at the religious leaders' answer, let's decode the parable
 - The landowner in the story represents the Father, Who created Israel and planted her in the land which God gave to His people
 - The Lord prepared the land for Israel and gave her everything the people needed to flourish in that place
 - He pushed out the land's inhabitants before them, and gave Israel victory over her enemies
 - He brought rain in the appointed day, caused the ground to give forth its produce and blessed the people with abundance
 - In the Old Testament, the Lord makes this same comparison

Is. 5:1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved

**A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
Is. 5:2 He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.**

- In Isaiah, the Lord tells us plainly that Israel is God's vineyard so the landowner is the Father
- And Isaiah goes on to say the Lord "planted" His nation in the land for the purpose of seeing them producing spiritual fruit
- That fruit was supposed to be godliness and obedience to the Law so the Lord could provide the world a testimony
 - Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations, a beacon beckoning the world to know the Living God
 - But Isaiah says instead Israel only produced worthless grapes
 - They were ungodly, disobedient and rebellious
- Why did Israel fail to produce fruit? From Jesus' parable, we learn where the Lord places the blame for a lack of fruit: on the custodians of the land
 - When the time came for the Lord to receive a harvest of fruit from Israel, the Father received nothing back
 - And why not? Because those left in charge of the vineyard, the custodians, didn't do their job
 - And the custodians in this parable are the leaders of Israel, their kings, their priests and most of all their teachers
 - Throughout Israel's history, the leaders of Israel forgot their place and their purpose and most of all they forgot the source of righteousness
 - Along the way, they started to see the land and the people as their own possession, not God's possession
 - Earlier in Israel's history, the Lord called out these evil custodians through the prophet Ezekiel

Ezek. 34:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"

Ezek. 34:3 "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.

Ezek. 34:4 "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you

have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.

Ezek. 34:5 “They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.

Ezek. 34:6 “My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.”””

- As Ezekiel describes, the shepherds of Israel became arrogant and greedy and abusive of God’s flock
 - The leaders drive the people into idolatry and depravity and all manner of sin to suit their own purposes
 - These custodians used the vineyard for their own purposes rather than for the purposes the Lord had ordained
- But the Lord in His mercy and love for His people gave opportunity after opportunity for the leaders of Israel to repent and return to Him
 - He sent His slaves, the prophets of Israel, and these men told Israel they must give the Lord His harvest of good fruit
 - Isaiah was one of those slaves, and this is what he told Israel

Is. 5:3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard.

Is. 5:4 “What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?

Is. 5:5 “So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:

I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;

I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.

Is. 5:6 “I will lay it waste;

It will not be pruned or hoed,

But briars and thorns will come up.

I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.”

Is. 5:7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel

And the men of Judah His delightful plant.

Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;

For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

- The Lord told Israel through His slave, Isaiah, that it was time to pay up, to produce fruit
- But instead of good fruit the Lord only received worthless fruit
- And so the Lord told His people that judgment was coming to them as a result

- He would break down the walls and trample the ground and hold back the rain
 - The Lord was speaking about the coming invasion of Assyria and later Babylon which resulted in the exile of Israel from the land
 - That was the warning the Lord brought His people through His messengers like Isaiah
- But the custodians of the land didn't listen to the slaves, and instead they took the prophets and treated them harshly, killing most of them
 - Tradition holds that Isaiah was persecuted to the point that one day he fled from a mob by hiding himself in a hollow tree
 - But the mob discovered his hiding place, and they killed the prophet by sawing the tree – and the prophet – in half
- So now the Landowner has given His custodians one more opportunity to repent and submit to His authority
 - The Landowner sends His Son, Jesus, to the religious leaders calling on them to produce fruit, but how did they respond?
 - They knew the Messiah would rule the Kingdom, but if Jesus were that Messiah, He would have put them out of power
 - Jesus had already declared that their elaborate religious system of external righteousness based in the Mishnah was invalid
- So the custodians, the religious leaders, conspire to put an end to Jesus' claim on the vineyard
 - They want to deny His rule so they can protect their own interests
 - So these men ultimately throw Jesus out of the city and kill Him on a cross at the hands of the Romans
- After Jesus tells the parable, as with His earlier parable, He lets His accusers name their own punishment
 - He asks them how would you have the landowner respond?
 - And without realizing that the parable is about them, they give the logical answer

Matt. 21:41 They said to Him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.”

Matt. 21:42 Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES’?

Matt. 21:43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

Matt. 21:44 “And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”

Matt. 21:45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

Matt. 21:46 When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

- The religious leaders say the landowner should bring those men to a terrible end and give his land to someone who would care for it obediently
 - A better English translation of v.41 might be “He will bring those evil men to a severe end”
 - I wonder if Jesus stood amazed at how they still could not see themselves in the parable
 - Especially given how closely Jesus’ parable mirrored Isaiah’s
 - So Jesus asks these men had they overlooked the Scriptures that foretold how Israel would reject their Messiah?
 - Quoting from Psalm 118, Jesus says the stone that the builders reject would be the chief cornerstone
 - “Builders” is a reference to the custodians of the land, the religious leaders of Israel
 - They rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and Jesus tells these leaders they are fulfilling Scripture even as they deny Him
 - But the Lord will use that rejected stone as the cornerstone of the Kingdom
 - And as Isaiah promised centuries earlier, the land would be taken away from Israel and her leaders at least for a time
 - And the land and the people that these men had once ruled over would belong to someone else
 - A new group would be “hired” to care for God’s people so that they might produce fruit
 - Beginning with the apostles and continuing to the shepherds of today, the Lord has turned to Gentiles to produce fruit
 - Until a day comes for the Lord to return to His people, Israel
 - Only at this point do the religious leaders realize that Jesus has been talking about them again
 - And they have just pronounced their own judgment...they said the Lord should deal with them harshly
 - And Jesus assures them that’s exactly what will happen to them
 - If there was any doubt about the evil in their hearts, it’s only confirmed by their response
 - Because of what Jesus says about them, they harden their hearts all the more

against Him

- They double-down on their plans to seize and kill Jesus but they don't act in the moment because they fear the crowd
- So which is easier? Is it easier to look righteous or to be righteous?
 - The Pharisees of Jesus' day certainly looked very righteous, and they maintained that appearance through hard work
 - As we've learned from earlier lessons, those men engaged in elaborate rituals of washing many times a day
 - They prayed publicly multiple times a day and fasted multiple times each week
 - They were the epitome of righteousness in Israel, and they worked incredibly hard to keep it up
 - But their righteousness was entirely external, meaning it consisted of behaviors only, and those behaviors masked their true nature
 - Think of external righteousness like an actor playing a role on stage
 - An actor works hard to change his mannerisms and voice inflections to adopt a different persona
 - He carries on in a contrived way for the sake of the audience, and if he's good, he can convince his audience that he's someone else
 - For 2 hours or so, an actor on stage literally becomes someone he isn't, but his transformation is entirely external
 - But when the audience is gone and the actor is alone again in his dressing room, he returns to his true self
 - Who he is underneath never changed...he just changed his external, outward appearance
- My point is that if we work hard enough, we can make ourselves appear to be someone or something we aren't, and that's what Pharisees did
 - They worked incredibly hard adopting mannerisms, habits and styles of living to project a certain image to their audience, the Jewish society
 - But underneath that facade, their true nature was still there, because it was just an act
 - In fact, Pharisees were so dedicated to this act, that they took it to the extreme
 - They learned to stay in character at all times, even in their homes by themselves, to the point that they knew no other way
 - They maintained this act of righteousness to the point that they convinced themselves of it also
 - Like an actor who stays in character for too long, these men came to believe they were the person they pretended to be
 - Pharisees truly believed that observing those elaborate religious rituals they invented were their *source* of righteousness
 - Then they went on to teach others that the way to obtain righteousness was to

imitate their act

- But God wasn't fooled by their rituals and recited prayers and extreme piety, because God knows the intentions of our heart
 - The things we do externally don't change who we are on the inside, not by themselves
 - God knew who these men truly were on the inside, and it's our inward reality that God judges
 - So appearing righteous requires a lot of work but ironically it achieves nothing in the end
 - And even worse, it deceives us in to thinking we have something we don't
- On the other hand, actually *being* righteous is quite easy, humanly speaking
 - It only requires faith in Jesus Christ, and when we place our faith in Jesus, we receive His righteousness assigned to us
 - As Paul said:

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- True righteousness happens inside us, as our spirit is made righteous by our faith in Jesus, and that's about as easy as it gets
- That's what Jesus was offering the nation of Israel and those religious leaders
- But in order to receive true righteousness by faith, we must first repent of self-righteousness, of any effort to obtain external righteousness
 - To repent means dropping our act, to stop seeking external righteousness and to confess it doesn't work
 - We stop pretending we are righteous at all, and we accept the reality that we need inward righteousness
- That's why the religious leaders of Israel opposed Jesus so strongly in His day
 - He demanded they drop their act, to stop seeking external righteousness and to acknowledge their need for forgiveness
 - Jesus was calling for no less than the dismantling of Pharisaic Judaism and the elimination of the religious leader roles
 - Moreover, they were blind to their predicament and they were convinced they had no sin requiring forgiveness
 - At a point in John's Gospel, Jesus says this to these men:

John 9:40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?"

John 9:41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since

you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

- The temptation to substitute external righteousness for true inward change didn't die with the Pharisees and Sadducees
 - Billions of people today are still following this same lie
 - They seek ways to make themselves righteous or they think themselves good already
 - And why? Because of what they do...how they live, how they pray, what rules they keep and what rituals they practice
 - It's all an act, one that someone taught them would please God and none of it changes who they really are on the inside
 - But He knows our hearts, and He's not fooled by these external efforts no matter how hard we work at them
 - Those who think external righteousness impresses God are like the Pharisees who declare we are not blind
 - But Jesus says if you truly want to see, meaning if you truly want to know God and be counted righteous, then you must first realize you are blind
 - And that blindness is only cured by placing faith in Jesus, Who gives us credit for His righteousness
 - Psalm 118 says the One the leaders of Israel rejected will be the cornerstone upon which God builds His Kingdom
 - And in v.44 Jesus says we can either fall on that stone or it will fall on us
- This is the Gospel that Christians believe, and I pray everyone who hears my voice knows this truth
 - When responding to Jesus' claims, we have two choices
 - We can fall on the cornerstone, falling to our knees before Jesus in repentance and falling on Him to rely on His righteousness
 - And as we do, we receive His righteousness which changes us inside, producing spiritual fruit as God intends
 - Or we can stand defiantly like those custodians in the parable and the Pharisees in Jesus' day, and if so we will share their fate
 - The Pharisees said such people should be treated harshly and rightly so
 - So as Jesus says, we will be crushed and become like dust
 - Either we repent of seeking external righteousness and receive His righteousness or else He will crush us at our judgment
 - We know the choice the Pharisees made...what choice will you make?
 - If you are moved today by the word of God to fall on the cornerstone, then pray with me
 - And if you have already fallen on that stone, then pray with me as well for the

sake of those who are turning to Him today

- Once again, we're back to the scene two days before Jesus' death where He is being confronted by Pharisees and Sadducees in the temple
 - These men are on a mission to discredit Jesus in front of the crowds or trick Jesus into saying something which they can use to accuse Him
 - Meanwhile, Jesus is on a mission to demonstrate Himself as worthy to be our perfect, spotless Lamb on Passover
 - So Jesus continues outmaneuvering these men and shining the light of scrutiny back upon them
 - Which is a reminder that we can't judge God, nor should we ever try, for He is always above our judgment
 - Now so far Jesus has faced a question of His authority, which He refused to answer on the grounds that His accusers didn't really care anyway
 - They did not know the source of John the Baptist's authority yet they allowed him to minister unchallenged
 - So Jesus said He would do the same
 - Following that first question, Jesus launched into a withering attack on these hypocrites with parable after parable
 - Jesus uses parables to draw the men into a discussion only to turn the tables on them in the end
 - Each time, He publicly humiliates these hypocrites in front of the crowds and they get progressively more determined to kill Jesus
- Let's remember, Jesus is just two days away from His own death, and these men are the ones who will bring that death about by charging Jesus before Pilate
 - They will move against Jesus out of jealousy over His popularity and intense hatred for how He undermines their authority
 - Jesus knows this is coming, and in fact He has foretold it many times, yet isn't it interesting that Jesus is provoking these men?
 - It appears Jesus is working to bring about the circumstances of His own death, which tells you who is truly in charge here
 - Jesus is exposing the religious leaders' con game knowing that as He provokes their evil hearts, they will react predictably
 - They will plot against Jesus and have Him killed in the end, thinking they are triumphing
 - In reality, Jesus will be in control of these events from beginning to end, which is what Peter told Israel at Pentecost

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know —
Acts 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

- So as we study the escalating tension, just remember that this is God's plan and it's playing out exactly as God determined
- Next, we move into Chapter 22 today, and the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders continues to escalate as Jesus delivers another parable

Matt. 22:1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying,

Matt. 22:2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

Matt. 22:3 "And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.

Matt. 22:4 "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'"

Matt. 22:5 "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,

Matt. 22:6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.

- By now it's obvious that all of these parables focus on the religious leaders
 - The first parable of two sons explained the true heart of these men
 - They were like the second son who gave lip service to the father but in his heart he had no interest in obeying
 - The religious leaders were self-serving hypocrites who used religion as a means of personal gain
- The second parable about the vineyard owner explained why the religious leaders rejected Jesus' authority
 - They saw Jesus' claims to Messiah as a threat to the Pharisaic system which brought them great wealth and power
 - In other words, they opposed Jesus, not on religious grounds, but for personal, economic reasons
 - They didn't want Jesus to put a stop to Pharisaic Judaism, which was their goose laying golden eggs
- And now Jesus gives a third parable about a wedding feast, and a wedding is Jesus' favorite way of picturing entering the Kingdom
 - Specifically, this parable is about entering the Kingdom of Heaven and who will enter and who will not
 - It starts with a king with a son who is getting married, and the king makes preparations for the wedding celebration
 - He invests considerable resources in the feast, butchering prized animals and making all necessary preparations

- And then the time came to invite the guests, and the king chooses who he will invite and sends slaves to call the guests
 - But then the slaves discover the invited guests are indifferent to the opportunity
 - And some respond by abusing and even killing the slaves
- Now we need to stop at this point because it's important to appreciate the significance in how this parable begins
 - In Jesus' day there was no social occasion more important nor more anticipated than a wedding feast
 - A wedding feast was all about being extravagant, especially if the family possessed the wealth of a king
- The feast would include multiple oxen, goats and sheep slaughtered...more meat than someone might see in a whole year
 - And there was more wine than you could possibly drink (remember Mary's fear that the wedding in Cana might run out)
 - And the menu went on and on, as did the music and games and celebration...
 - This party didn't just last for hours, *but for days*, sometimes as long as a week of feasting took place
- So if you were invited to the wedding feast of a wealthy family, you didn't just accept the invitation...you bragged about it
 - You wouldn't dare miss that wedding, because it would be the social occasion of the year
 - Simply said, no one turned down a wedding invitation
- So the king's slaves should have expected these people to jump for joy and to receive the invitation gladly
 - Instead, most were indifferent to it...they couldn't bother to even consider it as they went about their daily business
 - And then even more bizarre...some acted in hostility against those who brought them this good news
 - They killed the slaves for bringing them the invitation
 - All these responses were inconceivable, inexplicable, and inexcusable
- These are the circumstances that open Jesus' parable, so as the crowd heard Jesus' story, they probably giggled a little at the foolishness of those guests
 - Yet ironically, that's exactly what they were doing in response to the invitation Jesus and His apostles delivered to Israel
 - The Father in Heaven offered to give Israel the Kingdom in their day, if only they had received the Messiah sent to them
 - His invitations went out by way of His slaves, Jesus' apostles and other disciples, who called Israel to repent and receive the Lord
 - And even before that, John and his disciples had called Israel to repent and prepare to receive the Messiah

- But they foolishly responded with indifference to Jesus' offer
 - Had Israel accepted the invitation, the nation would have received the Kingdom in that day
 - And as a result, they would have enjoyed the greatest wedding feast ever known in the history of the world
- The Bible tells us that a great feast will inaugurate the start of the Kingdom
 - The Bible calls that future celebration a wedding feast, but it will make a normal wedding banquet look like a sack lunch
 - Isaiah describes it this way:

Is. 25:6 The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;

**A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.**

**Is. 25:7 And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.**

**Is. 25:8 He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken.**

**Is. 25:9 And it will be said in that day,
"Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."**

- When the Lord throws a party, He does it right, and the one that opens the Kingdom will be a party like no other
 - Isaiah says it will be lavish, and the Hebrew word translated lavish is the word for fat...meaning this feast will make you fat
 - It features choice pieces of meat, fine aged wine (which Isaiah repeats twice for emphasis)...only the best will be served
- And even better, this feast will take place at a time when all those invited will be without death and sorrow forevermore
 - So in that sense the party never ends! No one wakes up hungover from this party or sad because it's Monday morning
 - Isaiah says we will all say behold, this is the God who saves us, the Lord on whom we have waited!
- That feast will mark the first days of a thousand years of Kingdom life, and that opening event is just the tip of the iceberg for what we will experience
 - Paul says the Kingdom is so glorious in all that awaits us there that we simply have

no earthly idea how good it will be

1Cor. 2:9 but just as it is written,

**“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”**

- Paul quotes Isaiah 64 saying God has prepared things for those who love Him which humanity can't even imagine
 - There will be things we will see that no eyes have never seen, things we will hear that no ears have never heard!
 - The things of the Kingdom are things that have never entered into the heart of man, *meaning they have never been imagined*
- Try this thought experiment...imagine all the wonderful things you could ever want, the best possible life you could ever experience...
 - Then add to that all the good things that every other human being on earth might desire which you didn't even consider...
 - And then take the good things that every person who has ever lived in all of human history might desire...put all that together
 - And you still haven't even begun to imagine how wonderful the Kingdom is going to be...that is your future!
- That's what Israel could have enjoyed in the day Jesus came to them offering them this feast, but they were like those guests in this parable
 - They were indifferent to Jesus' offer, just going about their day, trying to make their way in this world and willing to forfeit a place in the next
 - Now that seems like a ridiculous trade, doesn't it? But there is a reasonable explanation for their strange behavior
 - Just look at what *did* get their attention instead of Jesus' invitation...their businesses and farms
 - In other words, they had their eyes on this world rather than on the next
 - They were absorbed in how to keep their businesses afloat, how to find enough labor to harvest their crop
 - They had the same worries and concerns mankind has always confronted since the dawn of time
 - And because they were busy trying to make *this* world Heaven, they missed the opportunity to receive the true Heaven
 - That's why the same people who would never think to turn down a wedding feast did turn down an offer to join the Kingdom feast
 - They knew from experience how great a wedding feast was, so naturally they were eager to accept that kind of invitation

- But Israel had no faith and understanding of the coming Kingdom, so Jesus' offer didn't seem worth the trouble to accept
- So they chose what they knew over what they didn't...they chose their regular lives, their businesses and farms over Kingdom life
 - And they chose the religious system the Pharisees gave them over the freedom Jesus offered them
 - They turned down the freedom of grace and the joy of the Kingdom that came by faith
 - And like guests refusing to attend a lavish wedding...it was a crazy, foolish choice
- But people often make crazy choices when we take our eyes off our eternal future and when we don't take time to understand what the Bible says is ours
 - When we stop living with eyes for eternity and let this world drive our thinking, we will always choose things we see over things of faith
 - That's why the Bible defines faith as having a confidence in things unseen
 - And knowing what the Kingdom will be like and what it holds for us is the key to living for that world instead of this one
 - When we live for things here and now, the things we see, we're living against our faith
 - But when we live with faith, we live for the things we can't see, for the things we know we have waiting in the Kingdom
 - Obviously, we're all facing uncertain times right now
 - Two months ago life was business as usual, and today it's as if we're living through a Hollywood disaster movie
 - People are confined to homes, worried about their jobs and business and watching their retirement funds shrink
 - To say nothing of the worry over spreading disease and death
 - And even after this crisis ends, as we hope it will soon, we wonder what will our world look like when it's over?
 - Consequently, many of our family and friends are fearful about the future...and perhaps you are too
 - But if you're dwelling on these concerns, you've got your eyes in the wrong place...set your eyes on eternity
 - You're at risk of missing what God is doing in this time, of passing by something eternal because you're looking down instead of up
- Paul says it this way

Col. 3:1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Col. 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Col. 3:3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Col. 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

- Paul says set your mind above because your life is hidden in Christ, and I love that line
 - The Lord has prepared a future life for us that we can't see right now, and in fact, we can't even imagine it
 - It's hidden from our view until we leave this world, yet because of our faith in Christ, we know it's assured and coming soon
- So we keep our minds focused on that life, not on this life...
 - Don't be like that generation of Israel that was so weighed down by this world that they missed the next
 - And though no one predicted this particular crisis, we do know that the Bible has told us to be ready for hard times near the end,
 - So things like this are not a surprise, nor do they suggest that God has lost control or that we're forgotten
 - Remember Jesus provoked the religious leaders knowing it would bring about His own death, because that was a good outcome for the world
- Likewise, we know the Lord is moving a plan forward through these events, and that plan is taking us to the Kingdom
 - So we've all read about martyrs and saints persevering in their faith during difficult times
 - We admire them for their witness and perhaps we secretly wonder if we could have done the same for Jesus
 - Well perhaps now is our time to shine in darkness, to be the light of the world for Jesus
 - Just keep your eyes on your life hidden in Christ and as Paul says in Ephesians 5:16, make the most of your time, because the days are evil
- Now back to the parable, we still have that one group at the end that kills the slaves sent with the invitation, and we know who Jesus is speaking about
 - Again Jesus is describing the religious leaders who opposed Jesus
 - These men did more than overlook the Kingdom like the rest of Israel...they actively opposed it
 - By doing so, they showed themselves to be truly evil men, men in the grip of Satan and under his control
 - How ironic that the most outwardly religious men of Jesus' day were actually the farthest from God
 - So Jesus finishes the parable explaining how the Lord will respond to both groups

Matt. 22:7 "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those

murderers and set their city on fire.

Matt. 22:8 “Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.

Matt. 22:9 ‘Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’

Matt. 22:10 “Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

- The king was so enraged at the response of his subjects, that he sent armies to destroy the murderers and to set the city afire
 - The Lord fulfilled this prophecy in Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Lord sent the Romans to take the city and destroy it as Daniel foretold
 - The Romans didn’t just put an end to the temple and scatter Israel out of her city, they also put an end to Pharisaic Judaism
 - The Pharisees and Sadducees lost their power base and never returned to power again, just as Jesus foretold here
 - Meanwhile, in the parable the king says there must still be a wedding celebration, so it’s time to look for new guests
 - Again, the king sends his slaves out, but they can’t go to the city again because it’s been burned to the ground
 - So instead they go into the highways looking for those who lived outside the city
 - They find as many as they could and invite them to be part of this tremendous feast, the invitation of a lifetime
 - People who lived outside the protection of cities in that day were the lowest groups of society, generally outlaws and destitute
 - So imagine what a ragtag group that must have been!
 - This is not an “A” list of guests, and they weren’t even the “B” list
 - Some weren’t even good, Jesus says, meaning criminals and vagrants attended the wedding
 - Of course, this ragtag group represents none other than us, the Gentile church
 - We were not the original invitees to this feast...the intended guests were the Jewish people, the citizens of the city, Jerusalem
 - We are those outside the city, but since the Jewish nation rejected Jesus, the invitation to the wedding came to us
 - So now we are those destined to fill the wedding hall, and one day we will enjoy the banquet that Jesus promises us
- In Revelation 19, we can read about that future moment when Jesus returns to rule the earth and the feast to open the Kingdom takes place

Rev. 19:6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Rev. 19:7 “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”

Rev. 19:8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Rev. 19:9 Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”

- As Jesus descends from Heaven to earth and sets up His Kingdom, notice there will be a marriage supper of the Lamb, a banquet
 - And collectively, we are the Bride, dressed in our wedding clothes, fine linen bright and clean
 - We are the ones who enjoy this great privilege by God’s grace, which He made available to us in light of Israel’s earlier rejection
- Because God is just and true to His word, Israel will still be represented in the Kingdom
 - But the generation that saw Jesus in this day will be largely missing from that moment
 - Because they were too busy with their world to consider the next
- Jesus ends the parable by pointing out that those who are not properly prepared for this moment will miss it when it comes

Matt. 22:11 “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes,

Matt. 22:12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless.

Matt. 22:13 “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Matt. 22:14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

- The parable ends with a curious moment, as the king discovers someone at the wedding banquet without proper attire
 - In that time, daily clothing was simple and typically dirty and often worn or torn
 - So clothing for a formal occasion was distinguished from daily clothing by being clean and in good repair
 - Remember, these guests came from the highways, so they all would have needed new clothing to attend this wedding

- Apparently, the king went the extra step of providing new, clean clothes to all he invited so that everyone looked appropriate
- But this man has shown up wearing his daily dirty working clothes, which means he never accepted the invitation when it was offered
 - He decided to join the party on his own, and since he didn't accept the king's invitation, he didn't receive new garments
 - To be without proper dress was a sign of disrespect for the king and his son, the groom
- So the king asks him how he would dare to come in this way, but the man is speechless during the confrontation being without excuse
 - Then the king has this man bound like a criminal, and thrown into outer darkness
 - Now in terms of the parable, the outer darkness would simply mean into the night
 - But we know the parable is speaking of a literal place that is much, much worse
 - As we will study in a later chapter of Matthew, this is a euphemism for eternal punishment
- Which leads us to the final question...why did this man receive such harsh treatment merely for a fashion *faux pax*?
 - Remember back in Revelation 19 we read how the Bride of Jesus had been given fine, clean white clothing to wear?
 - That clean clothing pictures the righteousness of the saints, given to the Bride by the Groom
 - In Galatians, Paul says it this way:

Gal. 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal. 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

- To place your faith in Jesus Christ means to have clothed yourself with the righteousness of Jesus
 - That's literally what happens for every person who puts their faith in Jesus, we are wrapped in His righteousness
 - Because we have none of our own...without Jesus' righteousness, we are a dirty, soiled lot of ragtag criminals
- So if we try to show up at the Kingdom wedding feast as we are without Jesus, we will not stand a minute
 - We too would be thrown out, bound as the criminals we are
 - And we will enter eternal punishment for our sins
 - But by placing faith in Jesus, we are clothed in His righteousness, and we will enjoy the feast with Him

- Perhaps you are one of those who always assumed that when you die and you face Jesus, you will talk your way past His judgment and into Heaven
 - Maybe you've joked about it, or maybe you haven't thought much about it
 - Perhaps you just assume it will all work out in the end
 - Let me remind you that no one will judge Jesus, for He will judge everyone
 - And if you think you'll have something to say to Jesus in your defense, then you greatly underestimate the severity of that coming moment
 - Like the man in this parable, you will stand before Jesus speechless on that day
 - For you will be in no position to dispute the facts and you will be without excuse for your lifetime of sin
 - Our sin is self-evident before a holy and just, all knowing God
 - Which is exactly why He made His own Son to take on flesh, becoming a man so He can bear your sin on the cross, standing in your place
 - Easter is only a few weeks away, and on that day we will celebrate that great sacrifice Jesus made for sinners like me and you
 - But you don't have to wait for Easter to come to know Jesus and receive the free gift of salvation that He offers you by His grace
 - You can do that right now, because you don't want to miss the feast that is coming and the Kingdom that follows

- We continue in our study of Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple in Jerusalem a few days before He dies
 - Today is Palm Sunday, the day Jesus entered the city, and we studied that day a few weeks ago
 - And now in our study, we're in the middle of that week, on Tuesday
 - So our calendar is catching up with the calendar of Jesus' passion story
 - Last week we studied the parable of the wedding banquet, where Jesus compared His offer of the Kingdom to a wedding banquet invitation
 - In the parable a king held a feast in honor of his son who was to marry, and the king selected whom he wished to invite
 - The king sent his slaves to inform his invited guests, expecting his guests to respond in joy and eager anticipation
 - But when his guests turned their collective backs on the opportunity, the king chose to invite others instead
 - And as we studied last week, the parable depicted Israel's response to Jesus' offer of the Kingdom
 - As the parable explained, Israel was indifferent and its religious leaders were hostile to the Kingdom offer
 - So the Lord withdrew the offer from that generation of Israel and in their place, the Lord extended the offer to other guests
 - Those "others" who were invited instead are the Gentiles of the Church, you and me, who the Lord chose
 - We are blessed to be included in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 - And our opportunity was made possible by Israel's decision to reject her Messiah in the day He came for her
 - Nevertheless, Israel remains God's chosen people, whom He has promised to bless with the Kingdom
- Therefore, God's choice to favor the Gentile Church now, in place of Israel, is not a permanent substitution
 - There is a day coming when the Lord will again return to Israel with the Kingdom
 - Paul tells us in Romans 11 that Israel is again going to be called and chosen again in a future day

Rom. 11:28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

Rom. 11:29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Rom. 11:30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,

Rom. 11:31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy

shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.

- Since the day Israel rejected their Messiah, generations of Jews have become God's enemy for our benefit
- Because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, the Gentile world has been included in the plan of salvation
- But then Paul reminds us that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, which means the Lord isn't done with Israel
 - God gifted Abraham with His covenant and so one day He will call Abraham's descendants into the Kingdom
 - And those promises are irrevocable because they were unconditional promises
 - They depend entirely on God's faithfulness, not on Israel's faithfulness, and God is faithful even when Israel is not
- Therefore, since we know that the generation that saw Jesus first did not receive the promise (not all of them at least)...
 - Then we should also know that a future generation of Israel will receive those promises
 - In a time to come, the Lord will again return to His people Israel and show them mercy just as He showed Gentiles mercy
- Now if you're wondering why I've opened our study this morning with this discussion, it's because of how we ended last week's lesson
 - Last week I read through v.14 but I never offered an explanation of that final verse
 - In v.14, the Lord said that many are called but few are chosen
 - To understand the verse properly, it's important that we don't forget the context
 - Jesus just taught a parable about Israel being called to receive the Kingdom
 - That call went out to the entire nation of Israel, but only a few received that call and placed their faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - Men like the apostles and women like the Samaritan woman received the good news gladly, but they were in the minority
 - So in v.14 Jesus says that these few within Israel were chosen to be included in the wedding feast, but the rest were set aside
 - So in that sense, many in Israel were called, but few were chosen to attend in the end
- Jesus was explaining why His earthly ministry will appear to have failed, and yet it wasn't failing at all...it was going according to God's plan
 - This was the result God expected and intended as He foretold through the prophets
 - Paul explains this to us in Romans 11

Rom. 11:7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Rom. 11:8 just as it is written,

**“GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,
EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.”**

- Israel was seeking a Messiah, but they did not obtain what they were seeking because they rejected Jesus’ offer
- Instead, only those in Israel on whom God had mercy, like the apostles and the Samaritan woman, were invited to the wedding
- The rest of Israel was hardened, Paul says, meaning the Lord left them in their sin and withdrew His offer of the Kingdom
 - This had the effect of hardening their hearts to the point that the Jewish nation became embittered against Jesus and Christianity
 - As Paul says, Israel became enemies for our sake
- After this day of testing, Matthew’s narrative will pivot into the dark circumstances surrounding Jesus’ painful death
 - But as we consider what happened to Jesus, we have to understand many were called but few were chosen in that day
 - And that was for a good purpose, for the purpose of bringing many sons and daughters to glory

Heb. 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

- Jesus was perfected by His suffering; His sinlessness was proven in His willingness to obey the Father in suffering for our sake
 - And by His sufferings He became the author of our salvation
 - And that’s Matthew’s point here...the hostility Jesus endured from the Jewish nation was a means God was using for our good
- And we need to see the circumstances on that day in the Temple and in the days that followed as God’s work for good
 - Now think about that for a moment...the Lord turned hostility and violence against His Son into a blessing for us and the world
 - We can’t name a more tragic moment in all human history than the one taking

place here

- Our Creator is being unjustifiably subjected to mocking, hatred, torture and death at the hands of His creation
- Never has a greater injustice been done, and yet never has a greater good been achieved as a result
 - As the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus tasted death for everyone leading to glory for those who receive that payment
 - Because in the end, the Lord raised up Jesus to glory to demonstrate His victory over death
- Understanding where the story is going changes our perspective on what's happening and why
 - Jesus is being killed, He's laying His life down for us
 - These men aren't getting the better of Jesus by their conspiracy, He's using their sin to accomplish His plan
 - So knowing that God intended for Jesus to die for a good purpose in the end lets us see the story from God's point of view
- But it also changes our perspective of our own circumstances, especially those the world is facing today
 - As bad as things may be or may become, we need to be mindful of what good things the Lord is working to achieve through them
 - We need to be asking ourselves what good is God working to produce through this trial?
 - How much spiritual growth is the Lord at work to produce in His body of believers as we endure this trial?
 - What new ministries are being formed or strengthened?
 - And what unhelpful trends within the church or wrong attitudes or teaching are being extinguished?
 - How many new opportunities has the Lord created to share the Gospel from the fear and turmoil of our days?
 - Only time will tell, and until that time passes, we can't evaluate our present circumstances
 - We must rest upon our faith knowing God is good and He is at work around us for His glory to accomplish what He promised
 - But even as we embrace this truth intellectually, we must understand that the circumstances of our lives will not always seem good to us
 - Far from it, many of us will know real tragedies in our lives
 - If not in these present circumstances, certainly we will experience tragedies in one form or another sooner or later
 - No one gets out of this life unscathed...we all get our share of trials and tragedy
 - Difficulties are the unavoidable consequences of living in a sinful fallen world

- But Jesus told us to have courage in the midst of these things knowing that in Jesus we have peace

John 16:33 “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

- We know Jesus overcame the world, meaning He lived in it, took the worst it could offer, and came back from the dead
 - And now Jesus will never again be subjected to the evil and hurt of the world...He has overcome it all
 - And that's the same future we have if we've placed our faith in Jesus
 - We have overcome the world because we will one day be resurrected also
 - And when that day comes, nothing in this world will ever harm us or disappoint us again, the Bible assures us
- The key here is resurrection...our peace comes from knowing that our God is a God of resurrection
 - He is in the business of bringing dead things back to life
 - He gives life to our dead spirit as we place our faith in Jesus
 - He will turn the death of this body into an opportunity to receive a new, imperishable one
- And in the meantime, He can turn our suffering into opportunity for glory, but always in that order: suffering comes before glory
 - Which is why Paul says in Romans 8:28 that the Lord causes all things *to work for good*...meaning things don't start “good”
 - But in the providence of God, He puts all circumstances to work for a future, eternal good outcome
 - Only in time can we see how the Lord used bad things in our life to accomplish good outcomes for us in eternity
 - But if you try to judge the outcome of a bad situation too soon, you may think God had failed or forgotten you
 - In the midst of your circumstances we cannot see the good that He is working because first comes suffering then later glory
 - Just remember, there is no Plan “B” with God...everything that happens on earth is part of Plan “A”
 - Everything that happens in your life, especially the trials and hardships, are God's plan for your life to achieve eternal good
 - So we endure trials and difficulties knowing that when the trial is over it will have accomplished its eternal purpose in God's providence
 - Then and only then will He bring it to an end

- In the meantime endure it with a hopeful attitude knowing our God is a God of resurrection
- As James says, consider it all joy when you face trials knowing it is a test of faith intended to bring a perfect result in time
- And in time we will see why it was necessary for our good, and we will be thankful for it
- So let's return to this Tuesday before Jesus' death and study the next moment of Jesus' testing

Matt. 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.

Matt. 22:16 And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.

Matt. 22:17 "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"

- Following the first encounter, Matthew now moves to a second encounter and Jesus' opponents have changed slightly
 - After Jesus embarrassed the first group of Pharisees and Sadducees, they retreated to plot a new way how to trap Jesus
 - And soon, a new group of Pharisees approach Jesus but this time they bring with them a group of Herodians
 - Remember the Herodians were the third group of religious leaders in Israel after the Pharisees and Sadducees
 - Herodians were similar to the Pharisees in taking a conservative approach to interpreting Scripture
 - But they differed from Pharisees by their support for Roman rule and their allegiance to King Herod
 - Pharisees hated Roman rule and opposed Herod personally
 - So the only thing that Pharisees and Herodians probably agreed upon was opposing Jesus
 - So these two groups bring Jesus a question specifically designed to trap Him
 - And of all the ways the religious leaders tried to trick Jesus, this question may be the most devious
 - The question is simple and ingenious...it's almost a perfect trap, almost
- The trap worked liked this: they ask Jesus a yes/no question in which either answer will get Him in trouble with someone
 - And they selected an issue that was a long-standing debate in Jewish society with passionate views on both sides

- One answer will get Jesus in trouble with Jewish authorities and His followers, while the other will run afoul of the Romans
- No matter which way Jesus answers, the religious authorities will have opportunity to accuse Jesus before one or the other group
- And to make sure Jesus didn't sidestep the question as He did with the one about authority, they open with strategic flattery
 - In v.16 they start by saying they know Jesus was truthful in teaching the word deferring to no one nor partial to anyone
 - These things were all true, of course, but these religious leaders didn't actually believe what they were saying
 - They were trying to ensure Jesus would be forced to answer their question one way or another
 - After an introduction like that, had Jesus refused to answer, He would have appeared to be the opposite of what they claimed
- Now looking at the question they bring Jesus, they ask should a Jew pay the poll-tax to Caesar
 - This question was a point of contention between the Pharisees and the Herodians and it was hotly debated among all Jews
 - A poll-tax, also called a head tax, was required by Rome of everyone living under Roman rule
 - The payment of this tax was considered a personal tribute to the Caesar, and Mark's Gospel specifically calls it a tribute tax
 - Rome imposed it in AD 6, and though it was a small amount, the Jews universally opposed it and even revolted over it at one point
 - That earlier revolt gave rise to the Zealot movement and the Zealots were the ones who later led the Jewish revolt in AD 66
 - So the Jewish people fiercely opposed the tribute tax as an affront to their sovereignty as a nation
 - And Pharisees opposed Jews making any tribute to Caesar on the grounds that the Roman emperor had declared Himself to be God
 - So in their view, any Jew who advocated for paying the tax was recognizing Caesar's claim to be god and guilty of idolatry
 - But the Herodians supported paying the tax since they preferred Roman rule and were not concerned about the Pharisee's claims of idolatry
 - And of course, the Roman authorities expected it to be paid and took a very dim view of anyone who encouraged disobedience
 - So had Jesus opposed paying the tribute tax, it would have offended the Herodians and drawn the ire of the Romans
 - And the Herodians would have taken the case against Jesus to Pilate
 - In fact, later, the religious leaders lie to Pilate accusing Jesus of telling the people not to pay the tax

- On the other hand, if Jesus advocated paying the tax, He would have upset the Pharisees and been accused of idolatry
 - Furthermore, supporting the tribute tax could be seen as an endorsement of Herod as the rightful king of Israel
 - That would have resulted in Jesus losing credibility with the crowds around him
 - And the Pharisees could make a case for the crowds to stone Jesus
- So one way or the other, this question seemed destined to get Jesus in trouble, a perfect trap it seems, so how does Jesus escape the trap?

Matt. 22:18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?

Matt. 22:19 “Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius.

Matt. 22:20 And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”

Matt. 22:21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

Matt. 22:22 And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

- Jesus begins His response by calling this moment what it was: a farce
 - Flattery is just a socially acceptable way of lying, and Jesus was having none of it
 - They have no sincere interest in this question, nor did they intend to follow whatever advice Jesus gave them
 - Their flattery was a ploy to trap Jesus, and so Jesus rightly calls them hypocrites
- So Jesus turns the tables on these men asking for a denarius, the Roman coin of that day
 - Now notice...someone had to go find a coin because there would not have been one readily available
 - Remember, the Roman coin was not accepted in the Temple, which is why money changers operated in the temple grounds
 - So someone probably went to a money changer’s table and retrieved a coin for Jesus
- And after they bring the coin to Jesus, he asks His well-known question: who’s picture is on the coin?
 - The obvious answer was Caesar’s image is on the coin, because his profile was embossed on one side
 - It was stamped with Caesar because it was a reflection of Caesar’s rule and power
 - But Pharisees viewed anything stamped with a person’s image to be an idol and even just holding a denarius was consider idolatry
 - So a Pharisee refused to use the Roman currency

- And at the same time, Rome refused to accept Jewish shekels as payment for the poll tax, so Pharisees refused to pay the tax
- Jesus knew that Pharisees behaved this way, and He uses it against them
 - He says render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and the Greek word translated render literally means to give back
 - Jesus was calling for the Pharisees to simply act in keeping with their convictions
 - The denarius was a Roman coin, not a Jewish coin, and the Pharisees had no interest in holding onto Roman money they say
 - So a denarius was worthless to the Pharisees...it only had value to Caesar
 - So Jesus says just give Caesar back what is his and you need not worry that you are showing Caesar honor
 - Because when you give away something that is worthless to you, then there's no sacrifice involved
 - And unless your tribute involves personal sacrifice, it's meaningless
 - In this case, they were just returning something to Caesar that already belonged to him and meant nothing to them
 - In other words, when we give worthless things, it's not a form of worship
 - And that's true for us too...we give tribute or honor to that which we make sacrifices
 - If you were to put Monopoly money in the offering plate at church, would you be honoring God with that gift?
 - No, because that gift cost you nothing and so it is not a tribute
- So Jesus sidesteps the trap by eliminating the conflict between paying the tax and honoring God
 - Paying that tax with money that meant nothing to Pharisees wasn't a tribute and therefore it wasn't dishonoring to God
 - Therefore, Pharisees and all Jews could make the payment without compromising their standing under the Law
 - That answer satisfied the Herodians and Romans who wanted to see the tax paid
 - And it addressed the concerns of the Pharisees by eliminating any violation of the Law
 - Moreover, Matthew says it amazed the crowds but Jesus wasn't finished with these men
 - Jesus adds that they should render to God the things that are God's
 - What thing do we render or return to God? We give Him our worship, praise and obedience, or as Paul puts it:

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- The religious leaders had been worried about extending Caesar too much honor but meanwhile they weren't honoring God at all
- Their lives were supposed to be like that coin, a representation of God, as if God's face was embossed on their bodies like a coin
- Instead, they were living a life of self-righteousness, selfishness and greed
 - They were enemies of God who actively opposed the Son of God and led the people of Israel astray
 - Which is why the Lord looks at them in this moment and says render to God what is His
 - Stop being concerned with obeying your own rules, Jesus is saying, and instead start obeying the word of God
 - How hypocritical was it for these men to worry about handling a Roman coin even as they tried to kill the Messiah
 - They were engaged in an ungodly conspiracy against God while arguing over how to please God with worthless currency
 - This is what self-righteousness looks like...it's judging ourselves by meaningless standards instead of being subject to God's standards
 - The Pharisees made self-righteousness into an art form
 - And they were completely oblivious to the need to serve God through a life of obedience to His word
 - And as a result, the Pharisees had presented the poll-tax situation as an either-or choice, but in reality it was an and-both situation
 - The Lord wants His people to set the example as good citizens in whatever society and culture He places us
 - And part of that example is to live in obedience to the government God places over us

Rom. 13:1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Rom. 13:2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

- Only when a governments' demands comes into direct conflict with God's word are we placed in a position to disobey the government
 - And almost always there are ways to work around that conflict as Jesus found in this

case

- But when we resist government at every opportunity as if we're serving God, we fool ourselves and disobey God
- We will face many tests during these days of hardship and crisis, including how to balance our obedience to government with our obedience with the word of God
 - But if we are patient in the trial, looking for the good that God is accomplishing, then we will meet its intended purpose
 - Just so long as we do not take the easy way out, the way of self-righteousness
 - Our responsibility in these days is to wear the image of Christ, His imprint on our very bodies
 - Make your lives a living sacrifice, and next week we will celebrate Easter, the day when Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us

- Welcome to our virtual observance of Easter, the day we remember our Lord raised from the dead
 - The Bible says Jesus was raised before dawn on the first day of the week, which is Sunday on the Jewish calendar just as it is for us today
 - For that reason Christians everywhere celebrate Jesus' resurrection on the first Sunday after the Jewish Passover
 - This year Passover occurred this past Thursday, which was the same day Passover fell upon during the week Jesus died
 - So as it turns out, this week is following the same pattern as the original Passion week
 - We will continue studying more about the events of that week as we progress through Matthew
 - But today is Easter, and typically I take a break from the verse-by-verse study I'm currently moving through on this day to acknowledge the day
 - I usually pause to preach a message on the significance of the resurrection of Jesus
 - Because Easter is all about resurrection, about Jesus' dead body returning to life and walking out of the tomb
 - But in the providence of God, we happen to find ourselves today in a passage in Matthew that fits the topic of Easter perfectly
 - So instead of venturing away from our regular study, I'm going to continue forward with our study exactly as God planned
 - Because the topic the Lord prepared for us in Chapter 22 of Matthew today is... resurrection
- Let's return to the scene in Matthew 22, on the Tuesday before Jesus dies, Jesus is teaching in the temple and being challenged by various religious leaders
 - They are intent on discrediting Him and they've been coming at Jesus in waves, one group after another trying to trap Him
 - Last week we studied a trap set by the Pharisees and Herodians who brought a question about paying the poll tax to Caesar
 - They tried to lead Jesus to say that either Jews shouldn't pay the tax, which would have upset the Romans
 - Or else Jesus might say that Jews should pay the tribute to Caesar, in which case the people would have been upset at Him
 - But Jesus sidesteps the trap by explaining that the tax could be paid without risk of idolatry because the denarius was worthless to Jews
 - Since the Roman coin had no value to Pharisees and only had value to Caesar, Jesus said give back to Caesar what is his
 - Giving something away that you don't value can't be considered a tribute because you aren't making a sacrifice
 - But then Jesus added that these men should also give God what is His, meaning

they had been missing the forest for the trees

- They were worried about giving Caesar too much honor, meanwhile they weren't honoring God at all
- When their Messiah came to them, they conspired to kill Him
- So Jesus won Round 2 in this battle, and now it's time for Round 3, and the topic for Round 3 on this Easter morning is...resurrection

Matt. 22:23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him,

Matt. 22:24 asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.'

Matt. 22:25 "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother;

Matt. 22:26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh.

Matt. 22:27 "Last of all, the woman died.

Matt. 22:28 "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her."

- The Sadducees have returned to take a second shot at Jesus and Matthew introduces them with a parenthetical comment
 - In v.23 Matthew explains that the Sadducees were those who said there was no resurrection
 - The Sadducees taught that the notion of a future bodily resurrection was nothing more than a fairy tale
 - And to understand what they said specifically, we first need to understand what resurrection is and what it is not
 - Resurrection is NOT the spirit of a person rising up from their dead body into Heaven like a ghost in a cartoon
 - Resurrection is a dead body returning to life, as when Jesus' body came back to life after 3 days
 - Or in the case of Lazarus in John 11 when Jesus raised his dead body back to life after 3 days in the tomb
 - But in the case of our resurrection, we won't receive back our original bodies
 - When we die our physical bodies go into the grave and eventually return to dust never to be seen again
 - From that moment, we exist in Heaven in the form of spirit only waiting for our resurrection day
 - Then in a day to come the Bible says the Lord will give to all saints a new eternal body for our life in the Kingdom

- That is resurrection, when we will live again on this earth in a new glorified body
- Now the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, which means they didn't believe that God gives saints new physical bodies
 - Instead, Sadducees taught that the saints remain eternally, in spirit form only, in Heaven with the God
 - And for that reason, they also didn't believe in a literal physical Kingdom on earth
 - For Sadducees, this life on earth was the only one we receive, and afterward we live in an etherial state with God
 - This view was very different than the Pharisees, who taught a literal resurrection and a literal physical Kingdom to come
 - So this question had become a major debate between the two parties in Israel
 - Sadducees maintained there was no resurrection in our future, while Pharisees taught that there was a literal resurrection
 - So to prove their point and embarrass Jesus, the Sadducees contrived this ridiculous scenario to make the idea of resurrection seem foolish
 - Their scenario was built upon a provision in the Law of Moses (Deut 25:5) for a childless widow to carry on the family name
 - The law said if a woman's husband died before she produced a male heir, then one of his unmarried brothers must marry her
 - And the first son born to that couple would be considered the son of the dead man, thus continuing his family name
 - And Sadducees viewed this requirement in the Law as proof that the concept of resurrection was unworkable in practice
- In their example, they imagine a woman who is widowed and then enters into a Levirate marriage with the dead man's brother
 - But then her second husband dies also, so she marries another brother and this continues a total of six times
 - Each time the next brother in the family steps up to marry her and later dies, resulting in seven marriages altogether
 - Eventually she dies and all are reunited in physical bodies after the resurrection
 - So then the Sadducees ask Jesus, which of those brothers would be her true husband after the resurrection?
 - They were mocking the idea that people returned to physical bodies and picked up life again where they left off
 - Under such circumstances, we would inevitably encounter serious problems, they assumed, especially in the area of marriage
 - They expected to see resurrected ex-spouses together in the Kingdom trying to figure out who was married to whom...it would be chaos!
 - For the Sadducees, such a scenario seemed to make the reality of a literal,

- physical resurrection impossible
 - And they assumed this scenario would make Jesus look foolish as He tried to untangle the conflicts
 - They then could turn to the crowds and say Jesus was teaching wrong and silly ideas about God and Heaven
 - And as a bonus, they could embarrass their rivals, the Pharisees, who also believed in resurrection
- Now before we look at Jesus' response, we might be tempted to ask what's the big deal here? This sounds like an academic debate
 - It's like theologians sitting around asking how many angels fit on the head of a pin, or can God make a rock so large that He can't lift it?
 - But in reality this was a critically important question
 - And in fact there is no single issue in all the New Testament more important than the topic of resurrection
 - Your entire faith and salvation depends on this question, depends on the literal truth of resurrection
 - Or as the Bible often calls it, our "hope"
 - You have no doubt read in the New Testament about the Christian hope?
 - Paul uses the word hope 44 times in his letters, including telling us that in hope we've been saved and hope doesn't disappoint
 - Consider these other statements by Paul:

Gal. 5:5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

Col. 1:27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

1Th. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

- Did you know in all these cases and many more, when Paul refers to our "hope" he's speaking specifically of our hope of resurrection
 - The hope of the Christian faith is our expectation that we will rise from the dead into a new physical body and live on earth again
 - In Galatians 5:5 Paul calls resurrection the hope of righteousness, because it is the outcome for those who are righteous by faith
 - In Colossians 1:27 Paul says that resurrection is our hope of glory, because at our resurrection we receive a new glorified body

- And in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul says we ought not grieve for dead believers as those who have no expectation of resurrection
- Your faith is in Jesus Christ, and that faith leads to your hope for resurrection
 - We are not yet in our eternal, glorified bodies, which is why it's called a hope, but we anticipate that day
 - And our expectation for resurrection is not a senseless hope
 - On the contrary, our hope in a future resurrection is sensible, rational and well-founded
 - Why so? Because of Jesus' own resurrection on the first Easter
 - When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you testify that you believe His claims, and what did He claim?

John 5:21 “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

John 6:40 “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

- In these two quotes, Jesus claims to have the power to raise people from the dead, meaning to give people new living bodies
 - Jesus promised that those who place their faith in Him would be resurrected on the last day
 - So in a time to come Jesus says He will perform a mass resurrection for all His followers just prior to the Kingdom
- Now those are bold claims, and words are cheap, so how do we know Jesus truly has the power He claimed?
 - First, during His earthly ministry Jesus performed several resurrections including Lazarus, which I mentioned earlier
 - But His ultimate proof came when He foretold His own resurrection

Luke 9:22 saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.”

- Jesus said He would die and later be resurrected, but if Jesus dies, who will resurrect Him?

John 10:17 “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that

I may take it again.

John 10:18 “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

- Jesus promised He would resurrect Himself, which He referred to as taking His life up again
 - Now that’s an audacious claim! Many people over the centuries have claimed to have the power to raise *others* from the dead
 - And a few have truly possessed that power, include the apostles who were granted power to raise the dead at times
 - But no one to my knowledge has ever promised to raise himself from the dead and then actually performed it...except Jesus
 - Jesus promised to have this power, and He settled all doubts when He walked out of the grave before dawn on Sunday
 - Now why is this so important? Because the hope of the Christian faith is knowing we live again in a body on this earth, that death is not the end
 - Death is merely a transition, and when that “day” of resurrection comes, we will have put death behind us forever
 - You will one day live inside a new body, one similar to the one you have now except this new one will never die again
 - And it will never get sick, never suffer, never know disappointment or heartache...and most of all it has no sin
 - In that day when you receive your new body and again walk on this earth, you will enjoy all the things you once knew
 - You will hold someone’s hand again, you will see your face in the mirror and this time it will never age again
 - You will go for a walk, swim in the ocean, eat a meal, sing a song, and you will never worry that things will be taken from you again
 - That’s our hope...it’s a hope in resurrection, a hope of escaping the fleeting life we know now to embrace an eternal life with Jesus
- And that hope is based in something real and rational...it’s not a hope in a fairy tale
 - And we know this because Jesus raised Himself from the dead to give us confidence
 - His resurrection is perhaps the best documented event of ancient history
 - Jesus’ crucifixion was witnessed by hundreds so there was no doubt He died
 - And His resurrection appearances were witnessed by hundreds more over weeks of time
 - The four Gospels are accounts written by men who lived at that time and witnessed the risen Lord and testified to what they saw
 - And if Jesus had not proven His claims...if He had died and stayed dead, then there

would be no reason to place faith in Him

- If someone says they can give us the gift of eternal life but they can't even give that gift to themselves, don't believe it
- Why place your hope for resurrection in someone who can't even resurrect himself?
- Or as Paul says:

1Cor. 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

- Paul says if Christianity was merely a hope that Christ would give us our best life now, then Paul says we are a sad bunch
- We should be pitied more than anyone else, because we denied ourselves the pleasures of this world with nothing to show for it
- No, Paul says that's not our situation, because Christ was raised from the dead, and the fact of His resurrection means our hope is justified
 - He does have the power to give us a new living body after this one is gone, and because we trust Him to do it, we will have it
 - That's why Jesus' resurrection is so important, and it's why this question posed by the Sadducees is so important to us
 - If the Sadducees were right and resurrection was just a joke, our faith is a cruel joke and our hope is a farce
- So how does Jesus deal with this question? He shows how these religious leaders had again misunderstood Scripture

Matt. 22:29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.

Matt. 22:30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Matt. 22:31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God:

Matt. 22:32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Matt. 22:33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

- Jesus states plainly that these men were mistaken, because they assumed too much about life in the Kingdom and assumed too little about the power of God
 - First, they misunderstood how resurrection worked because they assumed too

much about what life in the Kingdom will be like

- The Sadducees assumed that after we are resurrected we will just pick up in the Kingdom life right where we left off in this life
- They thought our present world was the pattern for how life in the Kingdom will go, and in many ways it is a pattern
- We still have our identity and enjoy daily life in similar ways, the Bible says
- But many details of life will be different in the resurrected life in the Kingdom, not the least of which will be the complete absence of sin in us
 - By the way, we're studying those differences now in Revelation and I encourage every believer to learn about their future
 - That's why God told us so much about it in His word, so that we would anticipate it and give Him thanks for it
- But Jesus says one of the key difference between life now and life in the Kingdom will be the elimination of the institution of marriage
 - In the Kingdom, we will no longer have husband-wife relationships nor desire such attachments
 - We will be like angels Jesus says, and we know God created angels to live and serve Him without other attachments
 - Angels are all devoted to the Lord, and they are completely satisfied in that relationship as we will be too
- So the Sadducees' trick question was just nonsense, because they had imagined a problem that simply won't exist in the Kingdom
 - That woman and all those men in their scenario will simply be brothers and sister in Christ after the resurrection
 - Their marriage relationships will be a thing of the past and so their scenario was not proof that resurrection was foolish
 - It was proof that the Sadducees were foolish
- Isn't it amazing how wrong assumptions about God and the Bible can lead us to ridiculous conclusions?
 - These men assumed marriage existed in the Kingdom, and on that basis alone they dismissed with one of the most important truths in the Bible
 - That's a good example of the danger of interpreting the Bible based on our assumptions and failing to take it for what it says
 - The scriptures said that resurrection was coming, but they said it couldn't be true because they couldn't imagine how it worked
 - But here's a simple rule of Bible study: when what the Bible tells you is something you don't understand, accept it without understanding it
 - It's ok to know that something *is* true even if you don't know *why* or *how* it's true
 - Don't dismiss it and certainly don't change it just so you can feel better that you

understand it...let God be God

- Which leads us to the second mistake the Sadducees made: they didn't understand the power of God
 - God has the power to do literally anything you can imagine and a whole lot of things you can't even imagine
 - So when the Bible says that there is a Kingdom coming for us with a real and amazing life, you can believe it
 - And in the meantime, we will have questions about how and why and when and what will it be like, etc.
 - One day those questions will be answered, and many of those answers will amaze us as we see the power of God on display
 - But never underestimate what God can do, because when you underestimate God you will eventually misunderstand the Bible
 - Like the Sadducees you will assume that the rules we live under are rules that limit God too
 - But remember, God wrote the laws of the Universe, and He can change them whenever He wants
 - The rules of our world say a man can't walk on water, but Jesus did
 - And our rules say you can't make water turn to wine or multiply fishes and loaves, but Jesus did
 - And in our world dead things don't come back to life, but in Jesus' power dead things are raised again
 - And we know these things because the word of God tells us these things
 - The Bible says an ark saved man and animals, the Red Sea was parted, the sun stood still in the sky for hours, a virgin gave birth
 - To understand the Bible properly, we have to acknowledge God's power to do anything, especially things that aren't possible for us
 - So you can't force God to operate according to the limits of this world, because He was the One Who established those limits
 - And therefore He can break them when He desires, and knowing that means we can take His word at face value
- But the Sadducees interpreted the Bible according to what they already understood or could imagine, and so they didn't understand God
 - In v.31 Jesus concludes by saying even Moses testified that resurrection was true
 - Jesus then quotes from Exodus 3:6 where the Lord identifies Himself to Moses as the God of three men
 - The Lord said He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel
 - By that time, those three men had long since passed away, yet God said He "is" the God of these men, not that He "was" their God
 - So Jesus says God is a God of the living, not the dead

- So if God was still calling Himself the God of these three men after they died, then clearly those men had not ceased to exist
- They continued to live even after their bodies died, and so God was still calling Himself their God even in Moses' day
- But how does God's claim to be their God prove the reality of resurrection?
 - We know those men weren't resurrected by Moses' time, and they haven't even been resurrected today
 - The answer comes from the special meaning that Jews attached to those three names together
 - Whenever Jews say "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" together, they are in reference to a covenant God gave those men
- We call this covenant the Abrahamic Covenant, because it was given to Abraham first and later repeated to Isaac and Jacob
 - This covenant is the basis for all of Israel's blessings, and in this covenant there are promises to Abraham and his descendants
 - And in particular, the Lord promised Abraham he and his descendants would live securely in an inheritance of land

Gen. 17:8 "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

- So Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all received this promise, and yet none of these men ever saw that promise fulfilled in their lifetimes
 - They died without having received that promised inheritance of land, so if God is to be faithful to His promise, then He must resurrect them
 - They must live again if they are ever to receive the land that God promised to give them
 - And not only will they need to be resurrected, but so will all Jews who are of faith for they too were all promised the inheritance
 - So Jesus points back to these men and the covenant they received to show the Sadducees that even Moses knew that resurrection was true
 - For in his day God said that He was the God who promised to bring those men back from the dead to enjoy their promises
 - And the writer of Hebrews reminds us of that truth

Heb. 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

- So with that Jesus not only proves the truth of resurrection, but He also showed the foolishness of the Sadducees
 - They didn't understand Scripture and they didn't understand the power of God
 - Scripture shows that God has planned from the beginning to keep His promises to Israel and to us in the Kingdom
 - And if so, then it means we all must be there together in physical bodies so we can enjoy our inheritance
- It means that resurrection is true and necessary, and Jesus' own death and resurrection is your proof that these things will happen
 - Easter is God's annual reminder that He will raise you from the dead and He will keep His promises to you
 - Easter is your proof that Jesus wasn't lying and your faith isn't in a fairy tale
 - Easter is the assurance of your hope, the Christian hope of our coming resurrection
- How do you receive this hope? How can you know that your death will not be the end of your joy and life on this earth?
 - It's very simple...all that God asks of anyone is that we believe in His Son
 - Believe that Jesus is your Savior, the One Who paid for your sin by dying in your place
 - Believe Jesus' death on a cross was a payment for your sin, and if you believe that and accept the payment, God forgives you of all your sins...all of them
 - Paul says it this way:

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

Rom. 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation

- Believing in Jesus is all about believing in His resurrection
- Because it's the difference between believing in fairy tales and believing in the Living God

- In our verse-by-verse study of Matthew, we're studying the events that took place in the temple on the Tuesday before Jesus died
 - Tuesday is one of four days that the Lamb of God was tested so He could be shown spotless and without blemish, without sin
 - His testing came in the form of trick questions brought by the religious leaders of Israel who opposed His claims
 - And so far, Jesus has endured three rounds with these guys and each time He's put them back on their heels
 - Moments earlier the Sadducees had tried stumbling Jesus on the issue of resurrection with that question involving Levirate marriages
 - The Sadducees didn't believe in a literal, physical resurrection
 - So they were seeking to discredit the idea, and Jesus, with a ridiculous scenario
 - Jesus responded by saying the Sadducees didn't understand Scripture nor the power of God
 - Those two reasons are always behind all misunderstandings, debates, confusion and false teaching about God and the Bible
 - Whenever we overestimate our understanding of the Bible or underestimate the power of God, we get it wrong
 - So Jesus corrected the Sadducees by showing how Moses taught the reality of resurrection, stunning them and the crowd into silence
 - The Sadducees' rivals, the Pharisees, were standing by watching this happen, delighted by their dressing-down
 - The Pharisees taught a literal, physical resurrection too, so for at least this brief moment, Jesus and the Pharisees were in agreement
 - So I'm sure they were pleased that Jesus sided with them on the question of resurrection
- But that moment was more impactful to these guys than we realize, because Jesus just settled a long-standing dispute
 - These two groups had debated whether resurrection was true or not for years and the arguments went nowhere
 - Neither side could convince the other, yet Jesus settled that argument in one moment with one example from Scripture
 - He cited the yet-to-be fulfilled Abrahamic covenant to show that resurrection must be true or else God is a liar
 - Imagine how the two sides felt when they realized their debate had ended, and the Sadducees were wrong and the Pharisees were correct?
 - The Pharisees felt vindicated and smug, while the Sadducees were disoriented, deflated, embarrassed and maybe angry
 - But Scripture had the answer all along in Genesis
 - And if either group had known the Bible well enough, they could have put the issue

to rest

- The Sadducees weren't listening to Scripture because they were set in their view
 - And they preferred winning an argument over knowing the truth
 - While the Pharisees, who believed in resurrection, couldn't teach the Bible sufficiently to convince the Sadducees it was true
- In my experience, this is how a lot of debates go in the Church today...scholars and pastor and Bible teachers arguing over ideas and never making progress
 - Both sides are ruled by pride, by academic achievements or fear of being diminished in the eyes of their congregations
 - So everyone digs their heels in without truly examining Scripture together with an open heart
 - And as a result, many of us who watch these exchanges assume that if the experts can't agree, then no one can figure it out
 - The answer must be unknowable or unimportant, and then we "agree to disagree", which is basically giving up
 - But as I like to say, just because many people can get the Bible wrong doesn't mean you have to be one of them
 - In my experience in these debates, someone usually has the truth
 - One side in the debate will often know the answer
 - But the other side isn't listening or won't change their mind even in the face of Scripture that proves the point
 - Which is proof that pride can rob us of our ability to see the truth or even to care what the truth is
- Always remember there are answers in the Bible, and the Lord delights to reveal them to those who seek Him with a teachable heart
 - And I think the reason we haven't settled more disagreements in the Church is because we let pride and ignorance get the better of us
 - If we study the Bible to have our views affirmed, we will make fools of ourselves by missing the truth as the Sadducees did
 - Or if we are arrogant with the truth and unskilled at defending it from the Bible like the Pharisees, then we won't convince others
 - But if we pursue a deeper understanding of the Bible while maintaining a teachable heart, we'll all know Jesus better
 - But don't forget that sooner or later we have to play the part of the Sadducees... sooner or later we will be the one who is wrong
 - And when it's your turn to be on the wrong side of the Bible, I encourage you to remember one of my favorite sayings:
 - I'd rather know the truth than be right
 - If you always have to be "right," you will miss the truth sooner or later, because

sooner or later we aren't right

- And the Lord may eventually bring us the truth so we can grow spiritually
- But He probably won't bring the truth in a midnight revelation with a lightening bolt or from an angel
- Usually He just places the truth in our path, maybe in a podcast or book...or maybe a word from a spouse or friend or pastor
- And if our default response to those moments is to defend our current position, then we will miss the truth when God gives it to us
 - A Christian who wants to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ must get comfortable with being wrong in order to receive the truth
 - If you develop a teachable heart willing to be corrected, you will learn a lot more truth than if you reflexively defend your views
- Because when all is said and done and we're with Jesus, then we will all know the truth no matter what we may have thought before
 - And that moment is not the time to discover we missed so much truth because we were more interested in protecting our pride
 - We want to enter that moment with a testimony of humility, of having allowed the Lord to correct us whenever necessary
 - As He is doing to the Pharisees and Sadducees here
- Back in Matthew in v.35, we move into Round 4 of Jesus' testing, but the nature of the question changes in this round
 - Rather than asking a trick question, the religious leaders come this time with a legitimate question about Scripture
 - But as usual, it merely becomes opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate their ignorance of Scripture

Matt. 22:34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together.

Matt. 22:35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him,

Matt. 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

- A lawyer from among the Pharisees comes asking Jesus a question to test Him
 - Mark describes this man as a scribe, but that's just another name for a lawyer
 - Scribes/lawyers were aligned with the Pharisees in teaching Israel and enforcing observance of the law
 - But these men specialized in settling disputes over the law and resolving conflicts between different laws
 - So for a scribe, questions like the one he asks Jesus here were especially important to their job

- So after this lawyer watches Jesus addressing the question of resurrection, he sees an opportunity to settle another long-standing dispute
 - In fact in Mark's account the lawyer acknowledges that Jesus handled the previous question well
 - So he asks Jesus to name the most important commandment in the law
- All laws were important to a Jew, of course, but sometimes two laws might come into conflict
 - And whenever that happened, the religious leaders would try to figure out which law was greater
 - And that investigation ultimately lead them to ask which law was the greatest of all, and of course multiple views were offered
- So this man asks Jesus to resolve the question, but Matthew tells us this was a test, so we know the question has the potential to trip up Jesus
 - But this time the test didn't come in the form of a trick question, but rather this is a test of the depths of Jesus' understanding
 - The Pharisee wants to test whether Jesus had the knowledge of the Scriptures to answer the question wisely or foolishly
 - Depending on which law Jesus chose to call the greatest, the religious leaders could pick it apart or challenge it
- Nevertheless, this man's question was legitimate and reasonable, so Jesus answers it without objection

Matt. 22:37 And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’

Matt. 22:38 “This is the great and foremost commandment.

Matt. 22:39 “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’

Matt. 22:40 “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

- Jesus quotes the Jewish Sh'ma, which is a recitation that orthodox Jews make twice a day, taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-5
 - Deuteronomy means “the second law”, and it's the final book of the Torah
 - In Deuteronomy the Lord repeats the Law to a new generation of Israel on the eve of entering into the Promised Land
- The earlier generation of Israel that left Egypt received the law in Exodus and Leviticus, but they were unbelieving and disobeyed the Law
 - So the Lord judged that generation by declaring they would wander in the desert for 40 years until they all died
 - After the 40 years, the Lord repeated His law to the next generation of Israel and

commanded them to obey it

- Deuteronomy is that second giving of the Law, and just like the first time in Exodus, the Law begins with the ten commandments
- But before the ten commandments, the Lord says this to Israel

Deut. 6:1 “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it,

Deut. 6:2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

Deut. 6:3 “O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

Deut. 6:5 “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

- Notice that before the ten commandments, the Lord declares that our highest duty is to love God with everything we have
 - Because the Lord introduces His law with this statement, the Pharisees determined this must be the greatest commandment
 - So they called it the Sh'ma and required that Jews recite this passage of Scripture daily to never forget it
- Now Jesus confirms that their interpretation was correct, this is the greatest command in the Law
 - Above all else, we are to love God with our heart, soul, and might or strength...and Mark adds mind
 - Jesus says this is the great and foremost commandment
 - And the Greek word for great is *megas*, meaning nothing is greater, nothing overshadows this command
 - And foremost simply means first, so we show God love first and show Him love over all else
 - We notice Jesus mentions four aspects of our being to cover all the ways human beings interact with our world
 - First, we love God with our heart, meaning in our affections
 - Love God more than you love your hobbies or job, even before your spouse or your children
 - Secondly, we love Him with our mind, meaning in our thinking and understanding
 - We seek the truth of His word over the world's lies through regular study of

God's word

- We commit Scripture to memory, allowing God to renew our mind by training us to think as He does
- And when God's word comes into conflict with the world's "truth" (and it often will), we choose God's word
- Thirdly, we love Him with our soul, meaning in our devotion of worship
 - We can't share our worship of God with a pantheon of other gods or spiritual powers we follow
 - We can't worship God properly if we also acknowledge other supposed spiritual powers like horoscopes or mother nature
 - That's not loving God with all our soul because our soul is divided in its worship
- And finally, we love Him with all our strength, which means in our physical struggles against our own sin and the resistance of the world
 - Following the Lord in a fallen world isn't going to be easy and the enemy is determined to make it even harder
 - So to truly love God, we commit ourselves to persevering in those struggles against sin and temptation
 - And we remain determined to continue loving God even in the face of persecution
- Jesus' answer agreed with the Pharisees' view which pleased the lawyer
 - In fact, in Mark's Gospel we're told that the lawyer compliments Jesus for having the right answer, (and I'm sure Jesus was relieved to hear that)
 - But Jesus doesn't stop there...He goes a second step, adding a second commandment not found in Deuteronomy 6
 - Jesus says the second commandment is to love your neighbor like you love yourself
 - This Law is found in Leviticus, and the Pharisees hadn't thought to include that one in their list
 - But Jesus says this particular law is so important that when you add it to the first commandment, the two together summarize the entire law
 - In other words, every one of the 613 commandments of the Law is related to ensuring our love of God and of others
 - Such that if a person kept these two greatest laws perfectly, then he or she would also have kept all 613 laws perfectly as well
 - And that begs a question...why wasn't God's law just these two laws? Why have 613 rules when just two rules would have been enough?
 - We might suppose it was to help us know how to love God and our neighbors by giving us a checklist of the right things to do
 - But the Bible tells us it was exactly the opposite reason
 - Paul tells us in Romans 7 that the Law was given so we would recognize we were

sinning as we failed

- In other words, our sin nature prevents us from doing what's right and it didn't matter how many laws we had
- If God had given us only two laws, we still would have violated them repeatedly
- But we would have had much less understanding of how much sin we truly possessed
- So the Lord wrote 613 laws which clearly spell out how we sin, so that now as we sin we can see it clearly and recognize our need for a Savior
 - Or as Paul put it:

Rom. 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

- So Jesus gives these men the answer they sought, and it pleased them, but then rather than leaving it there, the lawyer decides to challenge Jesus
 - We don't see his challenge in Mathew's account, but Mark reports that the scribe responded to Jesus this way:

Mark 12:32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM;

- The scribe compliments Jesus for His answer and then repeats the Sh'ma from Deuteronomy 6:4 saying God is One and the only one
- By his response, the lawyer seems to imply that Jesus' claim to being the Son of God contradicted this commandment
- I think this is the test this man intended to use to trap Jesus
 - He asks Jesus to affirm the Sh'ma so that he, in turn, could deny Jesus' claim to be the Son of God
 - The Pharisees intended to use Jesus' own words to trap Him
- But Deuteronomy 6:4 doesn't contradict Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, because Jesus never claimed to be a *competing* God
 - Paganism says there are many gods which compete or challenge one another for rule over aspects of the creation
 - But the God of the Bible is One and the only Creator God of all and there is no other god competing with Him
- Nevertheless, the Bible goes on to declare that the Creator God exists in the form of Three Persons named the Father, Son and Spirit
 - Together they are God, not three separate gods

- They don't compete or challenge one another to rule over different parts of Creation
- They all work in perfect unison ruling over all Creation as One God
- And the Bible has always represented God as Three and also as One, even from the opening verses of Genesis
 - The first verse of the Bible says, in the beginning God created the heavens and earth
 - The Hebrew word for God (*Elohim*) in that verse is plural yet the Hebrew verb for "created" is conjugated in the singular tense
 - Interestingly, the Hebrew scribes that reproduced the Scriptures faithfully preserved these seemingly contradictory grammar
 - Just 25 verses later in Genesis Moses quotes God saying "Let Us make Man in Our image..."
 - And even in Deuteronomy 6:4 the Hebrew word translated "one" can also refer to a plurality
 - So they knew the Bible presented God as One and as a plurality
 - And Jesus has consistently reflected this tension in His teaching, as He has called Himself God and the Son of God
 - At one point He says He is the great I AM, meaning God, and elsewhere He spoke of doing the Father's will
 - Yet the Pharisees and other religious leaders couldn't comprehend the plural nature of the one God
 - So when Jesus claimed He was God and also the Son of God, they thought He was contradicting Deuteronomy 6:4
 - And that's why this scribe pointedly reminds Jesus that God is One and there is no one besides Him
 - Which leads Jesus to respond with a question of His own

Matt. 22:41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question:

Matt. 22:42 "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "The son of David."

Matt. 22:43 He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying,

Matt. 22:44 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,
"SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,
UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET"?"

Matt. 22:45 "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?"

Matt. 22:46 No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

- Having made his point to Jesus, the scribe returns to the group of Pharisees, and Jesus

turns to the group and asks them a question

- Jesus quizzes them on their understanding of the Christ, specifically asking from whom is the Messiah supposed to descend?
 - The Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would come to Israel from the line of David
 - God made this promise to David through the prophet Nathan

2Sam. 7:12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.

2Sam. 7:13 “He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

- The Lord assured David that in the future He would raise up one of David’s descendants to rule a Jewish kingdom that never ends
- We call this promise the Davidic Covenant and we know that it was a promise to bring the Messiah to rule Israel
 - That Messiah would be a descendant of David, or a son of David as the Bible says it
 - So when Jesus asks these men who the Messiah will be, they correctly answer he will be the son of David
- Jesus says you are correct, but then asks how does David refer to this future descendant he never knew as “Lord?”
 - Jesus is referring to the great Messianic Psalm 110, in which David writes

Psa. 110:0 A Psalm of David.

Psa. 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

- Everyone knew this psalm was written by David and the subject was the Messiah, the coming descendant of David
 - Yet in v.1 David calls this future son his Lord, and that makes no sense to a Jewish way of thinking
 - David wrote that Yahweh (the Lord) says to Adonai (the Messiah), sit at my right hand...
 - So God directs this future Messiah to have the position of greatest honor above anyone else; the right hand of God
 - But in Jewish society, a father was always greater than a son or grandson
 - So in human terms, a descendant of David couldn’t be David’s Lord or superior, and that was the conundrum Jesus asked these men to solve

- In v.45 Jesus asks them how can David call this future Messiah “Lord” if the Messiah descended from David?
- None of these men were able to answer the question, because it requires understanding that the Messiah was the Son of God
- In human terms, Jesus was a descendant of David and therefore David would have been a superior of Jesus
 - But Jesus wasn’t merely a human descendant of David as the religious leaders had assumed
 - He was God incarnate, divinity and humanity in one
 - In human terms, the Messiah was David’s descendant, but in divine terms, He was David’s Creator, David’s Lord
- Obviously, David knew this truth, which is why He wrote Psalm 110, and we might ask how did David know this while these men didn’t
 - And the answer is in the text where we read in v.43 Jesus said that David wrote psalm 110 “in the Spirit”
 - In other words, David was directed by the Spirit of God to write these words, which means that God revealed this truth to David
 - And self-evidently, the Spirit had not revealed them to these men in that day
- And did you notice that in this short passage, Jesus has affirmed the Trinity itself?
 - In v.44 Jesus points out that David wrote of the Father speaking to the Son and placing the Son at His right hand
 - That statement clearly reveals that God is a Father and a Son
 - And then a verse earlier in v.43, Jesus said this truth was revealed to David through the third person of the Godhead, the Spirit
 - Once again, the Bible teaches Father, Son and Spirit...three Persons but One God
 - These concepts lay outside the grasp of these men, and because they couldn’t understand Scripture, they didn’t recognize Jesus as Messiah
 - Jesus’ question silences the religious leaders and that’s what the truth always does in the end
 - We may argue and disagree about Scripture with each other at times, and we certainly disagree with the world
 - But one day everyone will be silent before the Lord, because no one will argue with Him and all will confess He is the truth
 - Notice in v.46 that no one even dared to ask Jesus another question, and this is indeed the end of the questioning Jesus received
 - In the next chapter, Jesus is going to do all the talking, lecturing the Pharisees and the crowd for their unbelief
 - This moment is a good example of how the Lord will deal with all who oppose Him in a day to come

- In a day not too far from now, the Lord will assemble all who opposed the truth of the Gospel and call them to account
 - In that moment, Jesus will do all the talking and those under scrutiny will have nothing to say in their defense
 - And the result will be a great judgment from which there is no escape
- A countless number of people will enter into that moment and be crushed by the weight of God's righteous judgment
 - Remember earlier I said that just because a lot of people get the Bible wrong doesn't mean we have to be one of them
 - And likewise, just because a lot of people have rejected the truth of Jesus doesn't mean you have to follow their mistake
 - Surely you see the truth of what we studied today...the Bible testifies that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David and His Lord
 - Surely you agree that loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength is your highest duty
 - So if David knew God and was lead by the Spirit of God to write that the Messiah would be His Lord, then surely we can trust that word
 - Surely we should all agree that Jesus is deserving of our love and worship and confession
 - The Pharisees couldn't see this truth, but surely you can, no?
 - Wouldn't you rather know the truth than think yourself right?
 - You can trust the Scriptures when they say that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ will not be disappointed
 - Jesus is God, Who came to earth to live a perfect life for you to meet the standard for Heaven that you can't meet
 - And then He died on a cross to pay for your sins, and in that way He did all that was required for us to be saved
 - You can believe that truth

- Today we move into Chapter 23 of Matthew's Gospel, and as we do, we come to the end of Jesus' public ministry
 - Three years earlier at another Passover, Jesus launched his public ministry with the baptism of John by the Jordan
 - From that moment, Jesus set out to fulfill all Scripture concerning the Messiah's first coming to Israel
 - He recruited His disciples, appointed His apostles and began teaching the crowds
 - He healed countless sick and demon possessed, performing amazing miracles and walking the length and breadth of Judea
 - And as He went, He preached repentance for the Kingdom of God was at hand, calling upon Israel to receive Him as their King
 - But Israel failed to heed that call, because apart from a handful of disciples, most have rejected Jesus' claims to be Messiah
 - Six months earlier the nation committed the unforgivable sin
 - Their religious leaders declared that Jesus wasn't the Messiah...He was merely working miracles with the power of Satan
 - The crowds accepted this explanation over the proof they saw with their own eyes
 - So as a result of Israel's willful unbelief, Jesus withdrew His offer of the Kingdom from that generation
 - Jesus told Israel their house was being left to them desolate and they would not see Him again until they called on His name
 - And from that point, Jesus transitioned to preparing His disciples privately for the Kingdom Program after His departure
- Now we're barely 48 hours away from His death, and Jesus uses His final public statement to declare woe upon that generation of Israel and their leaders
 - His statement comes at the end of long day in the temple, where Jesus has defended Himself repeatedly before those religious leaders
 - He has endured four challenges by Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians and each time He vindicated Himself
 - He's proven He is Israel's spotless Lamb, a worthy sacrifice to be made on our behalf
 - In the next 24 hours He will be arrested and in about 36 hours He will be nailed to a cross
 - So after this discourse in Chapter 23, Jesus will make no further public statements
 - He goes quietly to the cross as a sheep goes to slaughter, silent before its shearers and He will not open His mouth again
 - He speaks only to the disciples privately during the Olivet Discourse and the Last Supper, which we study in coming weeks

- And now in His last teaching to the crowds, Jesus' focus is Israel's religious leaders and the role they played in bringing Israel to this moment

Matt. 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,

Matt. 23:2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

Matt. 23:3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

Matt. 23:4 "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

Matt. 23:5 "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

Matt. 23:6 "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,

Matt. 23:7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.

- As the chapter opens, Matthew says that Jesus spoke to both the crowd and His disciples, but His message was focused squarely on Israel's religious leaders
 - They were wolves in sheep's clothing, as Jesus described them in an earlier chapter, and now Jesus is ready to unmask them
 - Up to this moment, Jesus has been cautious in His public criticism of these men
 - He knew if He provoked them, they could interfere in His plans, so Jesus bided His time waiting for the right moment
 - And now with less than 2 days remaining before His death, Jesus takes the gloves off and pronounces judgment against these men
 - But as He does so, Jesus exposes their motives and methods
 - And today we open with a lesson on how corrupt men (and women) use godliness as a means of personal gain
 - Israel has a long history of corrupt leaders leading their people astray: kings, priests and elders who encouraged Israel to engage in idolatry
 - This pattern of poor leaders traces back to Aaron who failed the people while Moses was on the mountain
 - And that tradition of corrupt leadership continued in the time of Judges and throughout the kings north and south
 - At one point shortly before Israel was conquered by Babylon, the Lord told Israel's leaders they had failed to shepherd the people

Ezek. 34:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and

say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?

Ezek. 34:3 “You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.

Ezek. 34:4 “Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.

Ezek. 34:5 “They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.

Ezek. 34:6 “My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.””

- Ezekiel told the leaders of his generation they had taken advantage of God’s flock rather than caring for them
 - Speaking metaphorically, the Lord says these leaders slaughtered the sheep they were supposed to guard and feed
 - And they ate the fat and clothed themselves with the wool
 - Instead of sacrificing themselves for the sake of the people as good shepherds do, they sacrificed the people for their desires
- In Jesus’ day, sects like Pharisees and Sadducees continued the tradition of corrupt leadership in Israel, turning religious corruption into a science
 - They took advantage of those under their charge at every turn, using their positions for personal gain
 - Their corrupt ways was ultimately the cause of Israel turning against their own Messiah
 - So history repeats itself for Israel, as yet another generation of bad leaders yields another generation sent into exile
 - In v.2 Jesus starts His explanation of their corrupt ways saying they seat themselves in the chair of Moses, but they say one thing yet do another
 - The seat of Moses was a literal chair found at the local synagogue in Jewish towns of that day
 - In that chair would sit a judge who presided over court cases concerning violations of the Law of Moses
 - Under the system of Pharisaic Judaism in that day, the Pharisees were the self-appointed judges of the law
 - So Pharisees sat in this chair as they performed their duty, and Jesus said Israel should respect their judgments
 - Because they were the judges of the law, they should be obeyed in what they said from that chair

- When seated in the chair of Moses, the Pharisees were not bad judges of the law... the problem was their actions didn't match their words
 - These men judged others strictly for violating the Law yet they themselves circumvented it whenever it suited them
 - And to understand where Jesus is going in His condemnation of these men, we need to revisit how they lived
- The Pharisees were known for their scrupulous lifestyle, observing elaborate daily rituals on a scale that's hard for us to imagine today
 - They observed rules for fasting, washing, praying, studying, clothing, hair, etc.... from waking until they went to bed
 - They lived by a rabbinical code they helped invent, which made life like a prison without bars; every moment controlled by rules
 - As they complied with these rules, they appeared to others as men who had achieved religious perfection
 - Everyone looked up to them for their religious fervor and uncompromising devotion to piety
 - But Jesus says in reality they weren't the upstanding, pious, God-fearing men they portrayed themselves to be before the crowds
 - Their whole life was an act, an illusion to impress the people
 - When no one was watching, these men wouldn't bother doing the things they told everyone that God demanded
 - Jesus said they were saying one thing and doing another, which is the definition of hypocrisy
 - The fact they set aside their rules whenever it suited them proved their public devotion was just an act
 - Why did these men engage in such an elaborate act? It was their means to earthly gain...it brought them influence, honor, power and money
 - And in this chapter Jesus lays out that case against these corrupt leaders of Israel
 - He exposes how they played this game to their advantage through a series of maneuvers
 - The first step of their strategy was placing burdens on the people
- In v.4 Jesus says these men were like a merchant who loads up a beast of burden with a bundle of goods
 - A merchant going to the market to sell merchandise would commonly lay out a square section of linen cloth on the ground
 - Then he filled that sheet with his merchandise and pulled the corners of the cloth together and tied the bundle with ropes
 - Then that bundle was set on the back or shoulders of an animal, like a donkey
 - So the donkey would bear the weight of those goods for the merchant, carrying

the load to market for the merchant

- Jesus says that's how Pharisees began their deception, placing burdens on the backs of the people
 - For a Pharisee, every rule and restriction they incorporated into their precious Mishnah was a prized possession to them
 - When a rabbi succeeded in adding a new rule to the *mitzvot*, the Jewish canon of religious practices, it was a career achievement
 - So Pharisees cherished their rules like children, much in the same way that a merchant cherished his valuable merchandise
- But just like a merchant going to market with his inventory, the Pharisees didn't want to bear the burden of those rules themselves
 - Instead, they placed their rules on the Jewish people, who labored under the restrictions like an overloaded donkey
 - Remember, we're not talking about the Law of Moses...we're talking about the Pharisees' manmade rules in the Mishnah
 - Nevertheless, the Jewish people still obeyed these rules because they were told they were part of the Law given by God Himself
- Now following rules has the appearance of piety and religious devotion, but it cannot produce righteousness or holiness
 - Paul says in Romans that no one ever came to righteousness by means of following the Law
 - Trying to follow rules merely reminds us over and over again that we're sinful because we can't keep rules
- Nevertheless, the Pharisees were determined rule-followers thinking it makes them righteous before God, but even they had their limits
 - So when they began to strain under the burden of their own system, that's when they began to cheat the system
 - They were hypocrites who kept the rules only when observed by others and ignored them when it suited them
 - Jesus says in v.4 that they were unwilling to lift even their smallest finger... meaning they ignored even the smallest rules
 - The rules of Pharisaic Judaism were oppressive and virtually impossible to keep... and that was the point
 - As the people tried to follow the rules, they soon found themselves failing and falling further and further behind
 - And as they struggled under the burden, they would grow discouraged and hopeless and desperate for help
 - Imagine the despair and emptiness that Israel felt as they struggled to live under the Pharisees' vision of the law
 - And that's the way it works with legalism...legalism is substituting rules for the joy of a true relationship with the Lord

- In the case of God's Law, the Lord expected Israel to appreciate the futility of following law and look to the grace of God in the Messiah
 - When Jesus came to Israel offering that freedom, the Pharisees sought to undermine Him because He was threatening their system
 - They had portrayed themselves as the solution to the difficulties of keeping the Mishnah's rules so the people would seek them
- Which brings us to Step 2 of their strategy...cultivating a reputation for piety and obedience
 - In v.5 Jesus says the Pharisee did religious deeds only to be noticed by men, not by God
 - Jesus cites two examples of such behavior: broadening phylacteries and lengthening tassels on the garments
 - Both of these behaviors are uniquely Jewish traditions that the Pharisees manipulated to serve their own purposes
 - First, phylacteries are small wooden boxes that Jews tie to their hair and to their left arms
 - Inside these boxes they place small scraps of paper containing three passages of Scripture from the Law
 - Nowhere in the Law does God specifically tell Israel to make these boxes much less which Scriptures to place inside them
 - The rabbis came to this practice from a wooden interpretation of Deuteronomy 6

Deut. 6:7 "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Deut. 6:8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

- In Deuteronomy 6:7 God told Israel to teach and observe the Law at all times whether at home or away, when going to bed and when rising
 - Then in v.8 He says euphemistically to bind the Law on your hands, meaning they should follow the Law in every work and deed
 - And He says have the law on your forehead, meaning keep His commandments foremost on your mind at all times
- But the Pharisees didn't interpret this passage in the obvious and common-sense fashion, but instead choose to interpret it a hyper-literal and absurd way
 - Because keeping Law on your mind at all times isn't something you can show off to others and gain attention for
 - So rabbis chose a self-serving, hyper-literally interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8 leading to the practice of wearing phylacteries

- Wearing a box on your face is sure to catch someone's attention, and attention was what these men were seeking, Jesus said
- And if there was ever any doubt about the rabbis' motives, Jesus offers proof in v.5
 - Jesus says these men like to broaden their phylacteries, which means they made their boxes larger and larger
 - Once everyone was wearing little boxes on their heads, it became harder to stand out in the crowd and gain attention
 - So the Pharisees took the next step of enlarging their boxes a little more than everyone else
 - In that way, the people would marvel at the Pharisees' piety at being willing to bear the weight of those larger boxes
- That practice exposed their true reason for wearing them in the first place...it wasn't an exercise in honoring God or remembering His word
 - As Jesus says, they did these deeds to be noticed by men, and they did a similar thing with the tassels on their garments
 - Jews sewed tassels around the hem of their outer garment in obedience to Deuteronomy 22:12

Deut. 22:12 “You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.

- In this case, the Law did specifically require tassels but again the Pharisees found a way to play the rule to their advantage
- They made their tassels longer than others, so it caught everyone's attention and suggested they were more holy
- So Step 2 of their strategy was portraying themselves before the people as experts in keeping the Law to set themselves apart
 - But in reality, they couldn't keep their own rules either and didn't even bother trying
 - What deeds they did were calculated to gain attention and create the illusion of piety, but in secret they were hypocrites
- Which brings us to Step 3, turning religious power into economic and political power... by relying on a classic technique of marketing
 - Marketing is fundamentally creating a need in the mind of the consumer so then you may offer your product as the solution
 - Perhaps the best example today is the pharmaceutical industry
 - They invent new syndromes and conditions you never knew existed so they can sell drugs to cure the disease
 - In a nutshell, that was the Pharisees' game...create a disease among the people that only they could cure
 - They established so many religious rules that no one could possibly keep them

leading the people to fear God's judgment

- When the people became desperate for someone to help them meet God's standard, they naturally turn to the experts
- That's when Step 3 of the Pharisees' strategy kicked in...they took advantage of those in need for personal gain
- People who fear the judgment of God were willing to do anything to gain the Pharisees' seal of approval
 - So it became a quid pro quo arrangement, in which the Pharisees demanded certain favors and honor from the people
 - And in return, they would offer to overlook their sins, absolve them of their guilt and assure them that God was on their side
- In vs.6-7, Jesus refers to Step 3 saying these men coveted honor, power and ultimately wealth
 - Jesus lists four specific areas of Jewish life where these men sought honor
 - First, they loved honor at banquets which probably refers to Jewish feast meals or other important occasions
 - Seating for these events was according to honor, and the seat of greatest honor was next to the host
 - Pharisees always expected that seat, meaning they expected to be at the top of the social pecking order in Jewish society
 - Secondly, they wanted the chief seats in the synagogue, which were the seats closest to the Torah scrolls at the front of the room
 - Here again, this was a sign of honor, meaning the Pharisees sought to be recognized as the highest religious authorities
 - They wanted to be at the top of religious pecking order in Israel with no one to challenge their view of God and Law
 - Thirdly, they sought respectful greetings in the marketplaces, which were the commercial centers of Jewish towns
 - Every merchant and businessman had a shop in the marketplace
 - And spending time in the marketplace meant spending time around wealthy and influential men
 - Pharisees sought respectful greetings from these men but more than that...they sought for their money
 - The implication is they sought financial favors from wealthy merchants working in their shops as a show of honor
- Then fourthly, at the end of v.7, Jesus says these men loved being called rabbi, which means teacher. But why would Pharisees love to be called teacher?
 - Jewish religious training took place in small groups of students or disciples under the instruction of a single man who ruled their lives
 - From the moment the relationship was established, a rabbi became the most

important person in a disciple's life

- A disciple was expected to fully submit to the rabbi's authority and follow his instructions without questioning
- A rabbi's authority took precedence over every other authority, including even a natural parent
- In fact, the disciples would often call their rabbi "father" and even "master"
- And that's why the Pharisees were attracted to the title rabbi, because it gave them the power and control they needed to make their system work
 - Israel was under Roman rule at the time, and Romans had no respect for Israel's law or religious leaders
 - They allowed the Pharisees to practice their religion, but they kept the leaders on a short leash
- So the Pharisaic system of control only worked if the Jewish people conceded to follow it
 - They needed control if their system was going to provide the social, religious, economic and political power they wanted
 - And the title rabbi was key to that system, because Jewish society believed a rabbi was worthy of such devotion
- So that's how Pharisees corrupted their position for personal gain...
 - Make religion impossibly hard, pretend to be experts at it and milk the people when they come calling for your help
 - Now obviously, we would never look to the Pharisees as role models for Christian ministry, but Jesus warns us none the less
 - Take note of how Jesus warns His disciples against following in these men's footsteps

Matt. 23:8 "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

Matt. 23:9 "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Matt. 23:10 "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.

Matt. 23:11 "But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

Matt. 23:12 "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

- Notice that Jesus doesn't warn us not to be hypocrites like the Pharisees, though certainly we shouldn't be hypocrites
 - And He doesn't warn us about being greedy or manipulative, though we shouldn't of course
 - What warning does Jesus give us? He says don't seek for titles the way Pharisees

did

- Jesus says don't seek to be called rabbi or father or leader (or master), but why did Jesus warn the Church about seeking titles?
 - Because it's an early sign of corruption in religious service and it's often the key to taking advantage of the flock
 - First, titles in the Church aren't wrong in themselves, and even Jesus assigned titles to people within the Church
 - Jesus granted the title "apostle" to some of His disciples and He even gave Peter the title "rock"
- So having a title isn't necessarily wrong...but seeking for a title can be a step toward corruption
 - And that's the issue here...Jesus says *do not be called* rabbi, and the Greek word for called is *kaleo*, meaning to summon or invite
 - So a better translation would be do not *invite* people to call you teacher
- Inviting such attention and authority is the starting point to becoming a Pharisee
 - Once pride gains a perch in a minister's heart, it's only a matter of time before that person will follow the Pharisees' formula
 - Soon, you're craving attention and compliments, hungry for power and willing to abuse others to enrich yourself
 - It's happened a million times, and it starts with something as simple as seeking for a title
- Jesus tells the Church, do not seek to be called teacher in the rabbinical sense of a person who claims to have a corner on religious truth
 - Rabbis in Jesus' day were considered the sole custodians of truth about God
 - Whatever a rabbi said could not be challenged, and Pharisees manipulated that power to control the minds of Israel
 - We are not to look to anyone as our sole source of spiritual truth in that way, because Jesus says we are all brothers and sisters
 - Jesus is reminding us that none of us bring any inherent value to the process of teaching or learning
 - I wasn't born knowing the Bible, and neither were you...so how does anyone teach another what it means?
 - Where did all our knowledge about God come from?
 - It could only come from the Spirit, because only the Spirit knows the mind of Christ
 - So Jesus says the Spirit is our Teacher, and just because the Spirit uses one of us to teach another doesn't mean we get any credit
 - You're not gaining knowledge from me...I received it myself...so we all learned it from the same Teacher, the Spirit
 - You might call me *a* teacher, but I cannot be *the* teacher, because I am not your

source of spiritual knowledge

- Likewise, don't call someone your spiritual father in the way a rabbi was called father, meaning a person who gives us our spiritual life
 - The disciples of rabbis saw each other as rivals and opponents competing to have the best rabbi
 - And they found their personal spiritual worth by association with the best rabbi, as if his spiritual achievement rubbed off on them
 - In that sense, they called him father, but Jesus says that's not how His Church will work...that's how a cult works
 - We have only one spiritual source in our life and He is the Father seated on the throne in Heaven
 - We may call someone father in the familial sense, certainly, but no one on earth is your spiritual father
 - Finally, don't call anyone leader, which is actually the word for master referring to the way rabbis were masters of a student's life
 - In our walk with Jesus, we should give no one that level of spiritual control because Jesus is our Master
 - Again, we can use the term leader or master in a nonspiritual sense, but we have only One Shepherd, and we follow His voice
- Pastors, elders, teachers, and other church leaders have their place, and we should respect their roles certainly
 - But they are not single points of authority in our lives, because they are fallible, sinful men and women stumbling through this life just like us
 - And if they offer us anything of spiritual value, it's only because God showed up and accomplished a work through them
 - So even when these people help us, we acknowledge that what we received was a blessing sent by God
 - The Spirit taught us, the Son led us, and the Father empowered us
 - And if we maintain this point of view for ourselves and for others in the church, we can protect against the prideful abuses of the Pharisees
 - If you have come to this church from earlier experiences under men and women who lorded over you, then I'm pleased the Lord freed you from that oppression
 - Forgive them and learn from the experience...keep your eyes on God and not on people
 - People will let you down, and even abuse you, but God never will
 - And as we move deeper into this chapter we will learn more about how abuse in ministry takes place, how we can avoid it and how God views it

- It's customary to offer a condemned criminal a chance to say his final words before he dies
 - And in Chapter 23 of Matthew we are studying Jesus' final public words before He dies
 - He hasn't been condemned yet, but that's only 36 hours away, and by that point Jesus will be done speaking
 - He goes silently to the cross in fulfillment of Scripture, so He chose to deliver His final statement on His own terms
 - He delivers it in the temple, on the day before His arrest, surrounded by crowds, and directed at the religious leaders
 - Jesus uses His final words to condemn the nation's leaders for having confused and abused that generation of Israel
 - Jesus said they were hypocrites and that their corrupt leadership was the cause for Israel missing their Messiah
 - Had these men done their job and told Israel Jesus was Messiah as they should have done, the people would have received Him
 - So in this chapter, Jesus reveals their corruption to the people and pronounces woes upon them all
 - This chapter is important for us both from a historical and contemporary point of view
 - Historically, we need to understand the role the religious leaders played in driving Jesus to the cross and Israel into exile
 - After all, their conspiracy led to the Gentile church coming into being, Israel's rejection of Jesus became our opportunity
 - But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, we need to understand Jesus' teaching in Chapter 23 from a contemporary point of view
 - These men were the false teachers of that day, but there are false teachers in every age and we have our share today
 - So as Jesus exposes the methods and motivations of those men, He is also teaching us how to recognize today's false teachers
- Last week we studied their methods...how these men used their positions of authority to turn worship into wealth
 - It started with creating endless rules and restrictions for Israel, which burdened the people and left them feeling discouraged
 - The Pharisee's Mishnah was a new law on top of the Law, which robbed Israel of joy and peace in their relationship with God
 - It invoked fear of being judged by God for failing to keep it, and it misled the people about how to find true righteousness
 - Next, the leaders made a public show of keeping their rules perfectly, though in reality they ignored the rules when it suited them
 - By cultivating a reputation for religious perfection, the religious became known

as experts and guides to pleasing God

- This led people to turn to these men for spiritual direction seeking their assurance that God would show favor upon them
- Finally, when the people turned to them for guidance, the religious leaders leveraged their positions of authority for personal gain
 - They requested favors from businessmen or the wealthy seeking their counsel or blessing
 - They required bribes before granting divorces or rendering favorable judgments in matters of law
 - They lived a lavish lifestyle funded by the poor and desperate who were told their contributions were necessary to obey God
- That three-step process allowed them to turn worship into wealth, and the scam ensured the money flowed in one direction: toward the Pharisees
 - In Mark's Gospel we gain confirmation:

Mark 12:38 In His teaching He was saying: “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, **Mark 12:39** and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, **Mark 12:40** who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.”

- Mark 12 is the same moment as the one we're studying here in Chapter 23 of Matthew
 - Notice Mark says in v.40 that these men liked to devour widow's houses, which speaks to their unbridled greed and cynicism
 - They were so determined to gain from their positions they were even willing to take a widow's last possession: her home
 - Like the Grinch Who Stole Christmas, they had no conscience
- The Pharisees were false teachers, and the Bible says we will have false teachers in the Church as well
 - But false teachers aren't merely people who teach wrong things...all teachers teach wrong things from time to time
 - Peter describes this process this way:

2Pet. 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2Pet. 2:2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

- Peter says false teachers are unbelievers who portray themselves as believers yet do not possess what they claim to offer
 - They claim to know the way to Heaven, yet they themselves deny Christ and are destined for Hell
 - They preach a false message that convinces others to follow after their lusts thus bringing condemnation
- The false teachers of our day use a variety of tactics to deceive, but they all share the same hypocritical, greedy desires
 - Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4 that false teachers are hypocrites and liars with seared consciences
 - They use religion as a means of personal gain, who will take your last penny if you'll give it to them
 - And like Pharisees, they will show no regret when they destroy lives by their lying words
- Jesus warned His disciples to steer clear of these people and to avoid adopting their methods, starting with declining powerful titles
 - That's where we left off in Chapter 23, so let's rejoin the text there

Matt. 23:8 “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

Matt. 23:9 “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Matt. 23:10 “Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.

Matt. 23:11 “But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

Matt. 23:12 “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

- The hypocrisy and greed of the Pharisees and other religious leaders were most easily witnessed in their desire for impressive titles
 - As I said last week, titles aren't wrong by themselves, but the problem comes when we seek for titles out of selfish sinful motives
 - If we demand people address us in certain ways to gain undue honor or attention for ourselves, then we are wrong
 - Or we use titles to control others so we can acquire privilege and wealth for ourselves, then we are wrong
 - And even when we possess no title, we may still be guilty of coveting the honor and power that a title affords
 - And when we do these things, we are walking in the footsteps of the Pharisees, operating in selfish pride instead of godly humility
 - Pride is an ever-present danger in serving God, and giving in to pride is perhaps the fastest way to lose everything

- Pride can take you from hero to zero in a heartbeat, and it starts with something as simple as seeking a lofty title
- Jesus flatly tells us to avoid the whole mess...don't seek for titles or the recognition and privilege they may bring
 - Instead, Jesus says in v.11 that the one who wants to be greatest among us will be the one who serves us
 - Jesus taught this same principle back in Chapter 18, and we covered it extensively at that time
 - So to summarize, honor and reward in the Kingdom will be assigned to us based on our humility and sacrifice now
 - And Jesus' grading curve is very simple...the more humility now, the more honor later; the more sacrifice now, the more reward later
 - Or as Jesus puts it here in v.12, exalt yourself now and you will be humbled later
 - The Greek word for *exalt* literally translates as to lift up, as in to gain attention or receive praise
 - Jesus is talking about someone who wants to use ministry to stand out so everyone knows he or she is important and special
 - Someone who craves the limelight and takes credit for the work of others
 - Someone who craves an impressive title, demands a reserved parking space or a big office, wants his or her face on a billboard
 - Jesus says those who work to lift themselves up now will one day be humbled, which means the table will be turned in the Kingdom
 - They will find that they emphasized the wrong thing...they should have prioritized lifting up others instead
 - And if we exalt others now, Jesus said we will be exalted by God in the Kingdom
 - Our selflessness will be remembered and rewarded, and our humility will be celebrated and honored there
 - As Jesus said back in Mathew 20, the first shall be last and the last shall be first
- I see this struggle at work right now in our present circumstances as many churches fight to get back to weekly in-person worship services
 - I think the Church may be missing an opportunity to grow spiritually because we're too busy trying re-establish what God took away
 - True worship isn't merely the act of meeting in a building and singing, praying and the like
 - Paul says in Romans 12 that our true spiritual service of worship is making our lives a living sacrifice
 - He's speaking about Jesus' call for His followers to adopt a humble, selfless lifestyle of devotion to others
 - I wonder as we push to restart church meetings and open schools and businesses, are we overlooking God's spiritual purposes in the crisis?

- Maybe during this time apart, the Lord is giving us opportunity to practice what we study about every week in this room?
 - An opportunity for us to learn and practice humility and self-sacrificial service to others?
- Could this time be designed by God for each of us to change our daily patterns so we might become more devoted to the needs of others?
 - Maybe it's parents spending more time training up their children to be respectful, patient and loving?
 - Maybe it's Christian spouses spending more time together investing in their marriages?
 - Maybe it's believers making sacrifices to share resources with families out of work or donating to ministries or agencies on the front lines?
 - Maybe it's the Church showing the love of Christ by mowing the lawn of overworked first responders or caring for sick family?
 - Maybe it's all of us spending more time in God's word, in prayer and in solitude, becoming still and knowing that He is Lord
- There is something God is working to accomplish in your life through this time, and if we only think about getting back to normal, we'll miss it
 - Let's take full advantage of our present situation to gain more humility and to learn greater self-sacrifice
 - Because that's the path to greater honor where it really counts: in the Kingdom
- But humility and sacrifice wasn't the Pharisees' priority...they talked about the Kingdom often but they lived for this world
 - And their greed has left Israel desolate, so now Jesus pronounces "woe" against these men
 - The word woe is a transliteration of the Greek word *ouai* (ooway) which is simply an expression of grief or condemnation
 - But biblically, it has a very specific meaning, especially when spoken by God Himself as Jesus does here
 - Woe is a pronouncement of eternal damnation, meaning a future in Hades is assured
 - So Jesus pronounces a total of seven woes, the number of completion, to show that this judgment is assured and complete in God's eyes
 - The seven woes are seven areas of religious sin committed by these hypocritical Pharisees
 - But these sins are not unique to Pharisees...they are repeated a million times every day by religious imposters everywhere
 - And even worse, these seven mistakes can also stumble believers who seek for earthly gain instead of serving God
- The woes run from v.13 to v.36, and they are organized as a chiasm, meaning the first and last woe pair up, and the second and sixth pair up, etc.

- So that the unpaired woe, the fourth woe, becomes the chiasm's turning point emphasizing Jesus' main argument
 - So let's study this religious hall of shame starting with the first woe

Matt. 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

- Jesus' first woe against these religious leaders is rejecting the eternal life of the Kingdom and preventing others from entering it as well
 - The Pharisees talked about entering the Kingdom all the time, but the way they expected to enter it was actually a barrier to eternal life
 - They trusted in their works-based Pharisaic system of laws to approve themselves before God
 - They believed doing works of law brought righteousness, and by earning righteousness in that way, they would merit approval
 - It's called self-righteousness, and it's not a way to Heaven...it's a barrier to Heaven, Jesus says
 - The Bible says we cannot become righteous in that way:

Rom. 3:20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Rom. 3:21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

Rom. 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- The standard for entry into Heaven is the glory of God, meaning perfection, and we all fall short of it
- So works can't make us righteous enough to enter Heaven, because previous sins aren't erased by future good deeds
- But the Pharisees taught that their system of rules was the key to Heaven, so the people worked hard to obey the Mishnah
 - As Jesus says, the Pharisees were cut off from the Kingdom of Heaven because they trusted in works
 - And they barred others from entry also because they convinced them to take the same wrong path
- In other words, there are not many roads that lead to Heaven...there is only one
 - Following any system of works will not please God nor bring us entry into Heaven...

not even keeping the Law will bring us into Heaven

- There is only one way to Heaven, and that way is by receiving God's gift of righteousness by placing faith in His Son Jesus
- Earlier Jesus said if we want to be exalted in the Kingdom, we must be willing to be humbled
- And never is that more true than in the matter of our own salvation, as Jesus shows us in Luke's Gospel:

Luke 18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Luke 18:11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Luke 18:12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Luke 18:13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

Luke 18:14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- Notice the Pharisee is quick to exalt himself and he does so on the basis of his own righteousness
 - He self-righteously declares himself worthy of God's praise unlike the sinner next to him
 - And notice he prays to himself, which is to say he saw himself as good enough to merit Heaven...he deserved it!
- Meanwhile, that sinner acknowledges his sin humbly and asks for God's forgiveness
 - Jesus says that man who humbled himself will be exalted, meaning he'll receive mercy and eternal life unlike the Pharisee
 - This is true salvation...recognizing that apart from God's grace, we have no hope to reach heaven on our own
- So the lesson of the first woe is beware false teachers who spread a false Gospel of works that cannot save
 - Not all roads lead to Heaven so be sure you follow the right teachers
 - Moving forward, our next verse introduces a little confusion

Matt. 23:14 ["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

- In Chapter 23 this is the second occurrence of the word “woe,” but it’s actually part of the first woe
 - Matthew likely didn’t author this verse, because it doesn’t appear in the most reliable manuscripts of his Gospel
 - This verse probably came from Mark’s Gospel and was added to Matthew’s Gospel by copyists trying to align the two accounts
 - Since we studied these words earlier, we’ll move past this verse and into the second woe in v.15

Matt. 23:15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

- In His second woe, Jesus says the Pharisees would travel the world to convert a single person – yet they converted people to *the wrong* system
 - They weren’t converting people to faith in the coming Messiah; they were winning converts to Pharisaic Judaism
 - They didn’t call people to trust in the word of God; they were calling people to trust in their Mishnah
 - They were winning converts to self-righteousness and to their system of religion, not to faith in Messiah
 - Adopting Pharisaic Judaism was like entering a secret society that people felt privileged to join
 - It was hard work, it required high performance and therefore it made its followers feel qualified and even worthy for Heaven
 - But for that same reason, the Pharisaic approach didn’t appeal to many, which meant the Pharisees had to recruit new followers
 - As Jesus describes, they had to travel far and wide to find the next generation of Pharisee
 - And as they did, they eventually made the new convert even more zealous for their rules than they were
 - So over time, the movement became more exaggerated and farther from God
 - As Jesus says, the newest members became twice as much sons of hell as they were
- This is a feature of false religion and false movements especially those that find their way into the Church
 - People will come in championing some minor issue or special cause instead of championing Christ
 - And as they do, they win converts to their cause or issue, and these converts are often unbelievers

- They become disciples of the cause rather than disciples of Christ, yet they think themselves saved
 - They confuse agreeing with the cause with agreeing with the Gospel because they don't know the difference
- The well-known Scottish preacher, Alistair Begg, tells a story about a time he golfed with a pastor shortly after moving to the U.S.
 - As they are waiting to tee off, the U.S. pastor asked Alistair what was his "thing?"
 - Alistair didn't understand the question at first, so he asked his friend what he meant
- The pastor explained that everyone in ministry needed some "thing," some angle or issue or pet cause that defined their ministry
 - Alistair thought about it for a moment and said he didn't have a thing yet...then he asked could the Gospel be his thing?
 - And this pastor said no...it couldn't be the Gospel, it had to be something else or it didn't qualify
- Today you often find people in the Church championing their "thing" – something they are for or against that's all they talk about or care about
 - These causes overshadow the Gospel itself, and it eventually becomes to define their Christian walk
 - We find Christians pushing herbal remedies or special prayers or treatments to cure disease
 - Or Christians trying to convince you to keep the Law or the feasts of Israel
 - Or those who say we must call Jesus by some secret name or meet for church only on a certain day of the week
 - Or we must worship only with hymns or teach only from the King James Bible
- You wonder how many souls might have been saved if these same people worked as hard preaching the Gospel as they did promoting their "thing?"
 - That was Jesus' complaint against these men...they became advocates for their religious system instead of for God and His word
 - So if the first woe was believing in a false Gospel, the second woe was preaching that false Gospel to others
 - The first sin was having the wrong content, the second sin was having the wrong objective
 - The first mistake brought individuals under condemnation, while the second mistake meant many more followed
 - So Jesus pronounces woe on the Pharisees for both, because both sins resulted in dooming souls to an eternity of punishment
 - Let's recognize the seriousness of what we're about here...church isn't just a social event on our calendar

- We are about our Father's business, serving the living God in a pursuit of souls
- Often we only get one chance to influence someone, so be sure you use that opportunity wisely
- You are an ambassador for Christ, so speak of Jesus and Him crucified, as Paul says
 - Don't become advocates for secondary issues, especially false or destructive things that detract from the Gospel
 - Don't be carried away by fads or strange new movements in the church...this isn't a multilevel marketing society
 - We are Christ's Bride, the One placed on earth to show the rest of the world how to enter the Kingdom...that's our mission
- And the content of what we believe matters, and what we share with others matters
 - Believe in the Gospel and do nothing else until that truth is settled in your heart
 - And preach Jesus and nothing more...do not advocate for a thing that distracts people from the truth
 - Let's serve the truth together in humility and self-sacrifice, knowing that in a day to come we will receive our reward
 - And in that day, we will be surrounded by our brothers and sisters who believed that message and were saved by it

- Let's return to the seven woes of Chapter 23...Jesus is condemning the Pharisees for their part in denying Israel their Messiah
 - Jesus issues seven woes in total in this chapter, seven being the complete number indicating their judgment is assured
 - Each woe addresses a specific aspect of the Pharisees' corruption and hypocrisy
 - And as we study them in depth, we'll see clearly why (at least in human terms) Jesus ended up on a cross instead of a throne
 - But our study of these seven woes will also offer us valuable insight into the methods used by all false teachers
 - Remember, the same spiritual enemy lurks behind every deception in the church
 - So it should come as no surprise that the Pharisees' methods to deceive and manipulate are similar to those in use today
 - So as we study this chapter, let's learn how to recognize and avoid the false teachers of our day
- Last week we studied the first two of the woes, and they were closely related to each other
 - In the first woe, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for shutting off the Kingdom from themselves and from others
 - These men were barred from the Kingdom because they were not devoted to following God
 - Instead, they followed Pharisaic Judaism, a complex system of rules built on top of the Mosaic Law
 - They expected God to approve them first on the basis of their heritage as Jews and secondly for their zealotry in law keeping
 - They did this despite the Scriptures clearly teaching that the righteous man shall live by faith, not by his works of law
 - Since they trusted in their system of works rather than in the Messiah, they couldn't enter the Kingdom
 - And they kept others from entering too, since these men were the blind guides that taught generations of Jews
- In the second woe, Jesus condemned them for being advocates for their religious system rather than for God and His word and His Messiah
 - Israel was supposed to be a light among the nations, Moses said
 - So the Pharisees should have made their goal seeking converts to the Living God from among the nations
 - Instead, they championed Pharisaic Judaism, traveling far and wide to find one person to adopt their strict lifestyle
 - And when they found that one, they made him even more zealous than they were for their system

- Think of how many souls they might have brought to faith in Messiah had these men served God instead of their own system
- As we studied these woes last week, we noticed how these same two errors are present in false teachers today and in every age
 - The Bible tells us that false teachers are unbelievers who do not possess the spiritual insight they claim to offer others
 - Like the Pharisees, they don't possess faith themselves, nor do they understand the Scripture, nor do they convert people to Jesus
- Instead, they are advocates for something other than God and His word
 - Usually, false teachers are advocates for their own interests: usually for donations to their "ministry" or to purchase some book or video series
 - They appear to be serving God but in reality they are serving themselves at our expense
- So let's continue our study of the woes and learn more about the false teachers of Jesus' time and of our day

Matt. 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'

Matt. 23:17 "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?

Matt. 23:18 "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.'

Matt. 23:19 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?

Matt. 23:20 "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it.

Matt. 23:21 "And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

Matt. 23:22 "And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

- In the third woe, Jesus focuses on a particular behavior of the Pharisees concerning how a man swore an oath and which oaths were enforced
 - Swearing an oath involves making a promise by placing oneself at the mercy of a higher authority should you fail to keep it
 - Swearing an oath not only places us under penalty of law but also under penalties from God
 - For example, we may may swear an oath to tell the truth by saying "so help me God"
 - When we do, we are making a vow before God placing ourselves under His judgment should we fail to do as we promised

- According to the law of Moses, a Jew was not to make oaths he could not keep, and in Matthew 5 Jesus told us not to make oaths at all
 - Since we cannot know what will happen or how things will turn out for us in the future, we can't make guarantees
 - And if we cannot guarantee our future behavior, then we shouldn't place ourselves under God's judgment so foolishly
- But Pharisaic Judaism permitted oaths, and even though the Scriptures said every vow must be kept, the Pharisees made many exceptions
 - Under Pharisaic rules, if a man swore an oath, he was obligated to keep his promise only if he swore the oath a certain way
 - A man who swore by the temple wasn't accountable to keep his oath according to Pharisaic rules because his oath was invalid
- Why? Pharisees interpreted the third commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain as preventing swearing by God's name
 - They also said that swearing by the temple was equivalent to swearing by the name of God, so such an oath was invalid
 - And therefore enforcing such a vow would violate the 3rd commandment, so it was not required to be kept
 - But they would enforce an oath sworn on gold used to build the temple, since it was once removed from God and not blasphemy
 - Likewise, they would disavow pledges made on the altar but they would enforce pledges made by the sacrifice on the altar
 - These distinctions may appear pointless to us, but there was a method to the Pharisees' madness
 - The Pharisees used this system to help dishonest businessmen escape their commitments...for a price
 - A person needed to invoke the authority of God in their vow if it was to be accepted as credible and likely to be kept
 - But they couldn't swear on the name of God or else they broke the third commandment
 - So they would swear upon something close to God – like the temple or the altar – which allowed them to invoke His authority safely
 - And at the same time, this arbitrary distinction offered plausible deniability when they wanted to break their vow
 - Later if the person wanted to break their vow, they went to a Pharisee, a judge of the law, asking to be excused from the vow
 - And for a price, the Pharisees would rule that the vow was invalid because it wasn't sworn properly
 - They ruled the vow should have been sworn by the sacrifice on the altar, not the altar itself, or by the gold in the temple, not the temple itself
 - The rules were always changing, so no matter how the oath was sworn, the

Pharisees always had a loophole if one was needed

- Jesus is condemning these men for perverting justice and the truth merely to enrich themselves...it's corrupting
- In vs.19-22 Jesus says these distinctions weren't fooling God or men for that matter, because everyone knew what was going on here
 - First, in v.19 Jesus points out that their rules were contrived, because they didn't even make logical sense
 - Why should the gold used in constructing the temple be more binding than the temple itself?
 - Or why should the sacrifice on the altar be more valuable than the altar itself?
 - Their backward logic simply proved that these rules were nothing more than excuses to break a vow
 - So Jesus says in vs.20-22 if you swear by anything in the temple, you swear by God Himself
 - Because everything in the temple is equally associated with God, and after all that was the point of the vow
 - The person intended to invoke the authority of God in this vow to emphasize his commitment to keeping it
 - They were trying to have their cake and eat it to...to appear to be bound by their words without being accountable in the end
 - Since the Pharisees were always looking for ways to use their position of authority for financial gain, they were willing to play these games
 - They perverted justice and gave license for the people to break their promises and shame the name of God
 - In the end their greed brought condemnation upon themselves
- This pattern of behavior is perhaps *the* defining characteristic among all false teachers in every age
 - False teachers universally share a love for money and an insatiable drive to gain it through corrupt religious practices
 - To quote from Paul, they see godliness as a means of gain
 - Peter calls it the way of Balaam, referring to the corrupt prophet

2Pet. 2:14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

2Pet. 2:15 forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

- Peter says false teachers love the wages of unrighteousness, referring to the wealth of this world gained at any cost
 - They have hearts trained in greed, meaning they have learned from others the most

efficient ways to fleece the flock

- The Pharisees fit this profile certainly, and Luke 16:14 says the Pharisees were money-loving men
- And we see plenty of false teachers today who are following in the way of Balaam
 - They live lavish, worldly lifestyles made possible by ministries that see religion as a money-making enterprise
 - In fact, the love of money is such a consistent feature of false teachers, it allows us to see these people coming from a distance
- Before you follow someone's teaching, take a look at the lifestyle choices of that man or woman
 - Are they living a worldly, lavish lifestyle? Are they clearly pursuing this world above pursuing eternal rewards in the next?
 - And is the pursuit of wealth a constant topic in their teaching, and do they encourage their audience to desire for the same?
 - The love of money by itself doesn't make someone a false teacher automatically, of course
 - But it is a warning sign, and at the very least, it may indicate the person is a carnal or immature believer
 - And we should no more want to follow the teaching of a carnal, immature believer than we should follow false teachers
 - Just look at what happened to Israel when they followed after false teachers in the Pharisees?
 - They were so deceived that when Jesus came, Israel rejected Him because the Pharisees told them to do so
 - And why did the Pharisees tell them to reject Jesus? Because He threatened their wealth and power
 - So because of the greed of false teachers, a generation of Israel was shut off from the Kingdom
 - So imagine what damage a greedy, false teacher can do to your walk if you follow them over a cliff?
 - They may rob you blind of your money today and your eternal reward later
 - At the very least, they will distract you away from eternal concerns while stunting your spiritual growth
- So Jesus pronounces a third woe against these men for perverting oaths in the pursuit of selfish interests, so now we move to the fourth woe

Matt. 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Matt. 23:24 “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”

- For the third time, Jesus introduces the woe by calling these men hypocrites, because once again they are acting in ways contrary to their words
 - In this example the topic is tithing, and the Law required that Jews tithe in three ways, resulting in a total giving of between 20-30% annually
 - One tithe was on the produce of their crops, which became food for the priests or for the poor
 - But the Pharisees went the next step of tithing even on herbs produced in their garden
 - They would count out one tenth of the leaves off an herb tree or seeds from a spice plant to give to the temple priests
 - The Law of Moses never required tithing on the herbs in a household garden...that was a rule invented by the rabbis
 - But that rule wasn't necessarily wrong...even Jesus says in v.23 they should have continued tithing in that way if they desired
 - The problem was that they adopted this extreme measure hypocritically
 - It was part of their continuing effort to appear pious and scrupulous in keeping the law
 - But they did it only for the attention it gained them, and they were willing to do it because it cost them very little personally
 - Meanwhile, Jesus says they ignored weightier provisions of the law which demanded much greater personal sacrifice
 - In particular, the Pharisees tossed aside commands of the Law demanding justice, mercy and faithfulness Jesus says
 - Jesus is speaking about situations in which the Pharisees used their power to pervert the Law rather to enforce it properly
 - They might deny someone freedom or fail to convict a guilty criminal when it suited them or yielded a personal advantage
 - Perhaps they wanted a bribe, or a political favor with Rome
- The point here is the Pharisees selectively obeying the word of God...picking and choosing to suit them
 - And typically, they chose to obey the most minor provisions but disregarded the weightier provisions
 - Jesus sums up the behavior in v.24 using a figure of speech...He says they strain out a gnat and swallow a camel
 - It's a comical and vivid illustration of their hypocrisy...going to great lengths to remove the smallest insect from their drink
 - Yet when the time comes to swallow, they make no effort to stop the occasional camel from finding its way down their throat

- And that's the sin in view in the fourth woe: selective obedience to the word of God done in hypocrisy and manipulation
 - And it's a classic practice of false teachers, because it allows them to appear righteous without making a true effort
 - False teachers will obey the easy, minor things commanded in the Bible, and make quite a show of it to impress us
 - They want us to see their obedience and to praise them for it
 - But then false teachers ignore the major tenants of the Bible because they get in the way of what they desire
- Of course, we can play these games with God as well, when we want
 - Have you encountered Christians who say they are committed to the Bible and believe we should do what it says...
 - But then they decide some part of it doesn't apply to them? They ignore some rule concerning marriage or sexuality or speech?
 - They make excuses for why the Bible's standards of conduct commanded for all believers doesn't apply to them?
- That's selective obedience to the word of God, and Jesus says it's not fooling God
 - Whatever reasons a person may have for why a rule doesn't apply is merely hypocrisy and disobedience
 - In other words, what do you call 99% obedience? It's called disobedience
 - We cannot allow our obedience to the word of God to vary based on what suits us
 - Because if that's how we approach the Bible, then we've never truly been obedient to God at all...we were just playing a game
- So how do false teachers of our day repeat this pattern of selective obedience?
 - Well, today the pattern of emphasizing minor things while ignoring the main teaching of Scripture takes a very specific form
 - False teachers today quote minor, often obscure verses of the Bible taken out of context and use them to prop up false claims
 - And then at the same time, they will ignore the primary teaching of the Bible on that topic, because it undermines their argument
 - Let's look at an example of a teaching commonly repeated by false teachers today that follows this pattern
 - False teachers will commonly tell us that giving money to God (to their ministry) will result in a return on our investment
 - They describe a pyramid scheme in which a little invested with their ministry will result in much more returned to us somehow
 - Typically they run to a handful of well-known verses taken out of context to support these false claims
 - One of their favorite verses used to support this notion is a quote from Luke:

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

- False teachers today interpret this verse in a selective way while contradicting the major teaching of the Bible
 - First, they presume that the “it” Jesus mentions in this verse is wealth or money, but notice Jesus doesn’t name the “it” here
 - “It” refers to something Jesus named in an earlier verse, but notice the false teachers don’t quote the earlier verse
 - They intentionally isolate this verse so they can use it to manipulate you into thinking it means something it doesn’t
 - If we look two verses earlier, we discover what “it” is about

Luke 6:36 “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure — pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

- In this passage, Jesus is talking about forgiveness and mercy...show forgiveness and mercy to others, and the Lord will give you the same
 - By the same standard you measure mercy and forgiveness is the same measure God uses in showing you mercy
 - We discussed this principle when it appeared in Matthew 6, so you can go there for the full explanation
 - For this morning, just take note that these verses are not about money at all
 - Yet the false teachers will quote this verse repeatedly to suggest that God is asking us to give more and more money
 - And the more we give, the more God will grant to us in return
 - They are describing a Ponzi scheme where every investment goes up and everyone gets a huge return but it’s all a lie
 - That’s not what Jesus said, so it’s not what the Bible promises us
- This is an example of a single verse, a minor moment in the larger conversation of the Gospel, being over-emphasized to support a lie
 - The topic of forgiveness is not minor, of course, but this verse is of no importance on the topic of money because it’s not talking about money
 - It’s simply a verse that can be easily manipulated to create a desired belief

- In fact, the false teachers love to preach a whole sermon on this one verse, which is selectively attending to the word of God
 - And then they lie about what it says so they can move our thinking to a place that benefits them personally
- Once you believe what they tell you about this verse, you will be willing to send them your last dime and many do
 - As Jesus said about the Pharisees, they will take a widow's home if they can
 - In the end, they get rich and we're left holding the bag and thinking that God's word can't be trusted
- But it's not God's word we can't trust...it's the hypocritical, lying conmen who deceive us with their myopic misinterpretations of the Bible
 - They over-emphasize a minor point taken out of context so they can deceive you – and then they ignore the larger teaching of the Bible
 - And what does the Bible say about wealth and money generally?
 - The Bible's principle thrust on the topic of money is that we shouldn't seek for wealth for ourselves
 - Instead, use your effort to obey Jesus and seek for reward in the Kingdom
 - Consider the following statements from the Bible concerning wealth:

Matt. 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Luke 12:15 Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

Heb. 13:5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”

1Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

- The Bible says be content with whatever you have from God, and meanwhile don't make your life a pursuit of riches

- If you desire money too much, you are likely to fall into a snare set by false teachers who tell you God can make you rich
- Moreover, the godly character we should all desire is associated with a freedom from a love of money
- So even if you are blessed to receive much from God, don't become dependent on it or too attached to it
- Because Jesus says wealth is not the measure of one's life...that measure will be taken in Heaven at the Judgment Seat of Jesus
- Finally, never does the Bible promise that if we give our money to God it will result in a return of more money to us while on earth
 - Generally speaking, the math on this question is very simple
 - When you give your money away – whether to the church or elsewhere – you will have less money afterward
 - And that's OK, because by being generous with what you have, you're building up treasure in Heaven Jesus tells us
 - Perhaps the Lord will bring you more in return...we know He's going to provide for us...but there's no promise you will be rich
- This is a good illustration of how false teachers selectively emphasize minor verses of the Bible to craft a lie designed to fleece the flock
 - Meanwhile, they won't tell you the whole story of what's given in the Bible, because that whole story would expose their lie
 - So Jesus condemned the Pharisees for this hypocrisy, and we need to steer clear of anyone who repeats this pattern today
 - If someone majors on minor things while ignoring the major things, they are not fit to guide us into righteousness
 - They are blind guides, Jesus says
 - That's why we work to teach the whole counsel of God's word...Paul made that claim about his own ministry

Acts 20:27 “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

- In Ephesus, Paul told the elders he did not fail to share with them the whole counsel of God's word
- Perhaps that's the greatest thing that could be said about any teacher of the word...we were not selective in what we taught
- Teaching verse-by-verse is my way of showing my work when I teach
 - Remember when your school math teacher said you had to show your work when you did a math problem?
 - It wasn't good enough to merely show the final answer...the teacher wanted to know *how* you arrived at that answer

- That's how all good Bible teaching should be done too...
- The teacher shouldn't just tell you what the Bible says about some topic, they should show their work
- They should be prepared to show you the whole counsel of God's word on the topic to validate their conclusions
- If they can't – or won't – do that for you, then perhaps there's a problem and you should be suspicious
 - Either they don't know what they are talking about, or they are trying to deceive you
 - Either way, you should seek better teaching, because time is short and your own sanctification and reward is on the line
- Next week we finish the woes as we prepare to enter into one of the most important chapters in all of Matthew's Gospel

- Today we conclude our study of the seven woes Jesus pronounced upon the religious leaders of Israel in Chapter 23
 - We'll dispense with a review for today to dive back in, starting with Jesus' fifth woe in v.25

Matt. 23:25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

Matt. 23:26 “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

- Once again, Jesus calls these men hypocrites, and last week Jesus condemned them as false teachers who selectively obeyed the word of God
 - When the Bible uses the term false teachers, it's not merely referring to the false things they teach
 - After all, anyone can teach something false from time to time, but that by itself doesn't make a person a false teacher
 - The Bible uses the word “false” to describe the teacher himself, not just his teaching
 - So a false teacher is someone who is false, someone other than who they claim to be
 - Which is why Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they falsely claimed to know the Bible and to have spiritual insight
 - They portrayed themselves before others as godly and pious
 - The Pharisees convinced generations of Israel that they were experts on God and the most qualified to instruct Israel
 - In reality, they were far from God, so they didn't possess what they claimed to offer others
 - They were unbelievers, and therefore they were false teachers because they were not who they claimed to be
 - And that's what made them so dangerous...people were attracted to their outward appearance yet without knowing it was a lie
 - When we encounter people like this, we drop our guard and assume that anything these teachers tell us must be correct
 - Their outward appearance convinces us they are genuine and trustworthy...but inside they are very different
- So in this fifth woe, Jesus condemns those men for selective piety...for caring only for their outward appearances while ignoring inward realities
 - To make His point, Jesus uses a simple but effective illustration of dirty dishes to describe these men

- In v.25 Jesus says these men clean only the outside of their dishes, leaving the inside dirty
- Jesus is referring to the way Pharisaic Judaism placed importance only on the external behaviors of a person
- Their system of religion placed no importance on the quality of a person's character or their inward godliness
- So Pharisees could be scrupulous about keeping rituals while at the same time they gave no attention to their inner sin
- So imagine sitting down to eat at a restaurant (a distant memory for most of us, I know), and the waiter comes to set your table
 - At first glance, your dishes appear spotless, but as you inspect them more closely you notice the inside of your cup is filthy
 - So you complain to the waiter saying the dishes aren't clean
- To your shock, he dismisses your concern by pointing out that the outside was perfectly clean therefore the inside didn't matter
 - How would you respond to the waiter? You would tell him you demand a dish that is clean on both the inside and the outside
 - And if you had to choose only one side, you would certainly choose a clean inside over a clean outside
- That's Jesus' point to the Pharisees...they were practicing selective piety
 - They chose to focus on only one side of the cup, so to speak, claiming that the cleaning the outside was good enough
 - And to make matters worse, they picked the wrong side of the cup
- Jesus compares cleaning the outside of the cup to the ritualistic traditions and practices of Pharisaic Judaism
 - Pharisaic Judaism was an exercise in making the outside of a person – the other appearance – as “clean” as possible
 - From their clothing to their public prayers to how and what they ate, Pharisees followed rituals as a means of godliness
 - They fussed over how they wore their hair and beard and how many times they washed before a meal and many other things
 - They did all these things because they believed that these rituals made them acceptable to God
 - Pharisees believed their scrupulous devotion to external religious rituals made them pleasing to God
 - And they did all this without giving a thought to their inward character, to their true inner righteousness
 - Jesus said inside these men were full of robbery and self-indulgence
 - Robbery is forcibly taking someone else's possessions and self-indulgence is obeying your lusts

- And last week we saw how these men were lovers of money and used religion to steal from people including taking from widows
- That's the robbery and self-indulgence Jesus is talking about, and it was indicative of their corrupt, sinful character
- So if we could look into their hearts, spiritually speaking, we would see a cup filled with moldy filth
 - Yet they would have turned the "cup" over to show us the outside bragging about how shiny and clean it looked
 - And that's why Jesus condemned these men: they were experts in religious ritual but they cared nothing about inward character
- And of course this kind of hypocrisy isn't unique to Pharisees, since everyone including Christians can choose to put on an act in front of other people
 - We too can pretend to be better than we truly are to gain others' approval, and I suspect the day we do it most often is Sunday morning
 - But because we have the Holy Spirit living in us convicting us when we sin, we remain fully aware of these games we play
 - We know God knows our true self, and He judges us for who we are inside, so we feel may guilt over our hypocrisy
 - And hopefully that leads us to drop the pretense and submit to the Spirit so that we become the person we pretend to be
 - But for Pharisees, living a pretend life of external religious ritual wasn't an act...it was the means to obtaining internal righteousness
 - They truly believed their rules resulted in making them more holy and righteous before God
 - It's like thinking that if we make barking or meowing sounds long enough, we will eventually turn into a dog or a cat
 - As silly as that sounds, it's what all false religions is trying to do...to use external ritual to force inward change and it doesn't work
- We're learning the difference between ritual and relationship
 - Before you have a true relationship with God through faith in Jesus, religion is nothing more than external ritual
 - But religious ritual has no power to change the inside of a person
 - No more than making barking sounds will change you into a dog
 - Our spiritual nature can only be changed by a work of the Spirit through our faith in Jesus Christ

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and

renewing by the Holy Spirit,**Titus 3:6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,**

- As Paul explained, because of the kindness and mercy of God, we were saved not because we accomplished external rituals
 - But instead because He renewed us by the Holy Spirit through our faith in Jesus Christ
 - Being born again in his way is the inward cleansing we needed...it's making the inside of our "cup" clean, which only God can do
- But after God makes our inside clean, Paul says He continues the renewal process in us by the Holy Spirit
 - That renewing process, which the Bible calls sanctification, is the process of working that inward cleanliness outward
 - The righteousness God has placed inside us by His Spirit will show itself over time through changes in our words and actions
 - By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, who we have become inside begins to influence who we are outside
- That's the power of a true relationship with God through Jesus, and it's completely the opposite of how external ritual religion tries to work
 - Those who practice religion hope that performing rituals will produce inward positive change and please some god
 - But following rituals can only create outward changes, they leave the inside unchanged
 - It's cleaning the outside of our "cup" and claiming that will automatically clean the inside
- But the Lord doesn't just judge the outside of our cups...He looks at the inside too
 - And if you want to clean the inside and the outside of the cup, you must enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ
 - By your faith, your spirit will be cleansed and so will your entire body
 - You can clean the outside of a cup and leave the inside untouched
 - But you can't clean the inside without the water spilling over the side and cleaning the outside as well
- So these men promoted selective piety, ritual instead of relationship, and Jesus condemns them for it with His fifth woe...which leads us to the sixth woe

Matt. 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Matt. 23:28 "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- The sixth woe appears to be similar to the fifth woe, because Jesus uses another illustration of outward appearance vs. inward reality
 - But in the sixth woe Jesus is condemning these men for a separate error: they contributed to the lack of righteousness in others
 - Jesus calls these men whitewashed tombs, perfectly clean and attractively painted
 - But inside, the tombs were unclean, full of dead men's bones
 - To understand Jesus' critique, we need to understand a practice in Jerusalem during Jesus' day
 - Every year at Passover, thousands and perhaps millions of Jewish pilgrims would descend upon the city of Jerusalem
 - They came walking from all directions and since the city couldn't accommodate them all, they slept on neighboring hillsides
 - In the Law of Moses, a Jew would be barred from participating in the feast of Passover if that person was unclean
 - For example, Numbers 19:16 says if a Jew came into contact with a grave, that person was considered unclean for seven days
 - And the hillsides outside the city of Jerusalem were covered in graves in that day, as they still are today
 - So it became customary in the weeks before each Passover for Jews to go out into the hills to paint every tomb with a fresh coat of white paint
 - Not only did it make the graves look nice, but it also made them easier to spot by traveling pilgrims
 - That way Jews could avoid stumbling over the graves and being disqualified from participating in the Passover
- So that's the scenario Jesus is using to describe the Pharisees, they are like those tombs that were whitewashed right before every Passover
 - They have whitewashed themselves in the sense that they have made themselves look attractive and clean on the outside
 - No one looking at them could know how unclean they truly were on the inside, because we can't see the inside of a grave
 - But Jesus says on the inside, these men were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness
 - But the real problem was that their attractive exterior led many in Israel to come to these men for religious guidance
 - And as they did, the people were unknowingly walking on graves, so to speak, and therefore they were becoming defiled
 - The Pharisees led other Jews to become unclean in the sense that they led people away from the truth of God
 - And by defiling the people, the Pharisees disqualified the nation of Israel from participating in the true Passover

- Remember, this scene is taking place barely 2 days before the Passover celebration
- And on that day Jesus will get up on a cross to die for the sins of Israel and the world
- This is the year the Passover will be fulfilled, when Israel will be set free from their sins, yet most of Israel will miss it
- In effect, the nation of Israel will have stumbled over the whitewashed graves of the Pharisees and been disqualified
- So the sixth woe against the Pharisees was for being a defiling influence on the nation of Israel causing them to miss their Messiah at Passover
 - They were like tombs full of death that a generation of Israel stumbled over and became disqualified
 - And for that offense, Jesus says they are to be condemned
- Before we move to the final woe, let's reflect on these two sins for a moment
 - These two were emphasizing ritual over relationship and allowing our own hypocrisy to become a stumbling block to others
 - Christians can also fall prey to substituting ritual for relationship and becoming a negative influence on another person's walk
 - We could preach for a month of Sundays on these two topics, I know, and maybe one day I will
 - Just give some thought to where ritual fits in your walk with Jesus...is it a compliment to your relationship or a way to avoid relationship?
 - The Christian church has precious few prescribed rituals, and in fact I can think of only a handful we're given in the Bible
 - Baptism, communion, regular gatherings, and laying on of hands are the only ritualistic requirements of the New Testament
 - But over the centuries we've added many more rituals, and although ritual isn't wrong in itself, it can become a crutch
 - If we don't have a relationship with Jesus by faith yet we want to appear to have one, we may adopt empty rituals instead
 - Or maybe we do have faith in Jesus, but we don't want to spend the time or energy to invest in our relationship
 - So we repeat a routine of rituals every Sunday and we call it faith, rather than engaging in prayer, study and following the Lord
- You may be a Christian who is living out rituals rather than enjoying a relationship with the Lord, and you know in a sense you're faking it
 - You can feel your hypocrisy, and perhaps you just assumed that's what everyone feels...but that isn't true
 - You're missing something important...and maybe that something is Jesus Himself

- Maybe you need to get right with God through a genuine faith in Jesus?
- Or maybe you have saving faith, but you've never let the Lord become a major part of your life, so you're going through the motions
 - Maybe you do rituals to please your spouse or your parents
 - Maybe you're doing it out of obligation and guilt or because you have some superstitious hope God will bless you for it
 - You need to mature out of ritual and into investing in a relationship
 - Either way, this church can help you move from ritual to relationship, and I hope you will reach out to us for help
- If we go on practicing ritual instead of relationship, we run the risk of repeating the sin of the sixth woe by causing others to stumble
 - You might get so good at the ritual that others see your external piety as their guide and model
 - You become their whitewashed tomb full of hypocrisy, attracting people to the wrong thing and defiling them
 - Scripture indicates this is the greater sin, which should give us all incentive to put hypocrisy aside and seek authentic relationship
 - If not for our own sake, for the sake of those around us
- Now let's finish with the seventh woe, and as we do we'll put all seven together

Matt. 23:29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

Matt. 23:30 and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’

Matt. 23:31 “So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Matt. 23:32 “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

Matt. 23:33 “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

- Once again, Jesus draws upon a Jewish practice of His day involving tombs to make a comparison to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees
 - The Lord sent the prophets to Israel during times of disobedience to correct and teach them, which didn't make them popular men
 - In fact, being a prophet to Israel was a thankless and dangerous job
 - Prophets were almost always killed by those they came to serve
 - The writer of Hebrews describes the fate of the prophets this way:

Heb. 11:32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak,

Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,
Heb. 11:33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness,
obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,
Heb. 11:34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from
weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to
flight.
Heb. 11:35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were
tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better
resurrection;
Heb. 11:36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and
imprisonment.
Heb. 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they
were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins,
being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated
Heb. 11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and
mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

- They were universally hated and martyred for bringing the truth to Israel
- That's quite a recruiting pitch for becoming a prophet, isn't it? It helps us understand why Jonah ran away from the job
- But the Pharisees declared that had they been the religious leaders of those days, they would have defended the prophets
 - In that day, the Pharisees had designated certain places in Israel as the place of the graves of the Old Testament prophets
 - Some of these burial locations were probably accurate while others were likely just tradition
- And the Pharisees made quite a show of honoring the graves of these men by building great monuments around them
 - They said that when Israel rose up against the prophets to kill them, the Pharisees would have opposed the people
 - In other words, they claimed that Israel's history would have been different had they been alive at that time
- But Jesus says in v.31 that by their claims, they are testifying against themselves by acknowledging they are responsible for Israel today
 - These men were now in a position to direct the people of Israel concerning the prophets of that day
 - They could direct the people to receive the prophet John and Jesus, the Messiah Himself
 - So if they were so sure they would have sided with Isaiah, then surely they will direct Israel to embrace those Isaiah foretold?
 - But they didn't and in fact they sought to kill both, just as their forefathers did in

their day

- So even as they publicly embraced the memory of the martyred prophets, they were leading the nation of Israel to reject their Messiah
 - It was the absolute worst kind of hypocrisy, and Jesus condemns them for it
 - In vs.32-33 Jesus says they are filling up the measure of the guilt of their fathers, the religious leaders of earlier days
 - Their guilt will exceed that of those who killed the prophets, the ones they say they would have opposed, and they will enter hell
- So the sin of the seventh woe against the Pharisees was for thinking themselves righteous and better than the people
 - The sin of self-righteousness isn't just a matter of pride...it also inoculates a person from seeking God's mercy
 - If you don't believe you're a sinner, then you won't embrace God's offer of forgiveness when it comes
 - If you don't think you need saving, then you won't accept the Savior when He comes
- And that's the issue at the heart of the seventh woe...these men couldn't see themselves honestly so they couldn't see their need for Jesus either
 - They were blind to their own predicament, so they wouldn't acknowledge Jesus' call to repent and believe
 - It's why they objected to Jesus spending time with the prostitutes and tax collectors
 - They expected the Messiah, when He came to Israel, would honor them above all others
 - So when Jesus dismissed their hypocrisy and honored the down and out, it convinced them that Jesus was a fraud
 - Notice Jesus repeatedly calls them blind guides, and the thing they were most blind to was their own sin
 - As Jesus said in John 9, the Pharisees said "We see", meaning they said they were already righteous
 - And therefore, Jesus left them in their blindness
- So now let's end this section by standing back to look at all seven of the woes in this chapter
 - Remember, we said that they formed a chiasm, a literary structure commonly found in Scripture
 - It's an arrangement of ideas in a certain pattern that helps the reader follow the development of an argument or story
 - In this chapter, there were seven woes, and the woes are paired up so that the compliment one another
 - The seven woes can be summarized this way:

- Believing a gospel of works
 - Promoting a religion of works
 - Using religious ritual for personal gain
 - Selective obedience to God's word
 - Emphasizing ritual over relationship
 - Making others unrighteous
 - Believing themselves righteous
- The first and the last woe are connected in thought, as are the 2nd and 6th, as well as the 3rd and 5th, leaving the 4th woe by itself
 - When you arrange the list in this way, it forms a shape of the Greek letter chi (Χ)
 - The pairing of each idea with another helps us work out the interpretation of each point knowing they must match up
- But the main benefit of chiasms is in pointing us to the author's main idea or central thought
 - The main point of the chiasm is the unmatched idea in the middle of the Χ
 - As some say, the point is the "point," and the point in this chiasm was the way the Pharisees' manipulated the word of God
- The fourth woe was against the Pharisees' selective obedience to the word of God, as they chose to tithe on mint but ignored justice and mercy
 - They were selectively determining which parts of the law they would follow and which parts they ignored
 - And once you starting picking and choosing what you will follow in God's word, you will inevitably cherry pick
 - Cherry picking means selecting only the things you like, just as you only pick the fruit that looks good to you
 - So if the Bible says we can't do something we want to do or it commands we do something we don't want to do, we ignore that rule
 - But when the Bible says something we prefer, we do it enthusiastically to draw attention to our piety
 - It's as if we're trying extra hard at the rules we will keep in order to make up for the ones we want to ignore
 - Cherry picking the Bible is simply a game played by hypocrites living in rebellion to God's authority
 - No one obeys the Bible perfectly, of course, but that wasn't Jesus' concern here
 - He didn't condemn these men because they tried and failed to obey the Bible
 - He condemned them for ignoring the Bible when it suited them
- And that's the core issue that lead to all the other woes in this list
 - It's why this point sits at the center of the chiasm

- Because how you approach the word of God will determine how you live and whether you obey the Lord
- Do you come to the word of God sincerely with an open heart to accept what you find in it?
- Or do you seek to manipulate it to allow you to get your way in life?
- The Pharisees were master manipulators of the word of God, and they played their game to ensure they could have their cake and eat it too
 - They gained praise from people for being scrupulous men of God, while still being able to live as they desired
 - They prayed on Saturday morning and partied on Saturday night
 - They pointed to the word of God when it supported what they desired and they ignored it when it didn't
- There are three ways we can live in respect to the Bible, but only one will bring us into greater spiritual maturity and godliness
 - We can ignore the Bible, which seems to be the path most Christians take
 - We treat it like a dictionary on our bookshelf...we only take it down when we have a question and then back it goes
 - I call this Bible bingo, and those who play Bible bingo learn very little, and as a result they usually grow very little
- The second group engages in some level of study regularly, but it's not a search for truth...it's a search for affirmation
 - This group has pre-conceived ideas about God and faith and many other things they bring with them to study
 - And they aren't interested in having their minds changed about anything, especially if it involves personal correction
 - For them, the Bible exists just to confirm their views, and should they stumble upon something contradictory, they ignore it
 - I call this cherry picking the Bible, and it merely produces pride and hardens the heart against conviction
- Finally, there are Christians who make study of God's word a life-long pursuit, and they enter into the experience expecting to make changes as a result
 - They expect God to change their minds, and change their behaviors and ultimately change their hearts
 - They know they will be convicted at times, and when they are, they are ready to repent
 - They expect to be corrected at times, and when they are, will embrace the truth gladly
 - They expected to be amazed and intrigued and maybe even confused by what they learn, but they aren't worried by any of it
 - They plan to be engaged in study for the rest of their lives, so it will all work out

for their eternal good in the end

- I call this group truth seekers, and they are the ones Jesus is seeking, because they are the opposite of the Pharisees and all like them
 - How you approach the word of God is key in determining who you will become in Christ

- Welcome back to our study of the Gospel of Matthew, and if you're new to our study, you've picked a great time to join us
 - We're at the end of Chapter 23 and about to begin Chapter 24, and some monumental things happen in Chapter 24
 - We're in the final week of Jesus' earthly life, just a couple of days before Passover on the Jewish calendar
 - It's Tuesday afternoon of that week, and Jesus has just spent the past three days teaching in the temple
 - He's been speaking to large crowds and enduring constant harassment and inspection by the religious leaders
 - Jesus sparred with these men in four rounds of testing, and after it was over, He emerged triumphant and un-indicted
 - Jesus demonstrated He was above reproach, and that He was the spotless Lamb of God, ready to die for Israel's sins
 - Then at the end of His final exchange with these leaders, Jesus delivered a scathing rebuke in Chapter 23
 - He pronounced seven woes on them, judging them for their hypocrisy and for leading Israel into her own judgment
 - They misled the people, robbing them of their wealth, the Messiah and ultimately the Kingdom
 - So Jesus declared these men would be excluded from the Kingdom and face a fate in hell
- Now six months earlier, at the end of Chapter 12, Matthew recorded Jesus offering Himself to the nation as their king in a pivotal moment
 - Jesus performed a messianic miracle before the crowd, and they recognized its significance, even calling Jesus the Son of David
 - Still the people refused to accept the miracles they witnessed and instead believed the lies their religious leaders told
 - And as a result, that generation of Israel committed the unforgivable sin and forfeited the Kingdom
 - If you weren't here for that study, I recommend you return to Chapter 12 of our study to learn about that important moment
 - After that moment, Jesus started preparing His disciples for the Church program while He set His mind on Jerusalem and the cross
 - Now six months later, Jesus' death is barely 48 hours away, and His public ministry has ended
 - And as it ends, Jesus makes one last public statement lamenting Israel's decision

Matt. 23:34 “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will

scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,
Matt. 23:35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Matt. 23:36 “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

- The verses are essentially a footnote to the seventh woe, which we studied last week
 - You remember in the seventh woe Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for claiming to be more righteous than their forefathers
 - In prior centuries, the leaders of Israel routinely persecuted the prophets when they came declaring the truth
 - As John says in Chapter 1 of his Gospel, men loved the darkness and hated the light because it exposed their evil deeds
 - So when prophets came exposing the sins of the people of Israel, the nation’s leaders responded by killing the prophets
 - And now with the benefit of hindsight and with hypocritical intent, the Pharisees said that they would know different and done differently
 - They were more righteous than their forefathers, they said, and they would have obeyed the prophets
 - But Jesus said these men were worse than their forefathers because they not only did the same but worse
 - The Pharisees persecuted prophets too, like John the Baptist, but even worse, they persecuted the Messiah Himself
 - So Jesus condemned those men for their hypocrisy and self-righteous attitudes
- Now in vs.34-36 Jesus adds this footnote, saying He will confirm their hypocrisy and their unrighteousness by giving them more prophets to persecute
 - The religious leaders of Israel will kill and scourge these men and drive them from city to city and some will even die hanging on crosses
 - Who are these prophets that came after Jesus?
 - They are the apostles, who are the prophets of the New Testament era
 - The book of Acts records the ministry of these New Testament prophets and the fierce resistance they faced from Israel’s religious leaders
 - Just as Jesus predicted, these men were usually killed, beginning with James in Acts 12, and often mistreated
 - We see the apostles were scourged in Acts 5 and church tradition maintains that Peter was eventually crucified like Jesus
 - These historical accounts confirm the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who said they would acknowledge a prophet from God
- In v.35, as Jesus tells the religious leaders that as they do these things, they will show themselves equally guilty of the blood of all Old Testament prophets

- The Bible's first prophet was Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, who spoke the truth to his unbelieving brother, Cain
 - As evil Cain witnessed his righteous brother obeying God, it prompted hatred and jealousy in Cain's heart
 - So he responded by killing his brother, and he established a pattern for all history: the unrighteous persecute the righteous
 - As Paul observed in speaking about Isaac vs. Ishmael

Gal. 4:29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

- Those who are of the flesh, unbelievers, will persecute those who are born again by the Spirit, believers
 - It has always been that way and always will be, Paul says
 - That's why service to Jesus in the Kingdom Program leads to persecution...because we stir up those opposed to God
 - And in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were those born of the flesh who persecuted Jesus and those born of the Spirit
- And Jesus says those men shared in the guilt of all those who have done the same before
 - They share the guilt of Cain who killed Abel and with their forefathers who killed the prophets after him down to Zechariah
 - Zechariah was killed in the temple court, where he took sanctuary from Jews seeking to kill him over his prophecies
 - He is the final Old Testament prophet to be martyred before the advent of Messiah
 - So saying "Abel to Zechariah" means all the prophets (and as a happy coincidence, it also spans "A" to "Z" in English)
- The martyrdom of the saints, particularly the Apostles, reminds us that following the Lord comes with risks, and these risks are unavoidable
 - As long as our world has evil people opposed to God who love darkness and hate the light, believers will be persecuted
 - Why? Because we are the light of Christ in this world...meaning we bring the same message of salvation that Jesus brought
 - And therefore we will experience the same reactions to that message that Jesus experienced when He preached
 - Some respond to the Lord's grace in humility and repentance, but many and probably most oppose the Gospel and persecute His ambassadors
 - And the degree of our persecution will be proportional to the degree of our testimony and service to Jesus
 - The more fervently and persistently you witness to the truth, the more the enemy and the world will persecute you

- And if you are hesitant to make known your faith in Jesus, you will escape persecution
- But at the same time, the results we achieve in our Kingdom work are also directly proportional to our willingness to accept persecution
 - When the apostles went out with the message, the Spirit moved through them to convert many thousands to the truth
 - But of course, with that great harvest came great persecution, because the enemy would not sit still while they worked
 - When those men stepped out boldly to proclaim the truth, they stirred up the enemy and the persecution soon followed
 - This is a fundamental principle of faith: the more effective disciples of Jesus will usually be the most persecuted disciples
 - And the most persecuted disciples will also be the most effective disciples
 - If you follow Jesus' footsteps, you will end up where Jesus did
 - And there is an important corollary to this truth: when Christians hide their witness from the world, the church becomes weak and ineffective
 - If we make our goal blending in and avoiding opposition, we may live comfortable lives
 - We will likely avoid persecution, because the enemy has no reason to waste his time on the likes of us
 - He doesn't need to invest His resources in opposing us, because we have done his work for him...we have silenced ourselves
 - But we will also forfeit some measure of reward, because we will have passed up opportunities to serve Jesus
- So then in v.36 Jesus makes a sharp transition into discussing the coming judgment for this generation of Israel, not just for their religious leaders
 - Jesus says in v.36 that all these things will come upon this generation, and "these things" are the outcomes mentioned in vs.34-35
 - So entire generations of Israel will persecute the apostles by joining the religious leaders in scourging and killing them
 - And the guilt for these acts will fall upon this entire generation of Israel as a result
 - And this generation of Israel will receive a just and swift judgment for it
 - First, they will fail to receive their Messiah sent to her, and they will lose opportunity to enter into the Kingdom
 - But more than that, Israel will also lose its place in the land, because the Lord will send them into exile once again
 - And this time that exile will last not decades or centuries but two millennia
 - Jesus says that's what's coming for this generation of Israel because they listened to their corrupt leaders and rejected their Messiah

- And Jesus closes the chapter lamenting this sad and unnecessary future in vs.37-39

Matt. 23:37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

Matt. 23:38 “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

Matt. 23:39 “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”

- Now this passage will be very familiar to you because we examined these verses during our study of Matthew 12
 - Back in Matthew 12 we studied the moment when Israel officially rejected Jesus as their Messiah
 - Jesus had performed an unmistakable sign proving He was the Messiah, and the crowd recognized the meaning of that sign
 - But their religious leaders credited Jesus’ miracle to Satan, and the crowd sided with the religious leaders rather than with Jesus
 - In that moment, that generation of Israel blasphemed the Holy Spirit and committed the unforgivable sin
 - In response to their rejection, Jesus pronounced judgment on that generation using the same words we just read here in Matthew
 - They were unwilling to receive Him, so Jesus declared that He would leave Israel’s house desolate
 - In other words, Israel’s temple as well as her place in the land would be taken from her as a result of their rejection of Jesus
 - And Jesus said this state of desolation would remain in effect until the day came when Israel called out to Jesus in repentance
 - That’s the way Jesus ended the scene in Matthew 12, but we didn’t find these words recorded in Matthew...we found them in Luke 13
 - Luke records the first time Jesus spoke these words and Matthew records the second time Jesus spoke them here
 - Jesus issued this lament the first time at the moment Israel committed the unforgivable sin and lost the Kingdom in that day
 - Now Jesus makes the same statement a second time as His death approaches and His earthly ministry wraps up
 - As such, they became Jesus’ parting words to the people He came to serve and save, and they set the conditions for His return
 - After this moment Jesus will not teach or address the people of Israel publicly again
 - His ministry to Israel has finished and the nation is now under judgment and

there will be no turning back

- But Jesus isn't finished preparing His disciples for their mission to follow
 - And in fact two of the most important teaching moments in all of Jesus' earthly ministry take place during the next 36 hours
 - Jesus delivers an extended teaching on how the present age ends leading to Jesus' return
 - Secondly, Jesus teaches His disciples about the Communion Meal as they celebrate the Passover meal prior to His crucifixion
 - Let's move into the first of these moments, the Olivet Discourse, which starts in Chapter 24

Matt. 24:1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

Matt. 24:2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

- Jesus has finished His third day in the temple and as the day ends, Jesus follows His usual practice of leaving the city to sleep in the nearby hills of Bethany
 - The road home from the temple took Jesus out the East gate and down the Kidron Valley and up the other side to the top of the Mt of Olives
 - From there it's a short walk to Bethany where Jesus has been spending the nights, probably with Lazarus and Martha
 - It's Tuesday afternoon, and it's been a long and stressful day for Jesus and the disciples
 - So as they walk out of the temple, some of the disciples begin to admire the amazing construction of Herod's temple
 - Herod's temple was one of the most impressive construction projects ever undertaken in all history
 - The massive foundation stones Herod set are so large that we struggle to imagine how they were worked and placed precisely
 - The building was the longest building project Herod ever undertook and it wasn't completed in his lifetime
 - In fact, it wasn't even completed in Jesus' lifetime...the temple wasn't completed until nearly 40 years after Jesus died
 - And then it was destroyed by the Romans barely four years later in the great revolt of AD 70
 - So here in AD 28, the disciples are truly fascinated at the project, and they point out the progress to Jesus, Who responds abruptly
 - Jesus offers no compliments but instead He promises that this massive structure would be torn down, stone by stone

- Jesus' prediction was astounding and unbelievable
- It was like hearing a person telling us that one day the entire World Trade Center towers would be turned down brick by brick
- And yet these men believed Jesus because they knew He was the Messiah and they trusted His word
 - So when they heard that the temple would be taken down in a day to come, they began to wonder how that could happen
 - And naturally, they assumed an event of that magnitude meant the world was ending or something equally momentous
 - But the disciples don't say anything in response to Jesus, not at first, but later as they reach a stopping point they come to Him

Matt. 24:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

- Matthew says the disciples came to Jesus privately and asked Jesus a series of questions
 - And these questions serve as our outline for most of the next two chapters
 - In v.3 Matthew records three questions
 - (1) When will the temple destruction happen?
 - (2) What will be the sign of your coming?
 - (3) What will be signs of the end of the age?
 - But we know the disciples actually asked four questions in total
 - Because in Luke's account of this conversation, we find the additional question

Luke 21:7 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

- So putting both passages together, we have the following four questions that Jesus was asked:
 - (1) When will the temple destruction happen?
 - (1A) What are the signs of the temple's coming destruction – from Luke's Gospel
 - (2) What will be the sign of your coming?
 - (3) What will be signs of the end of the age?
- Virtually everything Jesus says from this point forward in Chapters 24 and 25 will be in response to these four questions
 - We'll spend weeks studying this discourse in Chapters 24 & 25, and these four

questions will serve as our outline for that study

- But before we start, there are a couple of quirks to the Olivet Discourse that we need to understand
- First, in addition to answering the four questions, Jesus gives a fifth answer to a question the disciples didn't ask Him
 - Jesus will explain to His disciples what will NOT be signs of the end of the age
 - This advice will be very helpful, because as we'll see, some of the signs Jesus gives are easily confused with ordinary events
- And then secondly, Jesus won't answer these questions in the same order they are asked
 - Instead, Jesus gives His answers in an order which better suited His purpose in revealing these things
 - The order Jesus answers them in will be His extra answer first, followed by 3, 1, 1A, and then 2
 - How do we know that Jesus rearranges His answers?
 - By the nature of what Jesus says, we will be able to tell which question He is answering
- If you've studied this chapter, then you know there are some strongly differing opinions in the church how to interpret Jesus' answers in this chapter
 - And much of that disagreement centers on when these events happen in history and in their relation to one another
 - And perhaps you've heard some of these debates or even participated in them
 - And if so, then I bet you've probably wondered why there is so much disagreement over this area of the Bible
 - Well one of the reasons for these endless disagreements is found in the simple explanation I just pointed out
 - Our interpretation can go sideways if we miss important details in the text, like the changing of the order of questions
 - We overlook that detail, but then we proceed ahead with our interpretation unaware that we are on the wrong track
 - Like a ship that starts its journey just a few degrees off its proper heading...it eventually ends up hundreds of miles off track
 - So in the case of Matthew 24, we have people who make one or more of these simple mistakes or perhaps they learn these mistakes from others
 - The key to get our "ship" back on track is to recognize our error in the beginning and retrace our steps through the text
 - Sometimes we may encounter someone who can explain our mistake to us in such a way that we make that correction
 - But most of the time, in my experience, Christians can't explain why they believe what they believe, especially in this area of Scripture

- And so the debates become intractable with no one able to explain the mistakes that created the divide in the first place
- When you can't work someone through the Scriptures in a detailed way, you can't sort out the wrong from the right
- So our study of this chapter isn't merely a pursuit of knowledge for the sake of it
 - Like our study of all Scripture, we are seeking to understand what God has revealed so we may share that truth with others
 - And as we share the truth, we help unite the Body of Christ
- Unfortunately, there are some in the church who advocate for a continuation of ignorance within the Church in this area of the Bible
 - A well known megachurch pastor once wrote the following in one his his best selling books:

"Today there's a growing interest in the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. When will it happen? Just before Jesus ascended to heaven the disciples asked him this same question, and his response was quite revealing. He said, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'"

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, 'The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I've given you. Focus on that!' Speculating on the exact timing of Christ's return is futile, because Jesus said, 'No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'

Since Jesus said he didn't know the day or hour, why should you try to figure it out? What we do know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it. Jesus said, 'The Good News about God's kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then the end will come.' If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy."

- This quote perfectly illustrates the attitude which perpetuates both ignorance and division in the body
 - First, the author clearly doesn't understand the Scripture himself, because he misinterprets the passage he quotes
 - He introduces his comments by saying there is growing interest in Christ's Second

Coming, as if to say that's a bad thing

- But the Bible itself tells us that we should have interest in the future events for the Church

Heb. 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- Secondly, he attempts to prove his point using a Scripture verse that isn't referring to the Lord's Second Coming
 - He quotes from a verse in Matthew 24 which says Jesus' return is not knowable, so why bother studying it
 - But that verse isn't talking about the Second Coming of Jesus, as we'll see when we get there
- My point is, this teacher has taken a wrong turn in his interpretation of the text and it's led him to the wrong result which has confused him
 - And as a result of his confusion, he is advocating that all Christians stay away from this area of Scripture entirely
 - But once again, the real problem is his error in interpreting the text, not the act of studying itself
- Secondly, this pastor labels the study of end times scripture as "speculating on the exact timing of Christ's return"
 - Endeavoring to understand the Bible's teaching on end times isn't the same thing as trying to time Christ's return
 - Most importantly, this pastor never explains why the Bible provide us with so much teaching on eschatology
 - If we're not supposed to be interested in matters of the end, why did the Lord give us so much to study about it?
 - In fact, by some estimates, 40% of the Bible is prophecy
 - There is a passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 where Paul explains some of the intricate details of events that end this age
 - We will study that passage later during the course of looking at Matthew 24
 - But for now I want to draw your attention to how Paul begins that passage and how he ends it

1Th. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

- Paul begins this section saying he didn't want believers to be remain ignorant of the events of the end times so they would not lose hope
 - Paul goes on to explain the events surrounding the Lord's return for the Church

- This is the very event that the author I quoted earlier said we should not examine and should not endeavor to understand
- Yet here's Paul talking about that event saying it's important we understand these things so that we might not lose hope
- What is this hope that Paul doesn't want us to lose? It's the hope of our resurrection into a new, eternal body and a glorious eternal future
 - When you're living in this world, experiencing its trials and difficulties, it can very difficult to keep your mind on eternal things
 - It's easy to be distracted and become preoccupied with earthly concerns
 - But when we do that, we begin to lose our Christian hope, and we start to live just like the world around us that has no hope
 - And Paul says the antidote to that problem is to learn more about the future awaiting us, not less
 - That's why we study chapters like Matthew 24...to remind ourselves of the glorious future the Lord has prepared for us
 - Furthermore, the Scripture says we must make it our ambition to live out our hope in front of the world
 - The Christian hope is in knowing that we have been saved from the penalty of death
 - We have nothing to fear from the end of lives or from the calamities of earthly life
 - And demonstrating that confidence requires understanding why it is true
- Finally, Paul ends the passage with a second statement about hope:

1Th. 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- Paul had just finished explaining the circumstances surrounding the Lord's appearing and the resurrection of the church
 - And then he says the church is to take these teachings and pass them around and share them with one another
 - And we are to do this so that we can comfort one another!
- Ironically, in some Christian circles, sharing a teaching on the resurrection or on other end times events is considered divisive
 - Pastors shy away from teaching it and don't allow others to do so either
 - Some go so far as that author I quoted and try to tell us it's unbiblical to study this material
- But Scripture itself says we are supposed to take this teaching and use it to *decrease* concerns in the church
 - How did Paul expect his teaching on the end times would comfort us?

- He knew that the better we understood the future, the more we would look forward to it
- And the more we look forward to the future, the more we will prepare our hearts to please Jesus so we'll be ready to meet Him
- And perhaps best of all, we will be united with our brothers and sisters in our understanding of the Bible and of our future
 - So if you are concerned about division over the study of the end times, the solution to that problem is not less study
 - The solution is more and better study, which is what we will do here over the course of the next several weeks
 - The Lord didn't provide us with so much information to confuse us, much less to divide us
 - We can be confident that the reason it's in the Bible is so that we would understand it if we study it properly
 - And as we study it, we will find our hope in the future growing and our concerns over what troubles us now fading
 - And I can't think of a better time in recent memory when the church needed an eternal perspective
 - Our study through this chapter may not be leading us to stirring extortions to obey Jesus or put away sin
 - But it's no less powerful or important...because it's going to give us what we most need to motivate ourselves to obey: hope

- Today we return to the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, one of the most important teachings in all the Gospels
 - The Olivet Discourse runs from Chapter 24 to the end of Chapter 25, and it gets its name from the place where Jesus delivered this teaching
 - As we studied last week, Jesus exited the temple for the last time a free man on the Tuesday of the week He dies
 - His disciples are following Him through the Kidron valley and up the Mount of Olives to their nightly resting place in Bethany
 - And as they were walking out, Jesus tells the disciples that the entire temple will one day be torn down
 - Naturally, the disciples began asking Jesus a series of questions about that event and about the end of this age and the start of the Kingdom
 - We read those questions last week in v.3

Matt. 24:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

- The disciples asked when will these things (i.e., the temple destruction) happen?
- What will be the sign of your coming?
- What will be signs of the end of the age?
- Then in Luke’s account of this conversation, we found an additional question

Luke 21:7 They questioned Him, saying, “Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”

- Luke recorded a “part 2” to the first question of what will be the signs when the temple destruction was about to take place
 - So putting both passages together, we end up with four questions:
 - 1) When will the temple destruction happen?
 - 1A) What are the signs of the temple’s coming destruction
 - 2) What will be the sign of your coming?
 - 3) What will be signs of the end of the age?
- Then I told you there were two interesting details needed to note in interpreting this discourse correctly
 - First, Jesus answers an additional question that the disciples didn’t think to ask, which was what will not be signs of the end of the age
 - Secondly, Jesus doesn’t answer these questions in the same order they are

asked of Him

- Specifically, He answers them in the order of (4, 3, 1, 1A, 2)
- So let's move ahead with the answer that Jesus adds of what will not be signs of the end

Matt. 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you.

Matt. 24:5 “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.

Matt. 24:6 “You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.

- Luke's version reads similarly...

Luke 21:8 And He said, “See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not go after them.

Luke 21:9 “When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately.”

- Jesus' first warning is that no one in the Church should be misled into believing that Jesus had already returned
 - It's one of the constants of this age that people are always guessing the end wrongly
 - They are assuming that minor things are signs of the end, but they are nothing
 - Meanwhile, when the real signs do start to happen, the world will miss them...that's what Jesus is teaching us in this chapter
- So the first false sign some will be fooled by are false messiahs, but Jesus says don't believe them
 - They are sent by the enemy, Satan, to deceive the world, but we can be sure these claims are always wrong
 - How can we be so sure that everyone who says they are Jesus is wrong? What happens when the real Jesus actually returns?
 - When Jesus does come back, we can't miss Him, because as we will learn later, He will bring us with Him
 - That's why we can safely ignore anyone who claims they are Jesus...it's always nonsense and it's not a sign of the end
 - But many will fall for these counterfeits, as we've seen in the past, and there will be more to come
 - Isn't it interesting that you rarely if ever see people claiming to be Muhammed or Confucius or Buddha returned
 - Why? Because Satan knows who the real God is, so he doesn't bother

counterfeiting the others because they are meaningless

- And the second sign Jesus says we shouldn't be worried over is wars or rumors of wars
 - In our world, war will be constant along with rumors of wars but war is not a sign of anything by itself
 - When you hear about new violence in the Middle East or world powers threatening each other, it's meaningless
 - These things happen merely because we live in a world of sin, so these things are not signs of the end
- But there will be signs that the end is coming and Jesus begins to give us those signs in v.7, starting with the signs of the end of the age
 - To understand what Jesus is saying, we first must realize what an "age" is in biblical terms
 - Simply put, an age is a long but finite period of human history
 - God establishes ages in the timeline of history to accomplish His purposes in Creation
 - Ages have beginning points and ending points, and according to the book of Daniel, our current age began in 605 BC
 - At that time, Babylon attacked Jerusalem and the nation of Israel lost its security in the land as a penalty for perverse idolatry
 - The prophet Daniel says this age will continue through four major world-dominating empires
 - And Israel will not be allowed to dwell securely in their land again until the current age ends and the next begins
 - Jesus calls this age the Age of the Gentiles, and Daniel tells us it will end only when the Lord returns to set up His Kingdom on earth
 - So our current age started in 605 BC and it will end when the Kingdom age begins sometime in the future
 - That's what the disciples were asking Jesus about...what signs will the world receive to know that the current age is ending?
- So Jesus now begins to tell us what signs will announce that this current age is coming to its end

Matt. 24:7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

Matt. 24:8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

- The signs of the end of the age will act like birth pangs, Jesus says
 - So we should understand a little of how birth pangs work if we are to appreciate how these signs will work

- First, we know that birth pangs are painful, as my wife can verify
- They are intensely painful contractions that interrupt normal life for the woman and announce something new is about to arrive
 - So are the signs of the end of the age...they will be painful experiences for the world
 - And they will interrupt normal life in every imaginable way
 - But they announce that something new and better will arrive
- Secondly, we know that birth pangs can start very mildly, even imperceptibly
 - Some women can think that their birth pangs aren't real at first
 - So it will be with the signs of the end of the age
 - They will start mildly, and many will not notice or recognize the significance of them
- Then thirdly, we know that birth pangs increase in severity as time progresses
 - The contractions get stronger and stronger
 - So it will be with the signs of the end of the age as the signs repeat themselves over and over
 - But as they repeat, they will get stronger and the more severe the damage will become
- Fourthly, birth pangs increase in frequency, that is they get closer together
 - The closer together the contractions, the closer the woman is to the end
 - So it will be with the signs also, as they repeat closer and closer together
 - And that increasing frequency is a sign that the end is approaching
- Finally, they ultimately lead to the birth of a new life, and that's where we are headed too in these signs
 - As the pains on the earth increase and the end approaches, so does Christ's return and the start of the Kingdom
 - At that point, a new world and a new life for Israel and all believers will begin
- So that's the comparison Jesus offers for the signs of the end age, and now let's look at the specific signs
 - In v.7 Jesus says that nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom
 - This term sounds a lot like war, but a moment earlier Jesus told us not to view ordinary war as a sign
 - And now we see why He made that distinction, because there will be a certain type of war that does announce the end
 - And so we need to understand how to distinguish this special war from the ordinary kind
 - And the difference is found by understanding the phrase "nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom" in its historical context
 - In Jesus' day, rabbis used this terminology to describe a certain type of war never before experienced on earth

- The term meant a “world war” involving all nations and kingdoms on earth in a common conflict
- So the understanding in Jesus’ day was that world wars would be a sign of the end of the age
- This type of war was unprecedented in all human history until the 20th century when world wars first began to happen
 - In 1914 Europe engaged in a war that eventually dragged most of the earth into the fight
 - Altogether, 88% of the world’s nations participated in WWI at some level
 - This was the first time a worldwide conflict had been waged
 - In fact this war was so unique that it was initially called the “war to end all wars”
 - No one had seen such a thing before nor imagined it could ever happen again
 - But they were wrong because not long after WWI finished, along came WWII
 - That war was larger and worse than the earlier war, involving 95% of the world’s nations, like birth pangs would predict
 - It fits the pattern of birth pangs increasing in severity
 - Now we know why Jesus specifically ruled out wars in His earlier answer
 - He didn’t want us mistaking “ordinary” war for the unique world wars that would mark the end
 - We’ve seen two so far, which means we have entered the period of the end and we should expect to see worse...far worse
- The next sign of the end of the age is famine in various places
 - Now famine is also common on earth, so to understand this sign we must consider it in light of the birth pang comparison
 - When the end of the age approaches, famines won’t just happen once in a while, they will become common
 - And they won’t just impact distant people, but they will impact us too
 - That’s what Jesus means by “various places” – He means in places everywhere, places where you didn’t think it could happen
 - And they will be more severe and painful than anything we’ve seen before
 - So it will be by the increasing severity and frequency that people can see famines as a sign of the end
 - But remember, in the beginning of birth pangs, they can be so mild that it’s hard to notice
 - And so it will be with famine...the initial stages of this sign may be subtle and overlooked, at least at first
 - Today, there are indications that famine is growing in severity and frequency and impacting more people than ever before
 - Even some industrialized nations have begun to experience food shortages for

- various reasons including the pandemic
 - Food prices are steadily increasing and supplies are running short
 - Inventories in grocery stores are also limited and dependent on regular resupply
 - As we move further toward the end, this sign will only increase
- Finally, Jesus says look for earthquakes to increase, and since measuring earthquakes is a science, it's easy to track the fulfillment of this sign
 - A search at the USGS website reveals trends in earthquakes in the U.S. and worldwide over the past century or more
 - The data shows a general rise in earthquake activity worldwide in recent decades
 - In particular, the number of high intensity earthquakes in the U.S. have increased dramatically in the past three decades
 - States like Oklahoma and Arkansas have seen unexplainable rises in earthquake activity on an order of magnitude
 - These are not normal variations and they have scientists stumped
 - And in looking at the previous decades compared to the prior century, the rise is especially dramatic
 - The average number of high intensity earthquakes per decade in the prior century was 110 and remained consistent from decade to decade
 - But in the first decade of the 21st century the number increased to over 150
 - And in second decade of this century we've already recorded 165
 - This is a 43% increase over the steady pattern of the 1900s
 - So we have world wars, increasing famine and increasing earthquakes, just as Jesus told us would mark the end of the age
- But Luke gives us another sign of the end of the age, one that you may find particularly interesting in light of our current circumstances

Luke 21:10 Then He continued by saying to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom,

Luke 21:11 and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

- Luke reports that Jesus also mentioned plagues in various places
 - A plague is the spread of disease over a wide area, otherwise known as an epidemic or pandemic
 - Jesus said these would begin to happen in various places, meaning around the world
 - A worldwide spread of disease by itself isn't very meaningful, but in combination

with the other signs, it's very telling

- So world wars, famine, plagues and earthquakes are signs we're near the end of the age and all these have been increasing in the past century
 - They follow the pattern of birth pangs, getting worse and more frequent as time goes on
 - For those who know their Bible, these events are completely understandable and in fact were told to us in advance
 - But the unbelieving world has no recognition of these things, and in fact they would like to believe it's all temporary
- As these things kick off and disrupt our world, everyone longs to go back to the life we knew before
 - But the Christian who knows his or her Bible realizes this is the new normal and there's no going back
 - Like a mother preparing to give birth, once the birth pangs start there is no stopping until that child is delivered
 - So once the signs of the end of the age begin, there is no turning back and no stopping until the age ends and the new age comes
 - We are on a one-way trip to Jesus' return
- So for us who read these truths in Scripture and see the events in our world today, we should be encouraged and excited even
 - The pages of the Bible are coming alive right before our eyes and we know that the Kingdom age is right around the corner
 - We aren't wishing for death, neither for ourselves nor for the rest of the world
 - We want to live as long as the Lord allows and we certainly prefer to live in a peaceful, calm world
 - But sooner or later there will be a generation of believers who live at the end of the age, and that generation will know these turbulent times
 - And that generation will be privileged to experience things that earlier generations could only barely imagine
 - That generation will see the prophecies of the Bible coming true before their eyes
 - And that experience builds faith... if you understand what you see
 - Jesus says that the only way we enter the Kingdom age is after this age ends and someone will be there to see it end
 - And by all accounts, we are among the privileged to see these things and to live through them and it is exciting
 - It's not so much fun when your world feels like it's falling apart and you can't find toilet paper or go to church
 - But look around...our world is rocking and reeling and it's only just started...your Lord is preparing to return and time is short!

- So as the signs appear, take heart in the chaos
 - Because we know that we don't have much longer to wait and this is what we have been waiting for
- Remember last week I introduced this section of study by saying that study of prophecy in the Bible isn't divisive or futile
 - Some pastors tell us that we can't know the things revealed in the Bible about the end and therefore we shouldn't study them at all...
 - It's our privilege to have these truths revealed to us, and if we turn a blind eye to them we neglect this blessing of God
 - Moreover, suggesting that we should ignore the word of God because it just confuses or distracts us is close to blasphemy
 - Our Lord is not a God of confusion, and He gave us His word to bless us with knowledge that would help us serve Him better
 - In fact, the Bible itself encourages us to study prophecy, as evidenced by the fact that 40% of the Bible is prophecy
 - And a proper study of prophecy brings believers together in a shared understanding of the future Jesus has waiting for us
 - We will be united by our learning so that in unity, we all gain eyes for eternity
 - And now we're learning studying prophecy helps prepare us for the things that come upon the earth in the end
 - In his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul teaches an extended section on the events that will come about at the end
 - He talks about the Lord's return for the Church and the beginning of Tribulation, a time of great turmoil on the earth
 - And in the middle of that teaching, Paul inserts the following statement

1Th. 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- Think about that statement for a moment...Paul says we should comfort one another with his words concerning the end times
 - An in-depth understanding of the Lord's coming to claim the Church saints and of His Second Coming are a comfort
 - They are not divisive or troubling or confusing or frustrating or anything other than comforting
 - Look, if study of prophecy scares you, you're not doing it right because the Lord says He gave it to us as a comfort
- What's more, Paul says we are to comfort one another with prophecy teaching
 - We're supposed to share what we know about these end times events with other believers for the purpose of comforting them
 - The Lord promises it will comfort another believer when you tell them that plagues

like the coronavirus are appointed by God

- He brings them to warn His children that the end is approaching and with it the dawn of the Kingdom is right around the corner
- So how do these things comfort us? It's simple...they tell you that the chaos we see around us is not random nor is it a problem that needs to be fixed
 - Earthquakes, famines, and pandemics are not the problem...they are signs from God that the solution is coming
 - Look, there is only one solution that will fix the things that make this world such a hard place to accept
 - If you believe there is injustice in this world, you are right
 - If you believe there is hatred and lawlessness, you are right
 - And if you mourn the tragedies of disease and hunger and violence and natural disasters and wish they would end, God agrees
 - And the solution to all these things is Jesus present on earth ruling a Kingdom filled with His glory and free from sin and rebellion
 - Because the problem we're facing on earth is sin and it's everywhere
 - And it's only going to be dealt with when the Lord returns
 - So when you study your Bible and you realize that the events that rock your world are signs that the solution is about to appear, you get excited
 - It's like preparing for the last set of final exams before you graduate from high school or college
 - It's hard and it's no fun, but at the same time you're excited because you know the graduation is right around the corner
 - So it is with these signs of the end of the age...they tell you that Jesus is right around the corner
 - And we're among the privileged generations that get to see these things
- So comfort one another with these words...know the signs and share them with others
 - And continue with us in this study in the weeks to come...

- We're returning to our study of the Olivet Discourse this morning, beginning with our outline of the questions Jesus answers in this chapter
 - His disciples asked Jesus to explain His remarks that the temple would one day be destroyed
 - They also asked Him to explain how the end of the age would come and how He will enter into His Kingdom
 - In our study last week, Jesus began His response by telling the disciples what would *not* be signs of the end
 - Next, Jesus answered their third question on what would be the signs to announce the coming of the end of this age
 - As we learned last week, an age of history is a long period of time that has a beginning and an end
 - According to Daniel, our current age began in 605 BC when Babylon conquered Jerusalem
 - This age is continuing today and will last until Jesus' Kingdom arrives on earth
 - And as this present age nears its end, the Lord will give the world signs
 - Jesus says those signs include world wars, famines, plagues, and earthquakes
 - These otherwise ordinary events are recognizable as signs because they will occur in a manner similar to birth pangs
 - Over time they will increase in severity and frequency culminating in a cathartic birth of a new age at Jesus' return
 - This pattern of increasing signs started in the early 20th century and have been accelerating ever since
 - So consider yourself on notice...we're fast approaching the end of the age
- And now we move to Jesus' next answer, explaining the destruction of the temple and the signs of that destruction (Q1 & 1A)
 - But as we do, we find another quirk to the Olivet Discourse...Matthew doesn't record the answer to this question at all
 - In Matthew's gospel, the narrative jumps from explaining the end of the age to explaining His coming into His Kingdom
 - Matthew jumps from question #3 to question #2, but Luke does include the answer to question #1 (and 1A)
- We can see this difference clearly when we compare the two Gospels side by side
 - Before the two Gospels diverge, both Matthew and Luke are both tracking through Jesus' answer to question #3
 - Then there is a break, and Matthew and Luke go in different directions
- Matthew 24:8 continues with "then" while Luke backs up with "before all these things"
 - So Matthew is moving forward in time to Jesus' (fourth) answer to question #2 on the signs of Jesus' coming

- While Luke is moving back in time to cover Jesus' answer to question #1 and the temple destruction in the first century
- Yet when we compare these two passages, we also notice that the language of Matthew 24:9 and Luke 21:12 are extremely similar
 - Both describe persecution of the saints so it would be easy to assume both were describing similar moments in time
 - In reality, they are talking about two different periods of history, one in the past and one in our future
 - This similarity is simply a reflection of the fact that persecution is a common experience for all believers
 - Persecution happened shortly before the temple was destroyed in the first century and it will be present at the end of this age
 - Nevertheless, by the context of each passage we can see they are actually talking about different times
 - And if we continue down the page of Matthew 24, we'll see clearly that Jesus is talking about the circumstances of His return
 - And if you scan down Luke 21, you can clearly see that Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD
 - And later, at the very end of Luke 21, we find Jesus' answer to the question about His second coming also
 - So Luke gives us all the answers but Matthew skips the answer to question #1
 - So if we want to understand the full Olivet Discourse, we would have to study Matthew 24 and then jump to Luke 21
 - But we're studying Matthew's Gospel, so we'll stay in Matthew and just summarize the answer to #1, since it's history to us
- First, Jesus says that before the destruction of the temple, the church would see persecution especially of the church leaders
 - They would be dragged into synagogues and before governors of Rome, which we see recorded in the book of Acts
 - The persecution of the church in the first century was an early sign of the coming destruction of the temple
 - And then in Luke 21:20 we read that the city of Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies
 - This would be the key sign for the believers of the first century to know that the end of the temple was drawing near
 - That sign occurred in AD 66, when the Roman general Cestus Gallus was sent from Rome to put down a Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem
 - The Roman siege eventually resulted in the Roman army penetrating the city walls in AD 70 and destroying the temple
 - Josephus was a Jewish military commander captured by the Romans who later chronicled the Roman Jewish wars

- And during the fall of Jerusalem, he witnessed the destruction and wrote about it

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), [Titus] Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple...so all the rest of the wall [surrounding Jerusalem]...was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to...a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.

And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judaea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor had anyone who had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again. But though he [a foreigner] were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it.

- Josephus claimed that 1.1 million Jews were killed in the city
 - The Temple was burned to the ground and the city was utterly laid waste
 - Titus celebrated the great military victory by commissioning an arch which is still visible in Rome today
 - It shows the Romans' carrying away the implements of the Temple
- Those are the signs Jesus gave His disciples to know that the temple was about to be destroyed in the first century, and they played out exactly as predicted
 - And those who heard Jesus' word and believed them were able to save themselves from that destruction when the time came
 - Jesus said when you see armies surrounding the city, flee the city and don't return
 - Those who obeyed His word escaped the carnage but those who didn't understand or believe Jesus' words died in the attack
 - They were among the 1 million Jews who died that day
 - In this detail we find a third reason for why we study prophetic passages like this one in Matthew
 - In our first two weeks studying this passage, I've given two reasons why Christians should spend time in prophecy

- First, biblical prophecy is a study of our common future, and the more we study that future, the greater our Christian unity
 - Gaining a shared understanding of our shared future brings us a shared identity, which helps unite us for a shared mission
- Secondly, study of the end times will bring the believer comfort and hope, Paul told us last week
 - Our hope comes from understanding we are promised a glorious future in the events that end this age
 - Moreover, we also learn that believers will be spared from the wrath of God and the turmoil that comes upon the earth
 - Knowing these things, we can face the end of the age with confidence and anticipation and hope that great things await
- And now we have a third reason to study prophecy...because the Lord often shares future details with His children so we won't become collateral damage
 - In the Olivet Discourse Jesus gave His first century disciples a warning to flee Jerusalem as the Romans arrived
 - And those who listened and learned Jesus' word were ready to escape the city when the signs started
 - Because they knew prophecy, they were spared the Roman onslaught
 - But they had to have studied and understood Jesus' warning....Jesus didn't force every believer to know how and when to escape
 - Undoubtedly, some listened and benefited while others ignored prophecy and were caught up in the turmoil
 - Obeying Jesus' warning to flee Jerusalem certainly didn't change *whether* a believer went to Heaven when they died
 - But it sure did make a difference in *when* and *how* they went!
 - Similarly, we don't have to understand prophecies about Jesus' coming for the Church or how the last days play out in order to be saved
 - To be eternally saved, a person needs only to believe in Jesus crucified to pay for our sins and resurrected to give us eternal life
 - If you believe that, then when you die, you will be ushered into Jesus' presence by the angels to be with Him forever
 - So studying prophecy doesn't impact your salvation, but remaining ignorant of prophecy might bring you more trouble than necessary
 - Like those believers in the first century, we who ignore Jesus' words do so at the risk of being caught up in difficult events
 - And at the very least, if we study prophecy, we can make sense of and find hope in things that others are despairing over
- Speaking of which, let's continue with the next part of Matthew's discourse, which now goes to (the fourth) question answered

- Jesus gives us signs of His coming into the Kingdom, beginning with a brief overview of the circumstances right before His return

Matt. 24:9 “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

Matt. 24:10 “At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

Matt. 24:11 “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.

Matt. 24:12 “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.

Matt. 24:13 “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

Matt. 24:14 “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

- We need to see this description as an introduction to the signs that precede Jesus’ return and the appearing of the Kingdom
 - And notice, tribulation and persecution will once again be the backdrop for important prophetic events
 - Just as believers were persecuted in the 1st century before the temple’s destruction, so it will happen again before Jesus returns
 - Jesus says believers will be persecuted, martyred and hated by everyone on earth because of their association with Jesus
 - And I believe these signs will also follow a birth pangs pattern in that a new kind of persecution will emerge, greater in severity and frequency
 - Though before Christians were persecuted here & there, now & again...at the end it will be everywhere and all the time
 - It will be impossible to be a Christ-follower at the end of the age and not be hated, persecuted and threatened with death
 - Moreover, this intense persecution will cause some Christians to stumble
 - In v.10 Jesus says many believers will fall away, betraying one another and even hating one another
 - To understand what Jesus is talking about we need to look more closely at the Greek words being used in this verse
 - The most common Greek word in the Bible for “fall away” is *apostasia*, which means apostasy, a repudiation of a previous-held belief
 - But that’s not the word Matthew used here
 - Here Matthew uses the Greek word *skandalizo*, which literally means to stumble or to take offense
 - So a better way to translate v.10 would be “at that time many believers will stumble”
- Jesus is not talking about Christians turning away from their faith in Jesus but rather

Christians stumbling (i.e., sinning) in the face of intense persecution

- They will stumble into sin by betraying other Christians to save their own skin and even to the point of hating other Christians
 - And though that sounds extreme, it's not hard to imagine this scenario when you remember human nature
 - If we take any two people, even siblings or a married couple, and put them in a life or death situation, some will react badly
 - Some may even turn on one another in the way Jesus describes, and He says that's what happens at the end of the age
 - In Luke 18:8 Jesus tells us that when He returns, He will find very little faith on earth waiting to receive Him
- Of course, these bad behaviors aren't changing the eternal future of these believers
 - We are all saved by our faith alone, not because we live a sinless life
 - Therefore, no amount of sin in our lives can stop the grace of God (Hallelujah!)
 - Nevertheless, these believers will leave the earth with a witness that's been compromised by their fears and selfishness
- I wonder if these believers would have behaved differently had they understood the prophecy of Matthew 24?
 - Remember, Jesus is talking about something still in our future, so these words we read now will be available then
 - If the believers of that future day had studied and understood them, would they have stumbled in the ways Jesus describes?
- Would they have given into temptation to hate one another had they recognized the true reason for the persecution as Jesus explained it?
 - Would they have betrayed their fellow believers merely to save their own skin knowing Jesus' return was right around the corner?
 - Now you see the power of studying prophecy...it helps you serve Christ well under difficult circumstances
 - Not every believer will live through these difficult events of course, but some will
 - And the one who lives through them with an understanding of prophecy will respond in ways that preserve his or her witness
- Returning to the passage Jesus says His coming will be met by false prophets misleading many on the earth, and by lawlessness increasing everywhere
 - Once more, false prophets and periods of lawlessness come and go regularly in various places and at various times
 - But as we approach the end of the age, the birth pangs will increase such that false prophets will be everywhere
 - And lawlessness will become the new norm as society crumbles under the weight of hatred and pride and depravity

- As a result of the breakdown in society, Jesus adds in v.12 that people's love will grow cold
 - As innocuous as that comment may sound, I think it's one of the most frightening statements in all the New Testament
 - Because even during the best of times, humanity struggles to show love for one another
 - In fact, most of the time love is being drowned out by selfishness and pride, jealousy and strife, malice and hatred
- So as rare as love is today, imagine a day when love grows cold, meaning it goes away entirely
 - The Greek word translated "grow cold" in this verse describes a fire dying out and becoming cool to the touch
 - That's the image Jesus uses to describe the state of love in the world at the end of the age
- And that's truly terrifying...when you see how heartless our world can be now... imagine how cruel it becomes when there is no love at all?
 - How ruthless and destructive will people be? How frightening will life become? How could anyone feel peace or safety?
 - I must assume that the hopelessness produced by this change will be part of God's plan to prepare hearts for Jesus' return
- I find confirmation of this in v.14 when Jesus says the Gospel will be preached to the whole world in that time and will reach all nations as a testimony
 - Take note of that last phrase...it will be spoken as a testimony which means it is not necessarily intended to save the whole world
 - It will reach the whole world and some will be saved by it, but many more will not, and to them also it will be a testimony
 - Remember, sometimes a testimony is given to persuade but other times it's given to convict
 - Then in v.13 Jesus adds that the one who endures to the end of the age will be saved, which is a curious statement
 - Because we know enduring difficult times is not the means of personal salvation
 - Yet at the point of Jesus' return, enduring to the end will have impact on the opportunity for a certain group to be saved
 - As we studied in our Revelation class, Daniel teaches that our age ends with a seven-year period called the Tribulation
 - Those seven years culminate with Jesus' Second Coming, and during Tribulation the things Jesus said here all come true
 - During Tribulation, the book of Revelation describes a great persecution of believers
 - And it foretells of great lawlessness and the absence of love and of powerful

- false prophets deceiving the world
- And during this time, Revelation says the Gospel goes out into all the nations as a last opportunity to believe and be saved
- Then there comes a moment at the very end of the seven years when the Bible says the Lord pours out His Spirit on all Jews on earth
 - According to Zechariah, the Spirit will bring these Jews to faith leading them to cry out for Jesus as He returns to them
 - That's the event Jesus is referring to here...the moment when all Israel is saved, specifically those Jews who endure to the end
- What v.13 tells us is that these signs of Jesus' impending return all take place during this coming period of human history called Tribulation
 - In other words, Tribulation is itself the sign that Jesus is about to return, because Tribulation is the final seven years before His Second Coming
 - They will all occur in a relatively brief period of history that ends the age
 - And for those who live during this period of history, all these signs will be announcing that the Lord's return is soon to follow
 - So by way of contrast, the signs that announce the end of the age take place over centuries and are witnessed by many generations
 - But the signs of Jesus coming will occur only during a short period of seven years to be witnessed by those of that time
 - And as the world nears the end of those seven years, the signs will become particularly intense
 - Next week we study the rest of Jesus' answer to this question, which will take us to v.35
 - And in that final section, Jesus gives tremendous detail of what the world of Tribulation will see to know He is about to return
 - Meanwhile, I'm sure some of you have been wondering whether these things will impact you personally or perhaps a family member?
 - You may be wondering will future loved ones have to experience the difficult times Jesus says are coming before He returns?
 - And the answer is, it depends...
- First, we know the signs that announce the end of the age are for everyone on earth, and in fact those signs are already happening
 - We've already seen world wars and we're seeing increasing earthquakes and famines and plagues, and that's continuing
 - And some believers will be caught up in these things, and truly there is no way to escape them
 - They are simply part of life at the end of the age, and we shouldn't worry about them
 - The Lord is in control, and the day of our death is already appointed to us,

according to Scripture

- So in the meantime, make every day count and in the words of Paul, to live is Christ and to die is gain
- Secondly, there are some signs that will only come upon those who have not believed in Jesus Christ beforehand
 - The truly scary signs that Jesus said will announce His return are reserved for those who live through the Tribulation
 - We're going to learn later in this chapter that the Lord has a special plan for His Church to protect us from those signs
 - Of how He will take the Church out of the way prior to the onset of those signs in Tribulation
- Paul reassured the church of this in several places including in 1 Thessalonians:

1Th. 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, **1Th. 1:10** and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

- Paul says the Church waits for the Lord to come from Heaven and rescue us from the wrath of God to come on the earth
- And now we have a better understanding for why this is God's plan: because Tribulation is a sign to the world of Jesus' return
- If the events of Tribulation are signs to the earth that Jesus' return is imminent, then it makes sense that the Church wouldn't need to experience these signs
 - Because when Jesus returns to the earth, the Bible says we will be returning with Him
 - Revelation 19 describes the moment of Christ's Second Coming, and notice who joins Jesus at His return

Rev. 19:7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

Rev. 19:8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Rev. 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

Rev. 19:12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

Rev. 19:13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

Rev. 19:14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

- When Jesus returns, He will be accompanied by His Bride, the Church saints, who by that time will have been collected into Heaven
 - Meanwhile, the Lord gives the world signs to know of His Son's return, but those signs clearly aren't meant for the Church
 - We won't need to see the signs of Jesus' Second Coming...we participate in His Second Coming!
- Here again, why do we study the end times prophecies of the Bible? Because they help us prepare for what's coming
 - Knowing that wars and earthquakes and famines and pandemics are signs of the end of the age, we prepare our hearts and minds
 - We will not lose our heads nor live in fear that compromises our witness or erodes our trust in God
- Likewise, knowing that the signs of Jesus' Second Coming are reserved for Tribulation, we can live in peace knowing we aren't appointed to wrath
 - Moreover, we should also feel great urgency in speaking to our unbelieving friends, neighbors, family members and strangers about Jesus
 - Because if you know that the end of the age is near, then you also know that the Tribulation is coming soon
 - And if you understand what life in Tribulation will be like, then you know why it will be a horrible thing for anyone to be there
- So by your study of prophecy, you have every reason to make Kingdom work your priority
 - We are all on notice...the signs are all here...we don't know how much longer they will last but that doesn't matter
 - We know enough to be faithful in our mission to be ambassadors for Christ
 - Don't become worried or fearful by the world's descent into turmoil...Jesus said it was going to happen
 - Neither should we make our goal fixing this fallen world...but rather our goal is rescuing as many people as possible out of it
 - Next week we will finish Jesus' answer to the signs of His Second Coming before moving into the most important part of this discourse
 - The part that follows describes our future apart from these events, and that's a discussion you won't want to miss
 - Meanwhile, look up for your Lord's return is near

- As we continue our study of Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse, we've reached a particularly fascinating and challenging passage today
 - Let's begin by remembering our outline based on the questions Jesus was asked by His disciples
 - First, Jesus' disciples asked Him to explain three things: His prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem
 - Then Jesus explained how the Romans would destroy the temple in a future day
 - And as we learned, history played out exactly as Jesus said it would
 - Secondly, what signs would God send to announce the end of the age was drawing near
 - And Jesus told us to expect increasing earthquakes, famines, plagues and world wars
 - And we saw clear evidence that these signs have already begun to happen, meaning the end of our age is upon us
 - And thirdly, they asked Jesus what would be the signs to the world that Jesus was entering into His Kingdom
 - This answer is by far the longest one of the group, so last week we only studied the first part of Jesus' response
 - In vs.9-14 Jesus gave us six signs that will precede His coming into His kingdom
 - The signs included false prophets deceiving the world, lawlessness, love growing cold, and others
 - We learned last week that these signs were all features of a unique seven-year period the Bible calls Tribulation
 - The book of Daniel tells us that the seven years of Tribulation are the final years of this age immediately prior to Jesus' return
 - So only those who live during those final seven years of Tribulation will experience the signs of Jesus' coming
 - But the signs that announce the end of the age start centuries before the end and build over time
 - And we've already begun to see the signs that announce the end of the age
 - So the signs of the end of the age are for everyone to witness, and the signs of Jesus' coming will be for those of Tribulation to see
- And as we ended last week, I told you the Church will not witness the signs of Jesus' Second Coming because we accompany Jesus at His return
 - In fact, we don't need to witness signs announcing an event that we take part in personally
 - There are other clues in this text telling us that the Church is not intended to witness the signs of Jesus' return
 - For example, earlier Jesus told us many would come in His name saying they are the Christ, yet that won't mean the end is near

- But then later in v.11 Jesus said that one of the signs of His coming would be false prophets deceiving many
 - How can false prophets not be a sign but at the same time it will be a sign?
 - This isn't a contradiction...Jesus is saying that false prophets aren't a sign to the Church but they will be a sign to the world
- For as long as the Church is on earth, false prophets will exist because the enemy is always seeking to stumble believers with false teaching
 - But once the Church is no longer on earth, the enemy will begin targeting the unbelieving world with these false prophets
 - With the Church out of the way, the enemy will be free to deceive the world, and that worldwide deception will be a sign
 - So what was not a sign while the Church was present will become a sign after the Church has departed
 - Later in this chapter we will see specifically how and why the church is not present to witness signs of Jesus' return
- But for now we move ahead with the rest of the signs of Jesus' return, and these signs become increasingly intense as Tribulation moves toward its end

Matt. 24:15 “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

Matt. 24:16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

Matt. 24:17 “Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

Matt. 24:18 “Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

Matt. 24:19 “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

Matt. 24:20 “But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

Matt. 24:21 “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

Matt. 24:22 “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Matt. 24:23 “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him.

Matt. 24:24 “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

Matt. 24:25 “Behold, I have told you in advance.

Matt. 24:26 “So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.

- As we dive into this passage, remember that Jesus is answering Question #2 (but the

fourth one addressed): what are the signs of His coming into His Kingdom

- And all these signs occur during the seven-year Tribulation, and we'll see further proof of that here starting in v.15
 - Jesus gives us an important and specific sign of the abomination of desolation written about by Daniel the prophet
 - We know from Daniel that this moment takes place in the very middle of the seven years of Tribulation
- Daniel describes it cryptically this way:

Dan. 9:27 “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

- Daniel 9:27 tells us about this important moment during the seven year Tribulation called the abomination
 - Daniel tells us this event happens in the middle of a “week” which refers to the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation
 - A week is the Hebrew way of saying a seven-year period
 - In the middle of that seven-year period, Daniel says a man will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering
- Sacrifices and grain offerings only happen in a Jewish temple, so Daniel is describing an event in a future Jewish temple
 - So a man will put an end to the temple's operation by causing an abomination that makes the temple desolate and unusable
 - Daniel doesn't tell us what the man's desecrating act will be, but the prophet says this abomination only remains for a while
 - He says the one who desecrated the temple will himself be destroyed, and then the abomination he committed will end too
- Back to Matthew, Jesus says when this man desecrates the temple, it will be a major sign to those on earth that Jesus' coming is fast approaching
 - Since this event happens in the middle of the seven years, it means Jesus' return is only 3.5 years after this event
- But more than that, Jesus says this event will be a turning point in those seven years, leading to a great upheaval unlike anything before it
 - In v.16 Jesus says this event should be a trigger for all who know Jesus to leave the city immediately
 - In fact, their flight must be so quick that it requires a complete abandonment of everything they value

- In vs.17-20 Jesus describes an escape that is so urgent that there won't be time enough to claim your coat from the closet
- Wherever a person is standing at the instant the temple is desecrated, he or she must turn and run to the mountains
- And to emphasize the dire nature of that moment, Jesus says pregnant and nursing women will be especially handicapped
 - When a woman is in the later stages of pregnancy or is caring for an infant, she is weighed down and less mobile
 - Apparently, this escape is so urgent that carrying the added weight of an infant may be the difference between life and death
 - Likewise, escaping in winter or on a Sabbath when facilities and transportation services are closed can make this journey harder
- So Jesus tells those who must endure that day to pray for God to time these events outside winter and not on a Sabbath
 - The reference to a Sabbath is an important clue, because it tells us that the believers of this future day may be largely Jewish
 - Because only Jews would pay attention to the Sabbath day
 - So Jesus is describing an escaping of Jewish believers as if running from a tsunami or a landslide...every second counts
- Why will this desolation in the Jewish temple prompt such panic among believers?
 - Because what follows for mankind on earth is a terrifying mix of God's judgment and intense persecution
 - Jesus says in v.21 that the abomination will trigger a great tribulation such as has never been seen on earth before or after
 - The greatest wrath and destruction that God could possibly pour out on earth will be poured out in this final 3.5 years
 - And on top of that, the enemy of God will become especially active in persecuting believers on earth during this time
 - In fact, Jesus says in v.22 that had the Lord not set a time limit for this period of history, it would have meant total annihilation of mankind
 - We know Tribulation is only seven years, and Jesus says the great tribulation will be limited to the final 3.5 years of that time
 - And the destruction in that short time will be so great that had these time limits not existed, all life on earth would end
 - We know from Revelation that these judgments result in the loss of all fresh water on earth and of all vegetation, etc.
 - Obviously, life on earth couldn't last long without water
 - That's how great and terrible this time of tribulation will be, and this time of terror will be a sign of Jesus' impending return
 - Then Jesus says in v.24 that false Christs and false prophets will rise up to give the

people hope

- Because the world is reeling from disaster and intense persecution, it will have tremendous interest in a savior
- So Satan will empower false prophets with supernatural power to mislead these desperate people on earth
- In fact, Jesus says that the enemy will have hopes to mislead even the elect, those who have come to true faith in Jesus
- But then Jesus speaks to the believers of that future day saying don't believe the reports of these false prophets speaking of My return
 - When they tell you I'm in the wilderness or inside inner rooms (meaning in the temple holy place), don't believe these reports
 - They will be lies, and the believer can avoid being deceived if he or she listens to the word of God given here
 - So the calamities of Tribulation will be a sign of Jesus' return, but Jesus does not rely on false prophets to announce the moment
- I love this passage of the Bible for the way it reinforces the power of God to work through His word, and you see that power on display here
 - Jesus spoke these words 2,000 years ago to a handful of men sitting on a hillside in Israel
 - He warned them about events in the distant future telling them them not to be deceived
 - But these events did not come to pass in the lifetime of these men, and in fact they still haven't come to pass
 - Moreover, it's likely these men didn't even understand the warnings they were being given by Jesus
 - And as far as we know, no one present at this moment with Jesus was even taking notes
 - And yet Jesus issued His warnings fully confident that in a future day, His followers would have these words available and read them
 - In fact, Jesus was so confident in the staying power of His word that He even refers to Daniel, a book written 600 years earlier
 - So if you question the accuracy of the word of God or the Lord's ability to preserve it through history, consider Jesus' perspective
 - Jesus clearly believed that what He spoke on that day on that hillside would be remembered, recorded, preserved and shared
 - And He expected that the prior works of Scripture like Daniel would also be preserved and shared over thousands of years
 - And that when the day came for these events to transpire, the word of God would be available to those who needed it
 - And then as a future generation experiences the trials of Tribulation and turns to the word of God for counsel, they will find these instructions

- Notice in v.15 Jesus adds a quick parenthetical comment saying let the reader understand
 - We could translate that phrase “reader understand” as if Jesus were commanding His followers to do their homework
- And later in v.25 Jesus tells those future disciples “behold, I’ve told you in advance”
 - In other words, Jesus is saying don’t say I didn’t tell you...all you have to do is read my words and you will have what you need
 - Jesus knew His word would be preserved and available to those who needed it in that day to come
 - And that’s not just true of distant prophecy...that’s true for everything found in the Bible
- So often as a pastor I minister to believers confronted with difficult challenges in their lives, usually as a result of sinful choices they made or others made
 - These challenges are the painful lessons in life that we all know and experience from time to time because of sin
 - None of us live perfect lives, so we all suffer from time to time as a result of the decisions we make or others make
 - And when these difficulties happen, we reach out for help and advice, and that’s where a pastor often gets called in
 - And in the course of giving the person counsel, I will take them to the Scriptures to show them what the Lord has to say
 - And so often, the answer we find in the Bible is some warning or exhortation that was ignored in the beginning
 - The Bible is saying don’t say I didn’t warn you, but we often ignore the warnings until it’s too late
 - That’s the key to understanding and obeying the word of God...it’s not a book of solutions for those who get into trouble
 - It’s a manual for living designed to lead us away from trouble
 - We are supposed to study it and obey it so that it goes well with us

Deut. 4:40 “So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”

- But if someone is to obey the word of God, including heeding the signs Jesus gives here, we must be students of Scripture...of all Scripture
 - In this case, we must study the book of Daniel, since that’s where the abomination is described and the timeline is given
 - And then we bring that understanding to Jesus’ words here so we may know and

obey the signs Jesus gives

- As Jesus says, reader understand...do your homework, pay close attention to the Scriptures for your own sake
 - And that's true for New Testament epistles where Paul or Peter says do this or don't do that, etc...
 - It's also true for prophecies in both the Old and New Testament, even for those who may not live through the events
 - If nothing else, you may be part of the chain of custody that the Lord uses to deliver His word to the next generation of believers
- In this we find a fourth reason to study prophecy...to become a better Bible student and more obedient Christian
 - As we've studied this passage, we've come upon reasons why the study of prophecy is important
 - We learned that the study of prophecy helps knit the body of Christ together in a common understanding of our shared future
 - Secondly, it brings us hope and comfort in the midst of a chaotic, evil world by focusing our attention on our future eternal glory
 - Thirdly, it prepares for coming difficulties so we respond in the right way, either to escape or face them with our witness intact
 - And now, fourthly, we study prophecy because it's part of the Bible, and we are called to understand everything in the Bible
 - And if you are going to fully understand and obey what's in the Bible, you must study all of the Bible
 - And self-evidently, Jesus expects His disciples to read, understand and pass on what He gave us as part of our mission
 - But if we skip large sections of God's word because someone told us "you don't need to know prophecy....it's a distraction," we are wrong
 - We are proving ourselves to be poor students of Scripture, and therefore we are poor disciples of Jesus
 - We cannot obey what we do not understand, and we cannot teach what we ourselves have not studied
 - That's what discipleship is all about...reading and heeding, knowing and going, just as Jesus told us to do:

**Matt. 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
 Matt. 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

- We have been directly called by our Lord to teach future disciples to observe all that

Jesus commanded His first disciples

- And included in the things Jesus commanded us to know and teach are instructions like this one...prophecies of the very end
- And when we devote ourselves to understanding prophecy, our obedience brings its own reward apart from whatever we might learn
 - There is a specific blessing promised to those who read and heed the book of Revelation, for example

Rev. 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

- And there is a general blessing to those who bring the word of God to others, especially the good news of Jesus' arrival

Is. 52:7 How lovely on the mountains

Are the feet of him who brings good news,

Who announces peace

And brings good news of happiness,

Who announces salvation,

And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

- So now, let's do that...let's move ahead in understanding the rest of Jesus' (fourth) answer, to the (second) question on signs of His Second Coming

Matt. 24:29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Matt. 24:30 "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

Matt. 24:31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

- We're still looking at signs of Jesus' coming, and as we've already learned, these signs take place entirely within the seven years of Tribulation on earth
 - So far Jesus has given signs that happen in the earliest period of Tribulation like lawlessness and love growing cold
 - Then He moved to the events at the midpoint of Tribulation like the abomination in the temple and the great judgments of God
 - And now Jesus moves to the very end of the seven years, to the very last days

when Jesus' return is only hours away

- And at that time, the signs will become undeniable and unescapable, as the very heavens themselves are made to disappear
 - In v.29 Jesus says that the sun will stop shining, and of course as a result the moon will also go dark
 - Beyond our solar system, the stars in the universe will “fall” meaning they will no longer be visible either
- Obviously, the sun provides us daylight, but at night we keep our world lit with technology
 - Our houses remain lit and our streets and businesses are illuminated, so we tend to take light for granted
 - But we know that after seven years of disaster after disaster, the world will no longer be industrialized
 - There will be no electrical grid or infrastructure...we will have been reduced to the most rudimentary living
 - The book of Revelation and elsewhere described men living in caves and under rocks by this time
- So the only light the world has at the end of Tribulation is the light produced by the sun in the day and the moon and stars by night
 - But then there comes a moment when all light sources cease, and the world will be plunged into utter and complete darkness
 - This is a darkness that few of us have ever known unless you have gone into an underground cave or sealed room
 - When you are in a cave or closet, you expect total darkness, but when you are standing outside, it's a different experience
- Then out of this intense darkness, the world receives one final sign of Jesus' coming as a bright sign appears in the sky
 - The Lord turned off all the lights in the Universe so that His light would be the only thing visible
 - And out of this intense darkness, the world witnesses the return of Jesus and the Church and the angels following Him
 - But notice Jesus says that His arrival leads the tribes of the earth to mourn as they see Jesus coming in power and glory
 - Jesus uses the odd term “tribes of the earth” to contrast with the tribes of Israel
 - The tribes of Israel will not be mourning this moment, because they will be celebrating their Lord's return
 - As we learned earlier, the Jew who endures to the end of Tribulation will be saved, Jesus said
 - But the tribes of the earth, meaning all unbelieving Gentiles, will not be celebrating because the Lord's return brings their judgment

- We will study that judgment more later in this discourse
- But for now we only need to note that Jesus' return brings different things to different groups of people
- To Jews, the Lord brings faith and redemption, and along with the believing Gentiles, He delivers the promised Kingdom
- But to the unbelieving Gentiles on earth, the Lord brings judgment
- And then as a final sign to those waiting for Jesus on earth, the Lord says there will be a great gathering accomplished by angels
 - The Lord will send angels to gather the elect, all Jews wherever they may be left in that day, and assemble them in Jerusalem
 - This is necessary because the Old Testament promises that all Jews will be assembled in the Promised Land for the Kingdom
 - And the Old Testament also promises Israel that at the moment of this gathering for the Kingdom, a great trumpet will be blown

Is. 27:12 In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel.

Is. 27:13 It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

- Notice Isaiah says the Lord will be engaged in a time of great threshing, which is a metaphor for the judgment of tribulation
 - And at that time, the Lord will gather Israel from where they may be scattered to the holy mountain in Jerusalem
 - And as that gathering takes place, a great trumpet will be blown, and that's the trumpet Jesus is describing in v.31 of Matthew
- So putting all of this together, in answer to the question what are the signs of Jesus coming, we have this list:
 - The onset of Tribulation will be the overarching sign of Jesus' impending return
 - Specifically, there will be persecution of believers leading some to stumble and hate one another
 - There will be lawlessness, false prophets, a lack of love and yet a worldwide evangelistic effort
- Then in the middle of the seven years, a man desecrates the Jewish temple, leading to intense supernatural judgments and even greater persecution
 - Believers will flee to the mountains as the world undergoes upheaval
 - False prophets led by Satan will deceive the world and even attempt to deceive

believers into following the wrong Christ

- Finally, at the end of the seven years, the heavens fall away, all light is gone and the world witnesses a bright light in the sky as Jesus returns
 - The elect will be assembled by angels and a great trumpet will sound to announce the arrival of Messiah and His Kingdom
 - And the unsaved on earth will be mourning their fate as they witness Jesus coming in glory
 - These are signs to the world that Jesus is coming, and as you reflect on that list, one thing becomes clear
 - There will be nothing subtle about the signs of Jesus' return...
 - It's almost comical to call these events signs, because they will be so utterly obvious to everyone
 - It's like calling labor pains a sign to a woman that she is pregnant
 - The point is that the Lord does not intend for anyone to miss His Son's coming into His Kingdom
 - Many missed His first coming in the day it happened, and in the centuries that have followed many more have ignored the news
 - Today, many are living as if there is no God and there will be no judgment despite the evidence to the contrary in the word of God
 - And for now, the Lord is content to allow that ignorance and defiance to continue
 - But a day is coming – and the signs tell us that day is drawing close – when every knee will bow and every tongue confess
 - It will not be possible to ignore the signs of Jesus' Second Coming or to deny the event
 - You will either be with Jesus at His coming or you will mourn His arrival as you witnesses it from earth
 - If you place your faith in Jesus Christ now, while the window of opportunity is still available, then you can be part of His return
 - But if you reject Him now, you will see Him face to face one day, and in that day the Bible says you will mourn His appearing
 - I urge you not to remain defiant in the face of the Bible's testimony and not to ignore the signs we have already seen
 - Join us in believing in the testimony of the Scriptures by placing faith in Jesus, trusting in His finished work on the cross to pay for your sins
- With that we have completed our study of Jesus' answers to all the questions He was asked by His disciples on the Mt. of Olives
 - But there was one more important event that takes place as part of the events that end the age which Jesus must explain to these men
 - The disciples never asked Jesus to explain this event, because none of them had

ever heard of it before

- This moment is pictured in numerous places in the Old Testament but it is never discussed plainly
- The disciples had no idea it was part of God's plan, yet as Jesus will show, it is the most important thing every believer must know
- I've said several times that we who believe will not be present to see the events Jesus describes at the end of the age
 - And next week Jesus will explain why that is so, as He tells His disciples about a great mystery God has planned for His Church

- Today we will move into the climactic section of the Olivet Discourse and to a topic that is all about having eyes for eternity
 - Before we get into that, let's regain our bearings...we're in the middle of a discourse that Jesus delivered to His men 36 hours before He died
 - He's seated on the Mt. Of Olives, which is why we call this teaching the Olivet Discourse
 - And He's explaining how the future events of the end times will play out in response to questions asked by His disciples
 - Altogether, Jesus explained four things:
 - When will the temple destruction take place and what will be signs of its coming destruction?
 - What are the signs of Jesus' coming?
 - What are signs of the end of the age?
 - And what events should not be considered signs of anything?
 - The disciples asked their questions in a somewhat random order, so Jesus reordered His answers in a chronological sequence
 - First, what are not signs because they happen all the time, then secondly, what are the signs of the end of the age
 - The signs of the end of the age happen over centuries so they will be our first indications that the end is near
 - Next, Jesus gives the signs of His Second Coming which happens at the very end of the age after the seven-year Tribulation
 - Then Luke inserted a sidebar about the Temple destruction between the signs of the end of the age and Jesus' return
- Last week we completed Jesus' final answer of the signs of His return, but there was some unfinished business we must cover before moving to the next topic
 - Jesus gives us a footnote for all His answers...one, final overarching sign that starts and finishes the entire sequence of end times events

Matt. 24:32 “Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;

Matt. 24:33 so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

Matt. 24:34 “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Matt. 24:35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

- Throughout this discourse, Jesus has been giving signs that announce certain events like the end of the age or His return
 - But at the very end He sums up everything with one major sign that will tell us when

the end times are set to begin

- And He also adds a promise to assure us that these events will be completed as promised
- He starts with a parable of a fig tree coming out of its dormant phase at the end of winter, when it appears dead because it has no leaves
 - It is not truly dead, of course, but to our eye it appears as good as dead – until the leaves emerge in Spring
 - And when the leaves show up, we know that means summer is right around the corner and fruit will be found on it soon
- In that way, the leaves of a fig tree could be considered a clock of sorts
 - Even if you had no idea what month it was, you could tell summer was near by watching a fig tree blossom
 - Jesus chose to use a fig tree for this parable because a fig tree is a classic representation of Israel in the Bible
- So Jesus is saying Israel will serve as God's clock to tell us when the end times are here
 - For a time Israel will appear lifeless, because the nation will be outside its land for centuries and many will conclude it is dead
 - But when Israel comes back to life, so to speak, then we can know that the end times are approaching
 - In effect, Israel's return as a nation on the world stage is the first sign that the end has come
 - And I'm not just talking about the formation of the modern state of Israel in 1948
 - The establishment of the nation came about as a result of years of work by the Zionist Congress to establish the nation
 - The Zionist movement started at the end of the 19th Century, and continued through the first half of the 20th Century
 - The 1948 declaration of independence merely formalized what had been already true for decades: Israel was back from the dead
 - And in this parable, Jesus connects the nation of Israel's return to life with end time events by a unique promise found in v.34
 - He says that this generation will not pass away until "all these things" take place
 - This promise has been a source of considerable confusion and misinterpretation in the Church
 - A common interpretation for a time said that once Israel became a nation, the end times would play out within a generation
 - But it's been over 100 years since Zionism began and 80 years since Israel became a nation, which is far too long
 - A second interpretation says Jesus was speaking of the generation alive in Tribulation, that this generation will not die out before the end

- But that's a pointless statement, since Daniel already told us Tribulation is seven years, far less than a generation
- There would be no reason for Jesus to give us this promise if He were merely repeating Daniel's timeline
- There are two keys to properly interpreting Jesus' promise
 - First, Jesus said "all" the things He described would come to pass while this "generation" existed, not just some of the things He described
 - So from the start of the Zionist movement in the late 1800s through the world wars and other signs of the 1900s & 2000s...
 - To the very end of Tribulation at Jesus' return...ALL these things are the signs that tells us the end is upon us
 - And all these things must take place without this generation passing away
 - Clearly, Jesus isn't referring to a single human generation, for no human generation lasts that long
 - Which leads us to the second key to interpreting Jesus' words: we notice that Jesus said "this generation" not merely "a generation"
 - Jesus was referring to something specific, something He had already mentioned: the fig tree
 - The fig tree represents what Jesus means by "generation" and we understand the meaning by looking at the Greek word in v.34
 - They word can also be translated as family, kind or tribe, so by the context, that's how we should interpret the word
 - Jesus was speaking of the entire nation as a new generation of Israel, not merely one birth generation
 - We know this by the context because of the parable of the fig tree, which we know represents Israel re-emerging on the world scene
 - So Jesus said "this" generation, meaning "this nation of Israel," won't pass away until all these things come to pass
 - When we see the nation of Israel returning to life, a new generation of Jews living in the land, then know the end is near
- That's the promise Jesus is making here...Israel is God's clock telling us that the end times events have started
 - And once that clock has started, there is nothing in the universe that can stop the events that follow
 - Jesus adds that Heavens and Earth shall pass away as a result of the end times events, but Jesus' word will not pass away
 - You can be sure that when you see Israel return, everything else Jesus said was coming will in fact arrive
 - So think about that...the seemingly unshakable earth and the vast, immeasurable universe surrounding us are here today, gone tomorrow

- Yet the simple words printed on the page in front of you are more permanent, more certain than anything in Creation
 - Remember that when you're gazing at a huge mountain or across an immense ocean or staring up at the countless stars
- If those things leave us in awe now, imagine how we would feel watching them disappear in a blink of an eye
 - That's how the world will experience the judgments to come
 - They will find everything they trusted in suddenly gone
 - Then out of darkness Jesus, the Word of God, will appear and remain forever
- Never forget what is worthy of your dependence and trust, and what is not
 - In times when your world is shaken or your peace is broken, when you feel like you're losing control, that's a great time to remember v.35
 - The things of this world that we often trust in for security or stability only have the appearance of certainty
 - A stable job or a comfortable house or good health or a faithful spouse or a secure retirement plan or even a civil society...
 - All these things appear certain and sure...until they aren't, and then we wonder where can we find security in this world?
 - And the answer we find in the Bible is that security or certainty is never found in the world because the world is passing away
 - And when you see the signs that tell you the end of the age is upon us, that's the worst possible time to seek your security here
 - As James scolded the church:

James 5:1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

James 5:2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.

James 5:3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

- James says it is a sign of biblical ignorance when we live in ways that witness to a trust in this world rather than a trust in God's word
 - And in Matthew Jesus has told us to look for signs, to recognize them, and when you see them, to know He is near, at the door
 - The first and foremost sign is to know that when Israel returns, the end is coming – and that day has already come
 - So we can be sure that this world will pass away before all is said and done, and Jesus' words will be fulfilled, every last one
- This truth brings us a fifth, and perhaps the most important, reason we study prophecy:

because it changes the way we live and serve Jesus

- When I was growing up, my parents would leave us at home in the evenings sometimes while they went out for dinner
 - And like most parents, they would issue instructions and perhaps warnings to us before they left
 - Do your homework, clean the kitchen, don't fight, etc.
 - But immediately after they were gone, we would ignore their instructions and do what we pleased more or less
- But as the night progressed, our thoughts would turn to the inevitable, knowing we didn't want to be caught by surprise when they returned
 - So as the time passed, we eventually did our chores and our homework so we would be ready for their return
 - But sometimes they would surprise us with an early return, and the result wasn't so happy
 - If only we had a warning to know they were near, we would have been ready sooner
- In a sense that's what study of prophecy should do for all who endeavor to learn it properly...it motivates us to be ready
 - The world has already seen sign after sign announcing that the end of the age is upon us
 - But even if you don't know prophecy, you wouldn't know that word wars or earthquakes or famines or plagues were signs
 - But Jesus says you only need to know one sign, really, because this one sign is enough to tell you that the end is near
 - As you learned today, Israel emerging on the world stage again is the primary sign to know the end of the age began ticking
- So we are like children put on notice that our Father is coming back soon, and we need to think about how that moment will go
 - In my experience, those who study prophecy carefully and think about it properly will be better prepared to live obediently
 - It's the same feeling you get when you look at the kitchen clock as a child and you realize your parents are due home any minute
 - You race to finish cleaning the kitchen or to jump into bed or to do whatever you know they expected of you
 - Of course, you should have done those things earlier, but still it's better to have done it late than to have never done it at all
 - And because you don't want to be found lacking when they arrive – and because you can read a clock – you get ready
 - And that's another reason we study prophecy: because it leads to a sense of urgency and to a fear of the Lord

- Which has its ultimately good purpose in causing us to obey Christ more fervently and more consistently
 - And it's all made possible because you learn how to read the "clock" (i.e., the signs) that Christ gives us in prophecy
- We will come back to this idea of being ready later in our study of this discourse, because Jesus comes back too
 - But with that we reach the end of all the signs Jesus gives in this discourse
 - But last week in our study of the signs of Jesus' return, I skipped two verses in the text
 - I didn't read vs.27-28, and today we will cover them as a transition into the next section of the discourse and a new topic

Matt. 24:27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matt. 24:28 "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

- In describing His return to earth, Jesus describes His bright appearance in an otherwise pitch black universe as like lightning
 - Lightning is fiercely bright, intense and quick...in fact, we might say it is *lightning fast*
 - So Jesus' return will not be like the slow landing of a helicopter settling down on a landing pad
 - But Jesus will flash across the sky like lightning
- And notice He comes in a certain direction, from east to west, reflecting Jesus' movements at His Second Coming
 - We learned in our Revelation study that Jesus' first appearing on earth will be at a place called Botzrah in Southern Jordan
 - Botzrah is southeast of Jerusalem, so as Jesus comes to earth, He moves from east to west, like lightning
 - And as He moves, He leaves behind corpses, because as Jesus returns He's simultaneously saving some while destroying others
- And like all the signs in this discourse, Jesus is describing the way He will appear from an earthly perspective
 - And the Bible says that there will be three principle groups involved in witnessing the Return of Christ
 - And they will experience His return in different ways
 - First, there will be those on earth who have believed in Jesus and are joyful at His return, because He has come to save them
 - Secondly, there will be unbelievers on earth who view Jesus' return as an unmitigated disaster, and they will mourn

- Paul describes these two groups and their respective responses in a single passage in 2 Thessalonians

2Th. 1:6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

2Th. 1:7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

2Th. 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2Th. 1:9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

2Th. 1:10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed.

- Notice in v.7 Paul says that when the Lord is revealed from heaven, He will come delivering retribution for those who are unsaved
 - Paul calls them those who do not know God nor obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus
 - They have persecuted believers throughout history, and now they will see the tables turned on them
 - They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord, Paul says
- Back in Matthew 24, Jesus addresses the fate of this group in v.28 where He mentions vultures gathering for the corpses
 - God calls the birds of earth to gather and eat the bodies of all those killed at Christ's return, which will be a great number
 - In Revelation 19 we're given the details

Rev. 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God,

Rev. 19:18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

- But also on the day Jesus comes in glory, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:10 that Jesus will be marveled at by believers waiting for Him on earth
 - Those who have believed the testimony of the Gospel, both Jew and Gentile, will watch in amazement as the Lord comes in glory
 - Back in Matthew 24:31 we read how angels will gather the elect from the corners of the earth bringing them to Jerusalem

- This great assembling of believers must take place so that all are present at the inauguration of the Kingdom
- So while the unbelievers are being made corpses and left for birds, the believers are being escorted by angels to Jerusalem
- But there is a third group involved in the return of Christ, and this third group doesn't experience any of these signs on earth
 - Because this group *participates* in Jesus' return coming down with Him from Heaven
 - Earlier I told you about this group when we read a description of Jesus' return in Revelation 19
 - That third group are the saints of the Church who accompany Jesus, and Paul mentions this moment also

1Th. 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

- Paul says that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ all the saints (meaning the whole Church) are with Him
 - But this begs a question...how did the Church move from the earth and into Heaven prior to Jesus' return?
 - We find part of our answer in 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul teaches that when a believer dies, his/her spirit enters Heaven with the Lord
 - So these saints that accompany Jesus at His return include all believers who died prior to Jesus' Second Coming
- Revelation 19 told us the entire Bride of Christ has been "made ready" for Her marriage to the Lamb prior to the return of Christ
 - The Bride being made ready is a reference to the entire body of Christ present with Jesus, no Church saints will be missing at that time
 - Which tells us that it isn't just the believers who have died who accompany Jesus at His return...all Church saints will be there
 - So when and how does the *entire* Church, both dead and living saints, end up in Heaven prior to Jesus' return?
 - That's a question Jesus' disciples never thought to ask Him, because that's a scenario they never considered, I'm sure
 - In fact, it's an event that is only whispered about in the Old Testament through various pictures
 - But it turns out this is the most important answer the disciples need to know, so Jesus moves to addressing that question now

Matt. 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of

heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

Matt. 24:37 “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.

Matt. 24:38 “For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

Matt. 24:39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

- When you reach v.36 of the Olivet Discourse, you come upon a very important but often overlooked transition phrase... “but of that day...”
 - Now that phrase suggests a day that Jesus has already been speaking about earlier in the discourse because He says “that” day
 - But we know from the context that Jesus has abruptly transitioned to speaking of something entirely new and different
 - He’s not talking about “that day” in the sense of a moment He previously mentioned
 - Rather, He’s talking about “that day,” as in a specific and special day no one had heard about before
 - How do we know this? Because of what Jesus says about that day in the rest of v.36
 - Jesus says this is a day that has no signs whatsoever, and in fact the day is so lacking in advance notice that not even He knows it
 - We’ll address why Jesus doesn’t know the timing of this special day at a later time, but for now consider the implications of this
 - Jesus is saying there is an event in God’s plan for the end times, a “day” He calls it, which has absolutely no advanced warning, no signs at all
 - That’s how we know Jesus is speaking about a new and different day rather than one of the events He previously described
 - All the previous events, whether the destruction of the temple or the end of the age or even His return, have warning signs
 - But of “that day” there will be no signs to anyone and no way to know it’s coming
- So what is this day that Jesus wanted His disciples to be aware of though we can’t know when it’s about to happen?
 - Jesus calls this day “the coming of the Lord” and obviously that phrase suggests the Second Coming of the Lord and the start of the Kingdom
 - But we know that Jesus isn’t talking about that coming of the Lord here, because the circumstances of this day are so different
 - And if we keep reading we see confirmation of this conclusion, beginning with the next verse
 - In fact, we’re going to study this unique day in three parts as Jesus teaches us about it

- Firstly, we're going to learn the circumstances of this special day
- Secondly, we're going to learn the details of the day itself, including who it is for and how it unfolds
- And thirdly, we're going to learn the purpose of the day, or why it exists at all
- We start today in v.37 with the circumstances of the day, and by these circumstances we can see clearly it's not Jesus' Second Coming
 - Jesus gives us a reference point from the story of Noah
 - Jesus says the circumstances surrounding this future day to come will be "just like" the days of Noah
 - Of course, the days of Noah is a reference back to the days prior to the flood God sent to destroy the earth some 4,500 years ago
- So what do we know about the days of Noah?
 - First, Jesus said it was a time when life felt normal to the world, and there was no sense of impending doom
 - Jesus says people were eating, which implies they were planting and harvesting
 - Which means they expected the normal routines of life to continue
 - Secondly, they were drinking, which refers to the drinking at a party or feast or other festive occasion where people celebrate daily life
 - That suggests people had no reason to worry or to panic
 - More than that, it implies debauchery and excess, a world unafraid of God
 - Finally, Jesus said marriages were happening, and marriage is an inherently optimistic choice
 - People marry because they are looking to the future, to a life together, to making a family, having a home, etc.
 - So the world expected daily routines to continue, celebrations and life to continue, and a future that wouldn't change
 - But in Noah's day, these impressions were very wrong, because the Lord had already determined to flood the earth after a period of waiting
 - God told Noah in Genesis 6 that He would bring an end to all life on earth in 120 years
 - And in the meantime, God directed Noah to use that time to construct an ark by which he could save himself and his family
 - So while the world assumed the future was bright, the reality was it was about to come crashing down suddenly
- In v.39 Jesus says the world simply didn't understand that a flood was coming to take them all away, even as they could see Noah preparing an ark
 - So the circumstance of the coming of the Lord will be two things, primarily
 - First, there will be a complete lack of awareness by the unbelievers that a day of

reckoning is coming for them

- But secondly, the people of God will be aware of judgment approaching and will be prepared by God to escape it
- Already we see Jesus is talking about a day very different than His Second Coming, because these circumstances are the complete opposite
 - Earlier we learned that Jesus returns at the end of a seven-year Tribulation
 - And throughout those seven years, the world will be rocked by signs that announce the return of Christ is near
 - And life during that time will be anything but ordinary...people will not be eating, drinking and the like without worry
 - On the contrary, Revelation tells us seas are turning to blood, mountains are falling, and people are living in caves
- So when Jesus says “that day” will come during a time like the days of Noah, He must be talking about a day other than His Second Coming
 - He’s talking about a day that will surprise everyone, a day that has no warning signs at all
 - That’s a very different day, even though Jesus also refers to it as the coming of the Lord
 - It’s a type of return yet one that is different than the one that ends the age
- It’s a return to rescue the Church, to bring us to Heaven prior to the onset of the judgments of Tribulation
 - It’s similar to the way God protected Noah and his family, making a way of escape shortly before the flood waters arrived
 - We’ll come back to the Noah analogy next time as we move into the second part of this day: how it unfolds
- For now, let me encourage you to consider that the fast-changing times in which we are living today are proof to us all of how close we are to the end
 - The world is in upheaval, and if it seems like we’ll never find our way back to normal, let me assure you the world will find a new normal
 - Jesus said they will...they will return to eating, drinking, marrying and the like
 - They will return to optimism and an expectation of regular life again
 - The world will return to that attitude, but we can’t
 - The believer is on notice that normal is an illusion and there are great and terrible things coming for the world
 - Maybe it starts tomorrow or maybe it’s a hundred years away, but it’s coming and Jesus assures us of that
 - These are the days of Noah so now is not the time to pretend all is normal
 - Now is the time to prepare, spiritually speaking, for what follows

- After a short break, I'm back and we're ready to dive back into our study about that mysterious future day that Jesus calls the coming of the Lord
 - So, let's revisit where we are in the Olivet Discourse in Chapter 24
 - Jesus has answered all the questions His disciples asked Him about the end of the age, His Second Coming and the Kingdom
 - Then having answered their questions, Jesus then moves to explaining another event associated with the end times
 - This new event was one His disciples didn't ask Jesus about, because it was something they had never heard about before
 - It was a mystery that God waited to reveal through Jesus, and Jesus reveals it in three stages
 - First, Jesus introduces it here at the end of Matthew 24 and the beginning of Matthew 25 in the Olivet Discourse
 - Then a few hours later Jesus elaborates more on this moment in His discourse at the Last Supper in John's Gospel
 - Finally, we get the full details from the Apostle Paul, who teaches us about this day in two main passages in his letters
 - Obviously, this is a study of Matthew's Gospel, so we will concentrate on what Jesus gives us here
 - Yet to gain a full understanding of this very important event, we will spend a little time in those other places in the Bible
 - We are going to look at "that" day in three parts, beginning with the circumstances of the day
 - Then secondly, we will study the details of how this day unfolds and who it involves
 - And finally, we will understand the purposes of this day in God's plan for the end of the age
- But let's continue in our study of the circumstances surrounding this day, which we began in Matthew 24:36-39

Matt. 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

Matt. 24:37 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.

Matt. 24:38 "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

Matt. 24:39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

- Jesus called this new event "that" day to distinguish it from the previous events He's discussed in this discourse

- And there were several unique aspects to this day, most especially the fact that He said in v.36 that this day will have no warning signs at all
 - That is very different than the previous events Jesus described which all had multiple warning signs
 - That's how we knew Jesus was no longer describing the end of the age or His Second Coming
- Then in vs.37-39 Jesus gave us a point of reference from history to help us understand the circumstances surrounding this future day
 - Jesus says the arrival of this day would be just like the days of Noah before the flood came
 - Notice Jesus says "just as" or "just like" which means He's asking us to draw comparisons between Noah's situation and this day
 - And there are many comparisons to be made
- For example, Jesus reminds us that in Noah's day people were living normal lives and were optimistic about the future
 - They were oblivious to the approaching flood that would soon bring God's judgment down upon them
 - So that tells us the coming of the Lord will take place in an age when judgment is fast approaching but the world doesn't see it
- Ironically, the Bible says the world should know better, if only they learned the lesson of Noah's flood

2Pet. 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

2Pet. 3:4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

2Pet. 3:5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,

2Pet. 3:6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

2Pet. 3:7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

- Peter says that in the last days the world will mock the notion of a judgment day looming and even the claim that Jesus will return
 - But Peter says the world should remember Noah's story
 - They should realize that if God could bring judgment upon the ungodly once without warning, He can do it again...and He will
- The second thing we learn from Noah's story is that Noah and his family *did* know that a judgment was coming, because God told them it was coming

- They didn't know the exact day and hour, but they knew enough to get prepared, and the Lord told them to prepare by building an ark
 - So while the world was oblivious to their fate, God's people were getting ready to escape judgment
 - And then right before the judgment waters came upon the earth, the people of God entered safely into the ark
- And this fact offers us another point of comparison: believers today are on notice from the word of God that the end is coming for the world
 - We were given signs to watch for, and today we see these signs so we should be preparing for our escape
 - Of course, God hasn't asked us to build an ark because God is not bringing another flood of water
 - Instead, we are called to prepare in other ways, ways which Jesus explains later in Chapter 25
- Thirdly, we know that the days of Noah were days of evil according to Genesis
 - Genesis 6 tells us that in the days leading up to the flood, the world was utterly wicked and bent on self-destruction
 - Genesis describes those days in this way:

Gen. 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

- Every intent of every human heart on earth was evil continually
- Even worse, the evil of the world included demons infiltrating and corrupting the human race in ways we can only imagine
 - We're told in Genesis 6 that demons left their proper station to take human women and use them to produce offspring
 - The product of this unholy union were a grotesque race of giant humans the Bible calls Nephilim
 - Therefore, the wickedness of the world was so great it necessitated a flood...there was no other way to fix the problem
- Back in v.38 Jesus said life in the last days would be like Noah's day with people eating, drinking and marrying unaware judgment was near
 - So perhaps you assumed Jesus was saying life at the end will be carefree, innocent and wholesome...like a 1950's sitcom
 - Far from it...those days will be just like the days of Noah, which means ungodly to an extreme, and demonically-influenced
- Listen to Paul's description of what life on earth will be like in the days leading up to judgment

2Tim. 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

2Tim. 3:2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

2Tim. 3:3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

2Tim. 3:4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

- Paul's description of the last days world is nothing like Leave it to Beaver or The Andy Griffith Show...it will be the Walking Dead
 - And we can already see the evidence today that our world is heading in that direction
- After hearing what's in store for our world, you may be left feeling a little depressed or worried for your future
 - After all, we still have to live here, and our children and grandchildren will be alive here long after we are gone
 - So perhaps you're wishing for the good old days before these things began to happen
 - Or maybe you're wondering how long will you have to endure this trial or how can you get through it?
- And if that's you, let me suggest that you're not asking the right questions
 - The question we should all be asking ourselves is how are we supposed to make the most of this time and opportunity?
 - And to find that answer, we go back once again to the story of the flood to ask how did Noah approach his circumstances?
 - And the answer depends on which way Noah was facing
- If Noah turned his focus to the evil world that surrounded him, he probably lived in terror and dread and disgust
 - If you're watching the news these days you might think we're living in days equally evil to Noah's day
 - But the truth is our day isn't even close to the evil that Noah endured in his day
 - We have never known a world filled continually with evil hearts together with demonic creatures living among us
 - So we can't even imagine how bad things must have been in Noah's day
 - When Noah walked into the local village to trade for supplies or materials or when he visited the nearby well for water, he took a risk
 - He probably watched his back for an attack, or averted his eyes from gross immorality
 - He probably slept with a weapon nearby and routinely had to run off thieves from his work site

- He lived in difficult times, and being righteous, he grieved over what he experienced and what he saw around him
- And remember, Noah experienced this deteriorating world for 120 years while he built the ark
- That's a long time to suffer in a world of continually evil hearts everywhere... longer than any of us will likely know
- When Noah focused his attention on the sad state of his world, I have no doubt he experienced worry and anxiety and frustration and anger
 - You're probably experiencing those same feelings today...fretting over the the world becoming increasingly lawless and evil
 - Perhaps there are days when you read the headlines and feel like going back to bed and throwing the covers over your head
 - Or perhaps you spend your day writing angry posts on Facebook
 - Or maybe you join a protest in the street determined to make the world a better place
- And I'm sure there were days when Noah or his family felt a desire to lecture the world or fight against the depravity all around them
 - But that wasn't the mission God gave Noah
 - God didn't ask Noah to fix the world...He told Noah He was going to destroy the world, which is why Noah needed an ark
- And building that ark wasn't simply a matter of personal preservation...it was the way Noah would save the world
 - By building that ark, Noah would save his entire family, and his family would ultimately repopulate the earth
 - And the ark would also save the animals, without which human beings couldn't survive
 - So ironically, the way Noah could save the evil, wicked world was by building an ark in preparation for a future world
- Which is why Noah needed to move his attention away from fixing the world and onto his mission of building the ark...so that God could fix the world
 - When Noah turned his attention away from the world and onto the project of building his ark, suddenly everything made sense
 - Building the ark gave his life meaning and purpose beyond anything else he had ever known
 - Whatever Noah accomplished prior to that moment was nothing compared to his God-given mission
 - Would we even remember Noah's name if it were not for the ark?
 - Noah had a God-given mission and the sad state of the world simply imparted greater urgency upon his work
 - He woke up each day and looked at the ark under construction, and he knew

why he was getting out of bed that day

- And when his eyes caught a glimpse of the world falling apart, it just motivated him to build faster
- And that's exactly the way we should see our days today, because we live in the same circumstances as Noah (at least in a sense)
 - Our days are evil like Noah, so if you focus on the world's deterioration, then you too will feel isolated, frightened and hopeless
 - And that's especially true in our current circumstances, isolated in our homes unable to do many of the things we used to do
 - I know believers today are feeling lost and sidelined, passing the time watching hours of cable news or Netflix or playing games
 - That's not living with purpose...that is abandoning the mission at the most critical time
 - Imagine if Noah put down his tools so he could catch up on past episodes of Friends?
 - Or what if he threw his hands up in worry and decided the situation was hopeless?
 - Or what if he just decided to wait it out hoping that life would one day get back to normal?
 - Friends, when you live in the last days, there is no "normal"
 - We need to take our eyes off our crumbling world and fix them squarely on our mission just as Noah focused on the ark
 - Our mission is not to fix this world, especially since we know the Lord is going to destroy it and replace it with something better
 - We know judgment is around the corner because we have all seen the signs Jesus told us to expect
 - Our mission is to prepare a people to escape this world and to enter a new and better world that is coming soon
 - We offer the world an ark, the ark Jesus, and when someone enters that "ark" by faith, they too are rescued
 - That's our mission, and when we turn our attention away from the world's troubles and onto that mission, we too find purpose
 - Our work may be hard, just as building that ark was likely the hardest thing Noah ever did
 - And the world will still be evil, but that just gives us greater reason to stick to our mission
 - But everyday you'll wake up knowing that the Lord is working through it
 - As Paul said in Ephesians 5:16, we will be making the most of our time knowing the days are evil
- We'll end our study of the circumstances of this coming day with a few final comparisons

to Noah's day

- Shortly before the Lord brought the flood on the earth, God told Noah it was time to enter the ark with his family and the animals
 - And the way that happens includes some interesting details:

Gen. 7:13 On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark,

- Everyone entered the ark on the same day, and later in Genesis 7:16 the Lord Himself closes the doors of the ark
 - He seals everyone inside and prevents others from entering
 - Even more interesting, Noah and his family and the animals waited in the ark for a full week before the flood started

Gen. 7:7 Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood.

Gen. 7:10 It came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth.

- Notice that the entry happened a full week prior to the start of the flood
 - For seven days, the family of Noah and the animals were safe and then God brought judgment down on the earth
- Both of these details tells us even more about the circumstances that will surround this mysterious, future day called the coming of the Lord
 - First, just as Noah's family entered the ark prior to the flood, so will the coming of the Lord take place prior to God's judgment
 - As it says in 2 Peter 2:9... God rescues the godly while keeping the unrighteous under punishment for a day of judgment
 - So our rescue will take place before the Lord moves to bring wrath and judgment to the earth
 - In fact, just as Noah's family was safely in the ark seven days before the flood, so will our rescue precede judgment by a period of seven
 - We know Tribulation will be a seven-year period of wrath upon the whole earth, according to Daniel
 - And Paul told us during an earlier lesson that the Lord will come from heaven to rescue the Church from that wrath to come
 - So Noah's seven days sitting in the ark before the flood came is a picture of our rescue happening seven years or so prior to God's judgment

- Then at the end of those seven years, Jesus' return to earth causes mourning because He brings judgment
- Also, remember the Church returns with Jesus so we are present at the judgment though we are not caught up in it
- That is also pictured by Noah, who witnessed the flood waters come on the earth while he was sitting safely in the ark
- Finally, just as everyone entered the ark in a single moment, on the same day, so will our future day include all of God's family in the same moment
 - No believer will be left out because all experience the same rescue
 - And on that day the Lord will "shut the door," so to speak, so that none of those rescued may be lost and no one else may enter
 - This moment will be the dividing line for all humanity, just as Noah's ark made clear who was being rescued and who wasn't
 - There will be two groups of humanity: those in the safety of Jesus and those left behind
 - And at the moment, there will be no going back, no exceptions, no appeals
 - And there will be no doubt that the Lord has protected His own
 - And that leads us into the second section of our study: the nature of this coming day, how it happens and who will be involved
 - This is really the heart of our study and it will take several lessons to complete
 - With the time we have remaining today, we will look at what Jesus gives us in Matthew 24 and move to other texts next week

Matt. 24:40 "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.

Matt. 24:41 "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.

- Jesus begins His explanations of the events of that day focused on that dividing line we just learned from Noah... two people with different futures
 - In v.40 Jesus illustrates how this day will unfold from a perspective on earth using two common scenarios of everyday life
 - First, He says there will be two men working in the field on a given day
 - Which tells us that nothing about that day will seem different from any other day
 - Had that day seemed different or strange, these men would not have gone about their normal routine
 - Similarly, two women will go to a mill to accomplish the daily grinding
 - And again this is an indication that up to this moment, all seems normal

- People going about their normal daily routines without any sense that the day would be different from any other
- This is perfectly consistent with what Jesus said earlier, when He told us that no one will know the day and hour of this event
 - The timing of this event will surprise everyone, even those who God will include in the rescue
 - So we can know that the event is planned and even how it will happen, but we cannot know when it will happen
- Then instantly, Jesus says one of the men and one of the women will be taken, but the original Greek wording of this verse implies a different sense
 - We could read v.40 to say “two men shall be in the field, the one is received, and the other is left”
 - In other words, something – or someone – receives one of the men and one of the women
 - That specific language suggests the movement of the person, not the death or the destruction of the person
 - So one man and one woman will be taken away from the earth, leaving the other man and woman unaffected and still at work
 - It’s similar to the way Noah and his family entered the ark and the Lord shut the door
 - One moment Noah and his family were just another family on earth like the rest of the population
 - But the moment the door closed, they were separated from the world, out of sight and out of reach
 - This is what our planned rescue will be like, Jesus says, which just leads us to many more questions
 - And as I said, Jesus elaborates further at the Last Supper, and we will jump there next week to see what He says
 - Later, Paul will give us the details in two of his letters, and we will look at those next week as well
- So in the meantime, let’s approach this next week and every week to come with a godly attitude that appreciates how we are to live in these days
 - It comes down to remembering five things that you know that you know:
 - First, we know that judgment for the world is fast approaching, because we can see the signs that Jesus told us to watch for
 - And secondly, we know God has planned a rescue for us so we will not experience this coming judgment
 - And thirdly, we know that as we await our rescue, the world will become increasingly evil, so we should not lose heart over it
 - Fourthly, we know to focus our attention on our mission of preparing for the next world, not trying to preserve this one

- And fifthly, we know that as we serve God in the mission He gave us, these last days can be our best days
 - Rather than being depressed or angry or discouraged by the days we live in, we can be filled with purpose and joy
 - Because we move our eyes off the world and on to Jesus and the rescue He has planned for His Church
 - We aren't going down with this ship, we're helping people into our life raft
- The church today is witnessing perhaps the single greatest witness opportunity any of us have seen in our lifetimes
 - A period of history when the foundations of our society are crumbling, evil has the upper hand and everyone is scared
 - Nothing is normal or stable now, and if you can't see God's handwriting on these circumstances, then you're blind
- This is the time for the Church to fulfill its mission, and we can't do that on the couch playing our X-Box, or watching Netflix, or surfing the web
 - We need to be about our Father's business, building the ark and stuffing it with as many passengers as we can
 - And by building the ark I mean preaching the gospel, sharing the truth, being a witness in these dark times
 - This is the time we show the optimism that understands our rescue is right around the corner
 - This is the time we show confidence and peace and joy when the world is filled with worry and distress and sadness
 - So that the world may be drawn to Christ through our witness and they too might be rescued when the day comes

- We're studying the coming of the Lord, that mysterious day Jesus describes in Matthew 24 which He says will be a part of the events of the last days
 - This day arrives suddenly without warning and it comes during circumstances that Jesus said would be like the days of Noah
 - The days of Noah were days of intense evil on earth, with the unbelieving world unknowingly careening toward judgment
 - But they are also times when the believing world will understand the end is near and will be preparing for a rescue
 - So will be the circumstances surrounding this future day, and now we're ready to move to Part 2 of Jesus' teaching about this day
 - In Part 2 we study the manner in which this day unfolds
 - Jesus didn't provide those details in the Olivet Discourse, preferring to wait for His discourse at the Last Supper
 - But Matthew doesn't include Jesus' teaching on the coming of the Lord in his version of the Last Supper, so we go to John
 - We find Jesus remarks in John 14, at the beginning of the Last Supper

John 14:2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

John 14:4 "And you know the way where I am going."

- Jesus was to die in a few hours and He knew that after His death His relationship with these men would change dramatically
 - Up to this point, they had walked with Jesus face-to-face, enjoying His company, watching Him work, sharing in His life
 - But after Jesus died, resurrected and ascended to the Father, these men would need to learn a new way to work with Jesus
 - They would lose access to His physical presence for a time but in return they would gain a much greater access to Him spiritually
 - Most of all, they needed to understand that Jesus' departure didn't mean the end of ministry...it was just the beginning
 - And eventually, these men would follow in Jesus' footsteps once more by completing a similar departure
 - So now in His final hours, Jesus announces to these men that He is leaving and one day they will follow
 - And this passage in John 14 we find Jesus' promise to His Church that one day He will return for all of us
 - That moment is the day Jesus called the coming of the Lord, the day when

Jesus is reunited with all His disciples

- Looking at the promise, Jesus says in v.2 that He's going to His Father's House soon to prepare a place for the Church and then He will return to claim us
 - To fully appreciate what Jesus is saying, it's necessary to recognize Jesus is speaking euphemistically here
 - He's comparing His return for the Church to the Jewish wedding traditions of His day
 - Marriages in Jesus' day were typically arranged with the father selecting a bride for his son
 - Once a bride was identified, each family committed to the marriage by entering into a betrothal agreement
 - But the marriage didn't take place right away, because the groom must first prepare a home for his bride-to-be
 - The son would work under his father's guidance to build an extension onto the father's home
 - This new room would be the future home of the son and his wife after the wedding took place
 - Only after the room was ready would the father permit his son to go claim his bride and marry her
 - When the father deemed the groom ready, the groom would travel to the bride's home, claim her, and bring her back home for the wedding
 - That was typically the first time the groom and bride would see each other face-to-face
 - Later after a week or so, the couple would travel back to the bride's home to celebrate the new marriage with her family
 - That is the ancient style of wedding that Jesus is alluding to here with His choice of language
 - Jesus is borrowing from that Jewish wedding tradition to help us understand the coming of the Lord
 - Jesus is expecting us to recognize Him as our Groom returning to claim us, His Bride, after a period of delay
 - So let's make that comparison as we consider what Jesus says in John 14
- First, Jesus says in v.2 that He goes away to prepare a place for us, which is obviously a reference to Jesus' ascension into Heaven
 - Jesus left the earth and entered into the presence of the Father, and Jesus is now preparing a home for His Bride to join Him
 - But just as obviously, Jesus isn't literally building additions in Heaven with wood, sheetrock, etc.
 - Jesus prepares room for us in Heaven spiritually speaking as the Author and Perfecter of our salvation

- In Chapter 9 of Hebrews the writer explains that Jesus mediates a better New Covenant for us in a better tabernacle in Heaven
 - So Jesus is our blood propitiation applied to the Heavenly tabernacle to remove the wrath of God
 - And He is our intercessor seated at the right hand of the Father, reconciling us to God
 - So by that comparison, we understand Jesus left us for a time to prepare a place for us in Heaven, like a groom leaving his bride
- Nevertheless, we remain in a covenant with Jesus in the meantime, just as a bride and groom are bound while they wait for their wedding
 - Because marriages didn't begin with an engagement but with something far more serious and binding: a betrothal
 - A betrothal was a preliminary form of marriage and a covenant itself, and like all covenants a betrothal was not easily broken
 - In fact, a man and woman who were betrothed had to seek a legal divorce if they wanted to call off the wedding
 - We see that in the story of Mary and Joseph, who was prepared to divorce a pregnant Mary though they were only betrothed
- So today we are "betrothed" to Christ by our faith and we have entered into the New Covenant with Him
 - Christ is our Groom and we are His Bride, and our Groom is not going to break His word to return to us
 - In fact, the groom's effort to prepare a home for his future bride is the best proof that he intended to return and claim her
 - A man didn't spend all day and everyday building a home for a bride-to-be only to decide not to claim her in the end
 - Similarly, the fact that Jesus has gone to Heaven to prepare a place for us tells you all you need to know that He will return for us one day
 - Jesus wouldn't have done the work of redemption, of lowering Himself to take the form of man and of dying in our place...
 - Of ascending to cleanse the Heavenly tabernacle and of interceding for us continually as Hebrews says...
 - He wouldn't have done the work of preparing for His Bride if He intended to abandon Her in the end
 - Or as Paul tells us:

Phil. 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- But like a groom claiming his bride, the timing of the coming of the Lord will always be a

mystery

- In the Jewish wedding, a groom couldn't know when he would claim his bride because the father made that determination
- He permitted his son to claim the bride only after the father was satisfied that his son's work on the bride's home was complete
- The son worked quickly to complete the room, but the father had the final word on when it was done
 - So the betrothal period might last months or even a year or more
 - And all the while the bride waited at her home not knowing when the groom would appear
 - This explains why Jesus said in Matthew 24:36 that the exact timing of the coming of the Lord was unknowable even to Jesus
- Next in v.3 of John 14, Jesus says as He comes, He will receive us to Himself
 - Last week in Matthew 24 Jesus illustrated how this day would unfold from the perspective of those on earth using two everyday illustrations
 - He said there would be two men in the field, one would be taken, one would be left
 - And there would be two women at the mill, one would be taken and one would be left
 - But I mentioned that the original Greek actually reads "two men in the field, one is *received*, one is left"
 - The Greek says they are "received" meaning the man and the woman move away from the earth
 - And now in John 14 Jesus uses that same Greek word, *paralambano*, as He says He "receives" us to Himself
 - And then at the end of v.3 Jesus adds that after He has received us to Himself, we will be with Him where He *was*
 - We know Jesus departs Heaven to receive us off the earth, so that means we return to where He was...in Heaven
 - So the coming of the Lord is Jesus returning from Heaven to remove His Bride from earth and return Her to Heaven
 - That detail is proof Jesus is talking about a day that's different than His Second Coming
 - The Second Coming of Jesus is a completely opposite set of circumstances from what we're reading here in John 14
 - At Jesus' Second Coming, He also moves from Heaven to earth, but when He gets here, He stays on earth to rule the Kingdom
 - And Revelation 19 says when He comes, Jesus brings His Bride with Him, which means we started in Heaven with Him
 - Those details are the opposite of what Jesus is describing here, which confirms

this is a different day

- That leads us to our next passage from a letter by the Apostle Paul where he elaborates on the manner of this coming day

1Th. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

1Th. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

1Th. 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1Th. 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Th. 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

1Th. 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- How do we know Paul is talking about the same day here that Jesus has been describing in Matthew 24 and John 14? There are two reasons
 - First, notice in v.15 Paul calls this day the coming of the Lord, which is the same term that Jesus uses in Matthew 24
 - Secondly, all the direction of movement Paul describes here is the same as the movement Jesus describes in John 14
 - Paul says Jesus returns from Heaven, then believers are caught up (or received) to Jesus and we remain with Jesus after that
 - So we know Paul is speaking of the same day here
- Paul gives us three new details in this passage, beginning with dramatic signals that announce the moment
 - The first, Paul says, is that an archangel will shout – and he is probably speaking of the archangel Michael
 - So believers across the earth will suddenly hear an angelic voice announcing our day has come
 - Then there will be a heavenly trumpet sound, which links this event to the Jewish feast of trumpets called Rosh Hashanah
 - As with the shout, I believe this trumpet will only be heard by those included in this moment
 - So the man and woman who are received in Jesus' example will hear these things while the man and woman left behind will not
 - And these signals are not signs that the event is coming, rather they are

announcements that the event is already underway

- The second thing we learn is that the Lord doesn't return all the way to the earth
 - In v.17 Paul says that when Jesus comes for His Bride, He never actually visits the earth but instead meets us in the clouds above the earth
 - This explains why we must be "received" to Jesus...we cannot go to Him on our own because our meeting place is off the earth
 - Jesus will be in the clouds, out of sight of the world, so the world will never know Jesus came
 - That fits Jesus' earlier description of two men in the field and then suddenly only one man remains
 - Paul's description confirms once more that we're talking about a day very different than the Second Coming of Jesus
 - Because the Second Coming is Jesus returning to live on earth again, not to stay in the clouds
 - In fact, we call that moment Jesus' "second" coming because it will be like His first coming
 - At His first coming, Jesus lived on earth, and so it will be at Jesus' Second coming: He will live on earth again in the Kingdom
 - In describing our movement off the earth, Paul says in v.17 that we are caught up with Jesus, and the word for caught up is *harpazo* in Greek
 - The word *harpazo* means to "snatch away" and it was later translated into *raptura* in the Latin version of the Bible
 - That Latin translation is responsible for giving this day its more common name
 - Because in English *raptura* becomes *rapture*, and so the coming of the Lord has come to be known as the Rapture
- Finally, Paul tells us that the coming of the Lord won't just be a moment for those believers who are alive here on earth on that day
 - Paul says in v.14 that when Jesus comes on that day He brings with Him those who are "asleep" in Jesus, meaning believers who died previously
 - The Bible tells us that when a Christian dies, the spirit of that person leaves the dead body to enter into the presence of Jesus
 - They enter Heaven fully conscious in spirit form only yet without a physical body
 - And Paul says these bodiless believers will be included in the events of this day
 - They leave Heaven with Jesus to participate in the coming of the Lord by "rising" first Paul says in v.16, followed by living Christians
 - The Bible uses the term "rise" to refer to a literal, physical resurrection, therefore the coming of the Lord is our resurrection moment
 - Which is why Paul says the coming of the Lord will be a moment of resurrection for both dead and living believers

- All believers need physical bodies to live in the physical Kingdom on earth, and this is the moment Jesus gives us that new body
- And it's only fair that those who have died already will be first in line for their new body since they have been waiting the longest
- It's one thing to hear spirits of dead believers receiving new bodies, but it's another thing to consider living believers gaining a new body
 - But Paul says in v.17 that those believers who are still alive and remain on the earth will also be resurrected in this moment
 - So how can someone who is still alive be resurrected?
- And that leads us to our final passage explaining how God will resurrect the living Church saints at the coming of the Lord

1Cor. 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

1Cor. 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1Cor. 15:53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

- In this chapter Paul is defending the reality of a future, physical resurrection to a church that had been deceived into thinking resurrection was impossible
 - And at this point in the chapter Paul is explaining how the Lord will resurrect believers who are still alive when Jesus returns for the Church
 - He begins in v.51 acknowledging this moment has been a mystery, meaning God hid this truth from prior ages
 - You may have encountered from time to time believers who doubt the teaching of a future rapture
 - And one of the arguments they make is that this notion is not in the Bible and was invented in the 1800s or something like that
 - Obviously, the coming of the Lord is found in the Bible, but they assume this is a reference to the Second Coming of the Lord not the rapture
 - Moreover, they fail to appreciate the nature of a biblical mystery...it's intentionally obscured until God reveals it
 - And unless we are paying attention and approach the Bible with a teachable heart, we will miss the truth of mysteries like this one
 - I believe that's how God tests us to see whether we are teachable and submitted to His word
 - I should add that if a Christian tells you they don't believe in a Rapture, then they are

making the same mistake as did this church in Corinth

- They are unknowingly denying the resurrection, because that's what the Rapture is: the moment the Church is resurrected
 - It's the moment we all receive new eternal bodies, and certainly every Christian should agree that we are promised resurrection
 - So when someone denies the Rapture that simply demonstrates that they don't understand how we will be resurrected
- Resurrection is the process of a dead person coming to life again, and the best example of resurrection, obviously, is that of Jesus
 - When He died, Jesus' spirit left His body and His body became lifeless
 - Then three days later, Jesus' spirit returned to His physical body and He returned to life...that's resurrection
 - Jesus's spirit never ceased being alive or conscious...only His physical body ceased living
 - And when believers die today, their spirit leaves behind a lifeless body and enters into the presence of Jesus
 - But Heaven isn't our permanent home, because we are destined to return to this earth to live in a physical Kingdom
 - So one day we must be resurrected, meaning our spirit must be reunited with a physical body
 - But unlike Jesus, we don't receive our old body back, because it was corrupt, so we get a brand new body in its place
 - And now Paul reveals a mystery to the Church, that not all believers are destined to die before they will be resurrected into new bodies
 - As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4, not all believers will be required to sleep – which is a euphemistic reference to death
 - Not all believers will experience a physical death because those who are still alive when Jesus comes skip that step
- Instead, Paul says they will be “changed,” and the Greek word for changed is *allasso*, which literally means an exchange of something
 - What is being exchanged? Specifically, living Christians on this day will exchange their present body for a new, eternal body
 - Simply put, they will be resurrected but without first experiencing the death of their current body
 - And in v.52 Paul says that this exchange is instantaneous happening in a moment
 - The Greek word translated “moment” is *atomos*, from which we get words like “atom”
 - The word means something so small that it can't be divided further
 - So the exchange of our old body for the new body happens in a moment so brief, so

instantaneous, that time can't be divided further

- One moment we're in the field or at the mill, and then instantly we will be with Jesus in the clouds in a new body
 - If you blink, you will miss it, and in fact Paul says it happens in the blink of an eye
 - And then it will be over...a man will be left standing in the field wondering what happened to his workmate
 - And a woman will be left working in the mill wondering where her coworker went
- But above the world, unnoticed in the clouds, will be a celebration unlike anything the Creation has ever known
 - The eternal Bride will have been united with Her Groom, and an uncountable number of saints will be rejoicing together
 - We'll be rejoicing that we are with Jesus, and that we are together with all our brothers and sisters
 - And we will be marveling at our new bodies, free from disease and pain...and most of all free from sin and death
 - And you'll be marveling at how much my new body resembles Brad Pitt
- That's how the coming of the Lord will play out...suddenly, dramatically, instantaneously, gloriously
 - That is very different from the other events Jesus described in Matthew 24
 - The end of the age is announced to us over centuries with signs that build slowly with ever-increasing cataclysmic events
 - And you can mark Jesus' Second Coming on a calendar since it comes at the end of a seven-year period of Tribulation
 - But this moment happens in an instant with no warning and no signs and its place in God's plan was a mystery until Jesus and Paul revealed it
 - And in Matthew 24 Jesus told us this day is not associated with any signs, and therefore it could have happened anytime
 - So every generation of believers should live with the expectation that this moment could transpire in their lifetimes
 - And now that the signs of the end of the age are appearing, we have all the more reason to live with that expectation
- Every moment of every day of your life, you are just an *atomos*, an instant away from finding yourself celebrating in the clouds in a new body
 - That day will be so sudden it will interrupt not only your plans for that day but for the rest of your life
 - It will be so sudden, it will even interrupt your thoughts
 - One moment you will be worrying about something, or fearing some calamity or being weighed down by some worldly desire

- And then in a flash, all that will be over and behind you, and you will be facing Jesus and on your way to Heaven
 - Suddenly, as you marvel at your new body, you will feel endless strength and boundless joy
 - You notice you're completely free of evil thoughts and sinful desires
 - You'll experience an overwhelming love for God moving in and through you, untainted by selfishness or deceit
 - And you will behold the One scriptures call Beautiful, in His full glory just as a Bride looks upon Her Groom on her wedding day
- And in that moment I wonder what we will say to ourselves as we reflect on the life we're leaving behind?
 - Will we wonder at how absorbed we allowed ourselves to become in the worries and sadness and struggles of this world?
 - Will we regret the time we spent chasing that world below the clouds, the world fading behind us and under judgment?
 - What were we worrying about? What were we striving for?
 - When a bride is betrothed to her groom, how much does she concern herself with the matters of the family she leaves behind?
- Now we know why Jesus told us not to fear and not to worry and not to store up things on earth
 - He wasn't merely telling us to maintain a positive attitude, as if our attitude makes a difference to our eternal future
 - Having a positive attitude doesn't change your resurrection day...the day of the Lord comes for all Christians the same way
 - The fearful and sad and grumpy Christians are resurrected just as assuredly as the peaceful, joyful contented Christians
 - And some of you are probably thinking "praise the Lord"
 - The reason Jesus counseled us to resist giving in to feelings of worry or sadness or insecurity is because they are a waste of our time
 - Fundamentally, they are evidence that we've taken our focus off of our eternal future and moved it onto a lost and dying world
 - Look, we all live in this world, so we all have to contend with whatever trials come our way
 - And those trials will discourage us or frighten us or anger us or tempt us into sin
 - But we can't let those experiences and the emotions that provoke us define our outlook in life
 - We should consider how we will feel in that moment we're caught up to the clouds
 - Consider how you will reflect on the life you're leaving behind, and ask yourself now what do you want to remember?

- If you've spent the better part of your adult life preoccupied with matters of this life, won't you feel like you wasted time and opportunity?
 - As you look upon your new, eternal, sinless body that never grows old and never wears out, won't you wonder why you spent so much time trying to preserve a body destined to be replaced?
 - As you learn of your eternal treasure stored up for your Kingdom life, won't you question why you spent so much time storing up treasure on an earth destined to burn up?
- We don't have to enter that moment with so many regrets, because the word of God has revealed this mystery to us precisely for that reason
 - Next week we will consider the purpose in this day, and why the Lord has included it in His plan for the Church
 - But here's a preview of what we will learn...
 - It's summed up in the phrase you hear me using from time to time...live with eyes for eternity
 - In other words, think about your future, think about the fact that the coming of the Lord could happen any second
 - Any second you could be with Jesus, in the clouds, in a new body
 - So live every second ready for that moment
 - Let the reality of that future influence how you live now
 - And if you are thinking well I might die before the Rapture happens, that may be true but it changes nothing
 - Because in the moment your body dies, you enter into the presence of Jesus, and that moment is only a heartbeat away
 - So whether we die or live until the Rapture, either way we ought to live with eyes for eternity
 - We will pick this conversation up again next week as we continue in our study

- Believe it or not, we have only reached the halfway point of the Olivet discourse in Matthew, but already we've learned so much
 - Jesus outlined the signs and the major events associated with the destruction of the Jewish temple and the end of the age
 - He gave us a summary of the events of Tribulation leading up to His Second Coming
 - Then He introduced us to a special day called the coming of the Lord, which we now call the Rapture
 - And on this day, Jesus said the Church saints will be received off the earth, resurrected and taken to Heaven with Jesus
 - We've been studying the Rapture for the past couple of lessons, and I said we would cover this topic in three sections
 - First, we looked at the circumstances that will surround the day when it comes
 - Then last week we studied the manner in which the day would unfold and how we will experience it
 - We also looked at a couple of passages by Paul to understand the details of how we receive our new bodies
 - And today we study the third section: the purpose of this day and why the Lord has chosen to make His return so dramatic
 - Last week we already learned one reason why the Rapture exists: it's our resurrection day
 - On the day of the Rapture, all saints in the Church will receive new, eternal, glorified bodies which we will live in forever
 - Paul gave us that reason last week in the passage we studied in 1 Corinthians 15
 - Let's jump back there again by re-reading the passage

1Cor. 15:50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

1Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

1Cor. 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1Cor. 15:53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

1Cor. 15:54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.

- Paul explained how the rapture will work in a future moment, when instantly believers

exchange their old, dying body for a new eternal body

- He said our old body, being corrupted by sin and under a sentence of condemnation, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God
 - Paul is speaking about the moment we are raptured...the moment we leave earth and enter in the presence of God
 - Paul says that journey cannot happen while we are still occupying these dying, corrupt, sinful bodies
- Because if sin enters the presence of a holy and just God on that judgment day, it must be condemned...justice requires it
 - Having even just one sin disqualifies us from living in the presence of God
 - Remember, Adam committed just one sin and that was enough to bar him from the Garden and from God's presence
 - So in order to redeem us and welcome us back into His presence, the Lord must correct for all our sin
 - He must pay for it on the cross and He must eliminate it from our very person
- That correction requires two steps: first, God must remove sin from our spirit and then He removes sin from our physical body
 - Our spirit is born again and made new when we come to faith in Jesus Christ
 - But because we still inhabit a sinful body of flesh, the Lord sends the Holy Spirit to accompany us until the day we are resurrected
 - He lives in us to give us the knowledge and strength to crucify our flesh and obey our new, perfect spirit
- But eventually if we are to enter in the presence of God, He must replace our corrupt and sinful body with a new, eternal and sinless body
 - That's what Paul is talking about here in 1 Corinthians 15 when He says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God
 - And the perishable does not inherit the imperishable, meaning our corrupt body will not enter into eternity
 - Our old body, our flesh and blood, is perishable, because it is condemned to die for sin, and therefore it can't enter Heaven
 - We need an imperishable body so that we can enter the Kingdom of God...we need to be resurrected
 - So one reason we have a rapture coming is because we need to be resurrected into a new body to live in the Kingdom
 - But why does the Lord conduct this day in such dramatic fashion raising the entire Church in the same instant?
 - And why make the saints who die wait to be raised at the Rapture with those who are still alive
 - What purpose did the Lord have in the design of this day?
 - We find that answer in the last section of this chapter

Matt. 24:42 “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

Matt. 24:43 “But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.

Matt. 24:44 “For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

- Jesus says that He designed this day to be a surprise so that we will have incentive to be on alert at all times
 - The Greek word for alert means to remain awake or watchful and it's the command given to a night watchman or guard
 - It calls for us to fight against forces trying to lull us to sleep, and to not get distracted or complacent but to remain attentive
 - And the fact that this day could happen at any time means we can't afford to let our guard down
 - Jesus uses the example of a man guarding his home from a thief, saying if the man knew when the thief was coming, he could get ready
 - Imagine how differently you would approach the security of your house if you could know beforehand when it would be robbed
 - If thieves sent you a calendar invitation in advance, you could wait until that moment to enact your security plan
 - You would lock the doors, turn on all the lights, call 911, buy a big dog, and maybe grab a weapon...you would be ready
 - Likewise, the rest of the time you would let your guard down because you have no reason to expect a robbery
 - You wouldn't lock your doors or worry about security lights, etc.
 - You wouldn't pay for an alarm company to monitor your home, you might not pay for insurance on your possessions
 - You wouldn't need to be alert or watchful...you could take it easy because there would be no surprise
- And Jesus says in v.44 that is exactly why the day of our resurrection has been left a surprise for us all
 - Jesus says “for this reason” we must be ready, because the Rapture is coming like a thief in the night, at an hour that will surprise you
 - God has planned the coming of the Lord in such a way that we have to treat everyday as potentially our last day on earth
 - And that means we have to spend every day carefully, thoughtfully, with great care
 - If we knew the exact day of our resurrection, the day the Rapture would happen, we could take a break in our preparations

- We could take our foot off the pedal and coast for a time, allowing our dedication to the disciplines of the faith fall off
- We could set prayer and study aside, we could skip out on the church gathering, and we could get cozy with our secret sins
- Until the appointed day approached, and then we would start to get serious about our walk with Jesus knowing the Lord was near
- That's why Jesus is keeping us in the dark about the timing of His return for the Church at the Rapture
 - In fact He says specifically that He is going to come at a day and on an hour when you don't expect Him to arrive
 - It will be a day that no one will see coming, He says
 - That means if someone tries to predict the day, they merely guarantee it *won't* be that day
- So we are to remain alert for that day, watchfully waiting and expecting the Lord to return at any moment
 - And since it comes instantly, without warning in the blink of an eye, don't think you can "get right with Jesus" at the last moment
 - Whether you are an unbeliever thinking you can confess Christ on your death bed
 - Or you're a believer thinking you can get serious about obeying Jesus when you see the rapture coming, stop fooling yourself
- Don't think you can outsmart God, because you will be disappointed
 - Unbeliever, today is the day of your salvation, but if you play games with God, you may wake up one day in fiery judgment
 - And believer now is the time to obey your Master, and if you delay your obedience, you be like that unprepared homeowner
 - You will be caught off guard and you will lose your possessions
- And this leads us to the final and most important purpose for why the timing of our rapture remains a mystery...to encourage us to protect our possessions

Matt. 24:45 "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?

Matt. 24:46 "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.

Matt. 24:47 "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Matt. 24:48 "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,'

Matt. 24:49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards;

Matt. 24:50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,

Matt. 24:51 and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites;

in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- Jesus now gives us a parable to explain why we need to be ready at all times for His return for the Church
 - Jesus uses the relationship of slaves to a master, which is one of His preferred illustrations for our relationship with Him
 - And as usual, Jesus is the Master, and we are His slaves, and just as Jesus left earth for a while, this master has left the slaves
 - All slaves have duties they are expected to accomplish diligently under the Master's authority
 - Some of the slaves possess rank over other slaves in the home, so they have the added responsibility of managing other slaves
 - And while He is away, the Master expects the slaves to do their duty in His absence no different than if He was still present with them
 - Every slave is expected to keep up with their assigned work
 - And the slaves in charge of other slaves are expected to make sure the work is done, and that meals are prepared, etc.
 - The whole operation should continue uninterrupted as if the Master had never gone anywhere
 - It's the opposite of the saying, "when the cat's away, the mice will play"
- Why do the slaves remain diligent in the Master's absence? Because they know the Master will return one day unannounced
 - And when He does return, He will take note of how the slaves did their work in His absence, and He will respond to each accordingly
 - And this brings us to the main point of this parable...when a master returns to his house, he comes with expectations
 - He expects His commands to be obeyed, and those who meet His expectations will be rewarded for their obedience
 - Notice in v.46 Jesus says there is a blessing for the slave who is doing as the master commanded when the master returns
 - In the context of the parable, that might mean the slave receives an increase in food rations
 - Or it might mean a day released from work, or a reduction in the debt the slave was working to pay off
 - Whatever it was, the slave knew rewards were on the line, and if the slave failed to serve well, those rewards never materialized
 - And in the worst case, a slave could reject the Master's authority entirely and become the master's enemy and an enemy of other slaves
 - In v.48 Jesus describes a slave who beats the other slaves, leaves the master's house and prefers the company of society's lowest

- That slave doesn't just lose opportunity for reward...the master will punish him
 - That slave will be caught off guard when the master returns and he will be rejected from service and left with hypocrites
- What is the meaning of this parable? You may remember a couple of weeks ago I gave my own example from growing up
 - I described nights when we were left at home while my parents went out for the evening
 - When they left me and my siblings, they told us what they expected us to do in their absence
 - If we did as we were told, then we expected to be praised and maybe even rewarded in some modest way when they returned
 - On the other hand, if we neglected our duties, we knew we risked negative consequences and at the very least, no reward
 - And since we didn't know for sure when they might come back, we were watchful and diligent in completing our responsibilities
 - Because we knew their return would bring an evaluation of sorts, a moment of judgment
 - And we wanted that moment to go well...my parents' approaching return was incentive for us to do our best
 - And that's exactly the situation Jesus is describing for believers at the coming of the Lord, or as we now call it, our Rapture
 - The purpose of the rapture isn't only to give us new bodies...it's also the moment that we receive our report card from Jesus
 - Following the rapture, Jesus will evaluate the works of believers done in service to Him so we may be rewarded for that service

1Cor. 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

- Paul says that we shouldn't judge our fellow believers in how they live or how they serve Jesus...leave that judgment to the Master
 - And Jesus will bring to light everything hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts
 - Paul is saying one day everything we've done in service to Jesus and the reasons we did it will be made public
 - Jesus will disclose these things so that He might praise us for what we did in service to Him
- This is the evaluation or judgment that comes for the believer, and Paul says it happens at the coming of the Lord

- Simply put, there is a judgement moment for the believer and that judgment happens after we are resurrected
 - Now the concept of a judgment for believers may be new to you, and if so I encourage you to study up on this truth of Scripture
 - But for our purposes this morning, let's cover a few points briefly
- First, this is not a judgment moment to determine if we are saved or if we go to Heaven
 - The Bible is clear about how to be saved: confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that He was raised from the dead
 - If you do that, you are saved and no service or good work is ever required because you cannot earn what comes by grace alone
- But secondly, there is still a moment of judgment planned for every believer, and Paul tells us that moment is for the purpose of reward:

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- All believers will experience a judgment in which Christ considers the work we did for Him while living in this body
- Service that He considers good will be recompensed or rewarded, and service that He considers bad will not be rewarded
- When Paul says “good and bad,” he’s not referring to our sins or righteous deeds...he’s referring to the quality of our service
 - So what constitutes good service? Jesus gives us that standard in His parable
 - In the parable, the Master assigned a work to every one of His slaves in His absence
 - The slaves didn’t determine their own assignments...they were required to do what they were told
 - Then each slave was recompensed or rewarded based on how well they did what was assigned
- That’s how we will be evaluated as well...Christ has assigned each of His disciples a place and role of service within the body of Christ
 - Some of us have individual assignments to serve Jesus and others have been assigned to care for other disciples
 - We cannot decide our own assignments...we are called to serve in the station Christ assigned to us
 - And depending on how well we carry out that assignment we will be rewarded
 - Our reward doesn’t depend on the type of work we do...Jesus decided that for us, so everyone can be equally rewarded
 - It only matters how well we carried out our assignment

- Back in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul said Jesus' judgment will take into account things hidden in darkness, meaning service we do out of view of others
 - And Paul also said Jesus will judge the motive of our hearts as we go about that service
 - So when you enter your prayer closet and intercede for fellow believers out of view of others, Jesus will take notice
 - And when you clean bathrooms at church or write letters of encouragement to other believers or share the Gospel with your children, the Lord sees
- And even better, the results of our service are not being judged...never does Scripture say that we must succeed in our work
 - Because the success of our ministry is also on Jesus
 - As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:

1Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

1Cor. 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

- The Lord gives opportunity to our service and He determines the growth of ministry
- So Jesus judges our obedience and effort and the intentions of our heart, not our results
 - Such that even when your ministry fails in some particular endeavor, the Lord still credits you for the effort and the intentions of your heart
 - Conversely, the way to lose reward is to not serve, to not try, to not have pure motives
 - We can't be like that slave that pretends the Lord will never return, who thinks that a judgment will never come
 - Jesus wants us to serve Him diligently for His glory and for our reward
 - And that's why Jesus is keeping the day of the Rapture a secret, because it ensures we will be ready for our report card moment
 - The Rapture is like a pop quiz...when you can't know for sure when the test is coming, you have incentive to study every day
 - And when you don't know when your judgment is coming, you have incentive to serve Jesus well everyday
 - When our Master returns, we should be found doing what the Master commanded us to do
 - So by keeping the day a mystery, Jesus is helping us maximize our reward when that day comes
 - But if you're saying to yourself, I don't know what Christ has assigned to me, then you realize that you aren't ready for that day, are you?
 - Because if you don't even know what it is Jesus has called you to do in service to Him, then you are unlikely to be found doing it

- So the first step to serving Jesus is to know how He wants you to serve, and how do we determine that?
- Well the answer is simple: you pray for His guidance and you step out in some direction and you expect Him to steer you to the right place
 - That's how it works for everyone who has ever served Jesus
 - The apostle Paul didn't wake up one morning and decide to become the apostle to the Gentiles
 - He began walking with Jesus and the Lord showed him how to serve
- Martin Luther wasn't born knowing the Lord would use Him to start the Reformation
 - He began reading the word of God, seeking to serve according to what he read, and the Lord directed his steps
 - The next thing Luther knew, he was nailing a document to a wooden door and the rest is history
- How does any Christian find their place of service to Jesus? They pray for guidance, they start moving and they expect God to steer them
 - But here's the thing...the Lord can't steer a stationary object
 - If you chase the world or live only for yourself or make excuses for why you can't obey Christ, you will never go anywhere
 - Jesus doesn't force His servants to serve...He just doesn't reward a lack of service
 - And the test is coming, the coming of the Lord will happen, and it will surprise you so you want to be found ready
 - That's why Jesus saved this topic for the end of the questions, because it's the one and only day that Christians should be thinking about
 - It's interesting to see the signs of the end of the age and to know that the last days are upon us
 - And it will be important for those who live in Tribulation to understand that the Second Coming is approaching
 - But for Christians, those events don't matter much because they don't impact us
 - The end of age will take place with us in Heaven before the end is reached
 - And the Tribulation is God's wrath appointed for the unbelieving world, not for His Church
 - So as interesting as these events are for us, they are not to be our focus
 - Jesus told His disciples about the Rapture at the end of this discourse because that's the day we are supposed to be focused on
 - The resurrection of the Church is the next thing scheduled to happen in God's program for the end and it's coming suddenly
 - That's what we should be focused on, that's the day we should be prepared for
 - And being prepared means going about the work of the Master, being found

engaged in what He asked us to do

- Using the spiritual gift He gave you, serving the brothers and sisters He has placed around you
- Living with eyes for eternity knowing that when He appears we want Him to be pleased with the service we rendered to Him
- Christian, don't play games with God...get ready for the Lord's coming, because you know it can't be far off
 - And even if you should die before that day comes, you will still be evaluated based on the deeds you did in this body
 - As the writer of Hebrews says:

Heb. 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

- And Peter says that the Church will be judged before God judges the world

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

- Peter says that judgment comes to the Church first, referring to the moment of the resurrection or Rapture
 - And so we must be ready for that moment, and we get ready by being diligent to serve Jesus well while we await His return
 - But notice also Peter says, what will happen to those who do not obey the Gospel (referring to unbelievers)?
 - What kind of judgment will they see?
- Jesus told us that too in the parable...the slave who left the Master's house was a picture of the fate of the unbeliever
 - The parable can be a bit confusing on this point, because the unbeliever is called a "slave" which is the picture of a believer
 - But in parables, it's not uncommon for characters to be exposed as frauds at a point in the story
 - So in this case, the actions of the slave reveal that he was never truly under the master's authority
 - For example, the slave left to consort with drunkards, which is a way of showing he was not truly a member of the master's household
 - He rejected the master's authority and did not want to be associated with the master's family
 - And he beat the other slaves, which is a picture of persecution, demonstrating

that this slave was an enemy of the other slaves

- These details tells us that this man was not truly a slave of the master...he was an imposter, a man who had no relationship with the master
 - And so when the master returned, he judged that man harshly for having become his enemy
 - He cut him into pieces and assigned him a place with the hypocrites, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth
- That is the Bible's way of describing eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire, or we could simply call it Hell
 - It's the home of all who reject the authority of Jesus and that judgment will likewise be sudden and unexpected
 - Like the Rapture for the Church, the unbeliever cannot know the day of his or her death
- So they too would do well to get ready, and it's the easiest preparation of all...it only takes a moment, and it only takes faith in Jesus Christ

- So we have reached the end of Chapter 24, and yet we're only halfway through the Olivet Discourse
 - So what will Jesus cover in the second half of His teaching about the end times and His return?
 - Well, the answer can be a bit confusing, because Jesus is going to teach us everything He just said again... *in parables, backward*
 - Allow me to explain...
 - First, these parables are well-known, and perhaps for that reason, people often disagree about what they mean
 - Fortunately, the Lord did us a favor by presenting this material in a way that makes it easier for us to understand Him
 - In fact, it will allow us to study this chapter in only two weeks instead of the six weeks we required for Chapter 24
 - Specifically, Jesus organized his discussions of His Second Coming and His coming for the Church in a chiastic form
 - A chiasm is just a type of outline but unlike our style of outlines, a chiasm organizes its points in a back and forth pattern
 - Each point is covered first from beginning to end and then the same points are covered a second time in reverse order
 - And the juncture where the order reverses is intended to draw our attention to the main point of the narrative
- The easiest way to understand a chiasm is by seeing a visual representation of it, so let's look at how Jesus structured His chiasm in the Olivet Discourse
 - The chiasm starts in 24:15 when Jesus begins describing His Second Coming at the end of the age
 - Then Jesus discussed the judgment for unbelievers that will take place immediately after His Second Coming
 - Remember Jesus said the tribes of the earth would mourn at the sight of His returning in v.30 because their judgment followed
 - Next, in v.36 Jesus introduced a different type of return, which He called the coming of the Lord and which we call the Rapture
 - The coming of the Lord is very different from the Second Coming since it will be unpredictable, unannounced, and sudden
 - Most importantly, it's a day only for the believer, and in fact, unbelievers on earth won't even detect that it's happening
 - Then as we learned last week, immediately following the coming of the Lord, a judgment moment takes place for all believers in the Church
 - This will be the judgment seat of Christ when our service to Jesus is evaluated and Jesus rewards our good service
 - So just as judgment for the unbeliever will follow the Second Coming so also judgment for believers will follow the Rapture

- But now as we move into Chapter 25, we find Jesus using parables to cover the same material again
 - And that repetition of ideas is what alerts us that we're dealing with a chiastic structure
 - And knowing this narrative is organized as a chiasm is important to helping us properly interpret His teaching
 - And the key to the value of a chiasm is knowing that the topics in the second half of the outline are presented in *reverse order*
 - That means that the first parables of Chapter 25 will cover the same materials as the last section of Chapter 24 and so on
 - Therefore, our interpretation in the second half of the chiasm must line up with our interpretation from the first half or else we've gone wrong
 - That's often why we find different and wrong interpretations of this passage and particularly of these parables
 - If we overlook the fact that Jesus organized this material in a chiastic fashion, we will confuse the timing of these events
 - We might assume Jesus organized this material chronologically, and if so our timing of these events will be way off
 - By the way, the chiasm gets its name from the way this back and forth structure is somewhat representative of the Greek letter *chi*
 - So with that background lesson, let's dive into Chapter 25 and the parables that elaborate on what we've learned in Chapter 24
 - And since we spent considerable time examining Chapter 24, we should find it much easier to move through the parables

Matt. 25:1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Matt. 25:2 “Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.

Matt. 25:3 “For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

Matt. 25:4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

Matt. 25:5 “Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.

Matt. 25:6 “But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

Matt. 25:7 “Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

Matt. 25:8 “The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

Matt. 25:9 “But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’

Matt. 25:10 “And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding

feast; and the door was shut.

Matt. 25:11 “Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’

Matt. 25:12 “But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’

Matt. 25:13 “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

- So we know this parable is teaching about the coming of the Lord, because it’s paired up with the topic that ended Chapter 24
 - But even if we didn’t know about the chiasm, we could still see clearly from the details that this parable was describing the Rapture
 - First, Jesus says this parable is about the Kingdom of Heaven, which is a reference to our future life in the Kingdom
 - Secondly, this parable is of a bride waiting for her groom to claim her for her wedding day
 - And we remember that Jesus used this same analogy in John 14
 - He said the coming of the Lord will be like a Groom appearing suddenly to claim His Bride and take Her away
 - Thirdly, there are ten women waiting to be married in the parable, but notice the parable only mentions a single groom
 - We should expect ten grooms for ten brides, but in v.1, v.5, v.6, v.10, v.11 & v.12, we have references to a single bridegroom
 - That also tells us this parable is about the Bride of Christ, which is made up of many individuals, and our one Groom, Christ
 - So the details of the parable itself point us to the events of the Rapture
 - And its connection in the chiasm to Chapter 24 gives us further confirmation
- Jesus refers to these ten women as virgins, and a virgin is the Bible’s term for a single woman of marrying age
 - Such a woman is called a virgin because a woman (and a man) were expected to refrain from sexual relations prior to marriage
 - Sex outside marriage is sin, so from the perspective of a God-fearing culture, all unmarried women are to be virgins
 - By the way, God’s expectation for purity before marriage has never changed, so virginity is still the standard for godliness
 - These virgins have gone outside to wait for their bridegroom, which indicates the virgins are expecting the groom to return soon
 - His exact arrival moment is still unknown, but the virgins are waiting and watching
 - And because it’s night time, the virgins have brought lamps to help light the way and so they can see their groom
 - Yet in v.2 Jesus says half of the virgins are wise and half are foolish because the wise virgins have oil in their lamps and the foolish do not

- And when Jesus uses the terms wise and foolish, He isn't merely describing their actions
- Zechariah 4 teaches that oil in a lamp is the Bible's picture of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit
- And Romans teaches that all who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ have the indwelling of the Spirit as a seal of redemption
- So Jesus is using the terms wise and foolish to describe the state of these virgin's hearts
 - According to the Psalms, the wise are those who receive instruction from the Lord and have hearts of understanding
 - While the foolish are those who have no fear of the Lord and have hearts of wickedness and evil
 - So the wise virgins possess a good spiritual nature while the foolish possess an evil spiritual nature
- Simply put, those virgins with oil in their lamps picture believers – those who have the Holy Spirit – while the other five virgins are unbelieving
 - The believing virgins are prepared for the Lord's return, since they possess the light of the Spirit, and they will see their groom
 - The unbelieving virgins lack the oil, meaning they lack the Spirit, so when the groom comes they will not see Him
 - Remember, when the Rapture happens, the believer will be taken but the unbelievers will not even see that the Lord came
 - So if the five virgins without oil are not believers, why are they called virgins in the parable?
 - Because it's common for parables in the Bible to feature characters who turn out to be imposters in the end
 - So as the parable begins, all ten appear to be the same but later events in the parable reveal all is not as it seems
 - In this case, Jesus is contrasting the future of those who are His by faith with those who are not believing
- Next in v.5 Jesus says that the groom didn't come back as soon as the virgins were expecting, so the virgins began to grow sleepy
 - Of course, you cannot be watching while you are sleeping, so their vigilance wanes until they are woken by a shout at midnight
 - Their bridegroom approaches and so now is the time to turn on the lamps so he can find his brides and they can see him
 - But the virgins without oil in their lamps suddenly realize they are unprepared for the groom's return and they grow desperate
 - In seeking a solution, they ask to borrow oil from the other five virgins but those virgins refuse saying they can't help
 - The only way to get oil is to go to the source, to the dealer who provides lamp oil

- But it's too late, because it takes too long to purchase the oil, and the groom arrives too quickly
 - He takes the five prepared virgins and enters the bridal chamber and closes the door
 - Interestingly, the other five virgins without oil still try to enter the room but they can't open the door
 - And the Lord responds that He doesn't know these other women, which means he doesn't recognize them as His wives
- This story is a perfect illustration of the day of the Rapture as we learned in Chapter 24
 - When the Lord comes, He will instantly receive to Himself those who belong to Him by faith
 - And those who are not His will be left behind, because Jesus did not know them
 - And there will be no time for those who don't know Jesus to decide to believe and join the event
 - It happens too quickly and invisibly, so that by the time those left behind on earth realize what's happened, the door will be shut
- So now let's use our chiasm to double check our work, because our interpretation of the parable should match up with Jesus' earlier teaching
 - First in Matthew 24:36-41, Jesus said the coming of the Lord will be like the days of Noah with people unaware that the return of Christ was near
 - Until one day there would be two working in the field or in the mill, and one would be taken and the other left
 - After Noah entered the safety of the ark, those who wished to enter couldn't because the door was shut and could not open
 - In all these details, we find a perfect comparison to the parable
 - In the parable there is the sudden arrival of the groom when the virgins were not expecting His return
 - After He arrives, half are taken and half remain behind, and those left behind try to enter but the door is shut and will not open
 - All these details line up with the matching passage from Matthew 24, so our chiasm confirms we are on the right track
- What then is the point of the parable? Jesus gives us the point of the parable at the end in v.13: be on alert for the return of the Lord
 - Those five virgins who lacked oil in their lamps were unprepared for the groom's return so that's the point: make sure you have oil
 - Or in other words, the one thing we must have if we want to be ready for the Lord's return is to have the Holy Spirit by faith
 - Those who are saved are ready and wise and prudent, but those who are not saved are foolish and unprepared and left behind

- Until a person has placed their faith in Jesus Christ, nothing else matters
 - There is no Kingdom future for that person, no eternal glory, no rewards
 - There's no point talking to that person about how to stop sinning or about the signs of the end of the age
 - There's no reason to encourage them to serve a Lord they do not know or to do anything other than to put their faith in Jesus
 - If you don't possess the Spirit, Jesus says He doesn't know you, and if He doesn't know you, He isn't going to rescue you
- And how do you get this oil? First, you have to go to the source to get your oil, as the parable says
 - You can't get it from someone else by association or by community
 - You can hang around Christians all you want, but you won't become one by association
 - You can attend church or small groups all you want, but you don't get saved by being in community
 - Your spouse may be Christian, but that won't save you...your kids may pray for you and you may do good works, but that isn't oil
- You have to go to the source for your oil, and the source is Christ Himself
 - You need to understand you are not OK the way you are without Jesus
 - Despite what you may have heard others say, God does *not* love you and have a wonderful plan for your life if you aren't His
 - The Bible says His wrath rests on those who practice sin, and His plan for all who reject Him is not wonderful...it's horrifying
 - It is a future in an eternal place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place of burning and torment
 - But Jesus is willing and able to save you from that eternal fate if you place your faith in Him, if you trust Him to pay that price for you
 - And as you place your faith in Him, you receive forgiveness for all your sins, and you are washed clean and you receive the Spirit
 - And because you have the Spirit, your "oil," then when He comes, you will see Him and He will receive you joyfully
 - And because you don't know when that day comes, you can't plan to get right with God when you see the Lord coming for His Bride
 - There is no better time to confess Jesus as Lord than now...because you don't know if you have tomorrow
 - Salvation cannot wait for another day because you don't know if you have another day...that's the lesson of this first parable
- And that leads us to the second parable...

Matt. 25:14 “For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.

Matt. 25:15 “To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.

Matt. 25:16 “Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents.

Matt. 25:17 “In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more.

Matt. 25:18 “But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

- As we begin our study of this parable, let’s take a second look at our chiasm, our roadmap
 - This parable is paired up in the chiasm with Jesus teaching on the believer’s judgment for rewards in Matthew 24:42-51
 - Which means this is an illustration of how believers are judged after the Rapture, when Jesus evaluates our service to Him
 - But once again, even if we knew nothing about chiasms, we could still understand the meaning of the parable by its details
 - So looking at the parable, a master gives his slaves “talents” to steward during His absence
 - A talent in Jesus’ day was a measure of weight of about 130 lb or nearly 60 kg
 - A talent of silver was equal to 9 years salary for a laborer, so even a single talent represented considerable wealth
 - In fact, the meaning of our modern word “talent” finds its origins in this parable, since a talent is something used to bring wealth
 - The three slaves in the parable were given differing amounts of wealth to manage in the master’s absence, according to each’s ability in v.15
 - But regardless of their different assignments, each slave was expected to manage his assigned wealth responsibly
 - Even the slave who received only one talent still had a significant responsibility in light of the high value of a talent
 - Therefore, all slaves were required and expected to serve their master’s interests faithfully in his absence.

Matt. 25:19 “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

Matt. 25:20 “The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’

Matt. 25:21 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were

faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matt. 25:22 "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.'

Matt. 25:23 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matt. 25:24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed.

Matt. 25:25 'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

Matt. 25:26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.

Matt. 25:27 'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.

Matt. 25:28 'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

Matt. 25:29 "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

Matt. 25:30 "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- So the master returns and evaluates each slave's service to see if the slaves have been faithful in discharging their duties
 - The slave given five talents doubled the master's money as did the slave given two talents
 - Even though one slave earned far more than the other, both received the same commendation with identical wording
 - They had different starting points because the master assigned them different responsibilities
 - But both rendered faithful service and so they both received the same reward, which was the right to manage additional wealth
 - So the master's rewards to his slaves were based on their faithful service, not on the magnitude of their achievements
 - Then we have the third slave who only received a single talent, presumably because he had a low potential to manage well
 - And sure enough, this slave proves the master right because he mismanages even the one talent he was given
 - He simply dug a hole in the ground and hid his talent

- When the master returns to evaluate that third slave, he rebukes the slave for failing to provide faithful service
 - The slave said he feared the master because he was demanding, a man who expected a harvest even in fields he hadn't planted
 - But notice in v.26 the master calls this slave "lazy" which means he doesn't buy the man's excuse for not serving well
- The master says if the slave knew he was demanding, then that's all the more reason for the slave to be diligent in serving him well
 - If the slave was concerned about keeping the talent safe, then put it in the bank, where at least it would have earned interest
 - So the slave was not afraid, he was lazy and uninterested in serving the master
 - Moreover, he demonstrates that he didn't truly know the master, or else he would have understood what was expected
- So the master takes that slave's single talent and gives it to the other slave who showed the greatest potential to manage the master's business
 - While the third slave is consigned to outer darkness, to a place that represents eternal punishment in hell
 - Here again, we see that common feature of parables where one character is revealed at the end to be an imposter
 - Since the third slave lacked a true relationship with the master, he was never truly a servant
 - He only knew the master as hard and unreasonable, but he never knew him to be loving and generous and willing to reward
 - Like those virgins without oil, the master did not know this slave so he is not a part of the master's house
 - So we can clearly see Jesus is describing a reward system for believers in this parable, which is exactly what our chiasm predicted
 - Jesus (our Master) expects every believer to serve Him during His absence
 - A talent in the parable symbolizes a believer's opportunity to serve the Lord faithfully in some important and challenging way
 - The way we are called to serve the Lord will vary in keeping with our abilities and station in life
 - Jesus calls some believers to bear greater burdens in service to Him, to make greater sacrifices, to manage more talents
 - Nevertheless, we are all His servants so we all have an expectation to serve and we all have opportunity for reward
 - Our reward doesn't depend on the magnitude of our effort or the degree of our success...just our faithfulness to serve
- And how will we be rewarded? This is where we must be careful in drawing conclusions from the parable for details that aren't made clear to us

- For example, in the parable the slaves kept the additional talents and were even given more talents taken from the third slave
 - But in our case, we can't say exactly what form our material rewards will take in the Kingdom
 - We can say that there are material rewards involved, some measure of wealth in the Kingdom
- Jesus tells us that we will receive material reward in the Kingdom as part of our reward for serving Him here now

Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

Luke 16:11 “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

Luke 16:12 “And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

- Unrighteous wealth is Jesus' term for the money of this unrighteous world, the wealth of earth
- While true riches refers to the wealth of the Kingdom, the wealth that can never fade or rust or be stolen
- So Jesus says that there is wealth in the Kingdom just as there is wealth in this world, but this world's wealth burns up one day
 - But the wealth of the Kingdom lasts, and what we have there is connected to how well we serve Christ here
 - So we must choose whether to serve the interest of earthly wealth or serve Christ's interests...we can't serve both
- That's why Paul tells us this in Colossians

Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

Col. 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

- We don't know what our reward will be exactly, but that doesn't matter because we can trust Jesus to do what is right and good
- Meanwhile, we have incentive to do our best at all times because we don't know when He comes so we want to be ready

- So what's the point of the second parable: believers also need to be ready for Jesus' return, and we get ready by being found doing what Jesus asked us to do
 - He has asked us to serve Him, to go to the nations to bring believers into the Church and teach them to obey Christ
 - We each do our part in that work in our own way, according to Jesus' direction and the gifts and opportunities He gave us
 - Some of us bear greater burdens by managing more talents, so to speak, but all have something to do according to our ability
 - And we all are being measured according to the same scale of faithfulness so we each have opportunity for equal reward
 - What matters is not our results or even the degree of work...it is faithful desire to please Him knowing He will reward us
 - Remember what the writer of Hebrews said about faith:

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- We must first believe that Jesus is the Lord, the writer says, because without that faith it's impossible to please Him
 - But the writer goes on to say that it's also impossible to please Jesus if we don't believe that Jesus is a rewarder too
 - We need that motivation of reward to offset our sin which is motivating us to do the opposite of pleasing Jesus
- You might tell me that you don't like the idea of serving Jesus for the opportunity for rewards...
 - You say you want to serve Jesus just because you love Him and He saved you
 - To which I would say, you're right...serving Jesus because you love Him is the best reason to serve....so why aren't you doing it?
 - And we all know the answer...because loving someone isn't always enough to get us to do the right thing
- Parents, you love your children and they know you love them, and you care for them and so you should expect them to do what you tell them to do, right?
 - But despite your love for them, they still disobey you, don't they?
 - So apparently love isn't always enough to motivate good behavior, and we know why...it's called sin
 - Sin inside every one of us motivates us to act in unloving ways even against those we know love us
 - So we sometimes use reward to motivate our children to obey us and our Father in Heaven does the same thing for us
 - The Lord has given us resources to use in serving Him, and He holds out the

opportunity for reward for those who please Him by their service

- You cannot please Him if you don't have faith in Him, if you don't have oil, if you don't have the Spirit
- So the first step to pleasing God is to place your faith in Jesus Christ
- Then for those who have faith, the Lord expects us to use our resources – our time, talent and treasure – to serve Him knowing He rewards us
 - First, you have time to give to Jesus in service, and time is perhaps the most precious commodity you have to offer
 - In our modern age, the enemy has been particularly focused on taking away our available time
 - Many of us have treasure and all of us have talent, but few of us seem to have time anymore
- Now in these days of quarantine, you may have more time than you have ever had before to offer Jesus...so how are you using that time?
 - Can you look back on the weeks and months just passed and see your service to Jesus? Can others see it? Or was it wasted?
 - Is your service time buried like a talent in the backyard?
- Consider how you spend every minute of your day, and ask yourself which minutes are spent serving Jesus and which minutes are for you?
 - If you want to be ready for your Lord's return, then take an inventory of how you spend your time and make some decisions
 - Remember, Jesus said you can't serve God and wealth, and yet so much of our life is about serving the cause of ourselves
 - Shift time away from worldly pursuits and toward eternal concerns, and you will be pleasing your Master
- Secondly, how are you using your talent, and by talent I mean your natural and supernatural abilities?
 - We all have been equipped by God with natural born abilities and a spiritual gift that we received when we came to faith
 - So are you using those abilities, those talents, for Jesus in some way?
 - If you have a gift to pray, are you praying? If you have a gift to teach, are you teaching someone?
 - If you have a gift of leadership, are you actively leading God's people?
 - Or if a gift of encouragement or helps or giving or whatever...is that talent buried or is it being put to work?
 - If you want to be ready for your Lord's return, be sure to be found using your talents as the Master assigned you to do in His absence
 - And your assigned spiritual gift is a pretty good indication of how the Master wanted you serving Him
 - Learn what your gift is by stepping out in different areas of service, and make

use of your spiritual gift and you will please the master

- Finally, we are called by Scripture to be generous in our treasure for the sake of the Kingdom
 - Jesus said we can't serve wealth and serve God at the same time, but we can use our wealth to serve God
 - How much you decide to give to the Lord's work or where you send or put your money to work, it is between you and the Lord
 - There is no amount of giving set by Scripture for the Christian, and it's not my business what you do with your wealth
 - I'm just saying that you should approach your treasure the same way you approach your time and your talent
 - When it comes to your wealth, concern yourself with pleasing Jesus
 - And if you bury your wealth, meaning you hoard your money or you spend on your own desires, then you are being unfaithful
 - But if you give sacrificially to the needs of the body and to the work of the Kingdom, then you will be pleasing the Master
 - There is reward – eternal reward – for those who serve Him well
 - We should look forward to the day you see your Groom coming and we should do so with no regrets, eager to hear Him say:
 - Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Master

- Time has come to end our study of the Olivet Discourse, and at the same time we also come to the end of the eschatology teaching in the Gospel of Matthew
 - After today, we enter the final section of Matthew's gospel to study Jesus' Last Supper, betrayal and passion
 - Before we get to that climactic section, we need to finish the parables of Matthew 25
 - And because we observed Jesus organized his teaching as a chiasm, we know where we're going today
 - We learned last week how the Olivet Discourse follows a chiastic outline, meaning Chapter 25 repeats the teaching of Chapter 24 in reverse
 - In Chapter 24, Jesus started teaching on the Second Coming and judgment for unbelievers
 - Then He moved to teaching about the Rapture and the judgment for believers' rewards
 - Now in Chapter 25 we're studying parables about the same topics but in a reverse order
 - So Jesus starts with parables about His return for the church and our rewards moment, which we studied last week
 - And today we finish the chapter with parables about the Second Coming of Christ and the judgment for those He finds on earth
- At first, you may think this final section won't be very relevant for us, since these events focus on others and not us personally
 - But that's not true, since there is more going on here than meets the eye
 - So let's study it and see what we find together
 - We begin where we left off in the final parable of the chapter

Matt. 25:31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Matt. 25:32 “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

- Jesus has returned to the topic of His Second Coming, and we know that both by the chiasm and by what we see in the details
 - First, Jesus says this return will be one of glory accompanied by angels for all the world to see
 - But we know the Rapture is not a coming of Jesus in glory or with angels for all to see, since it will be invisible to the world
 - Secondly, He says He judges all nations at this time, yet we know the Rapture only involves a judgment of believers
- So Jesus is describing the events of His Second Coming, which happens at the very end

of this age following the seven-year Tribulation on earth

- And at that time Jesus says He will sit on a glorious throne to judge the nations He finds waiting for Him on earth
- Now it's important to understand this judgment is not the final, eternal judgment for unbelievers
- According to the book of Revelation, the final, eternal judgment for unbelievers happens after the 1,000-year Kingdom period
 - Here in Chapter 25 Jesus is describing a different judgment that takes place before the Kingdom period even starts
 - So we need to take a moment to understand what this particular judgment is all about
- First, let's go back to what Jesus told us about this moment in Chapter 24:

Matt. 24:30 “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

Matt. 24:31 “And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

- At His Second Coming, Jesus said He would appear as a bright light in an otherwise pitch black sky coming with great power and glory
 - At that moment, all the tribes of the earth will mourn at the sight of Jesus returning
 - They mourn because the unbelieving world took the mark of the beast during the Tribulation and worshiped him as messiah
 - So now as they see the true Messiah returning to defeat the Antichrist, the world realizes this isn't going to go well for them
- Then Jesus says He will send His angels around the earth to gather the elect from wherever they are and bring them to Jesus at Jerusalem
 - The elect refers to the believers, primarily the Jews, who have come to faith during Tribulation and are still alive
 - They will be gathered to meet Jesus and to participate in the feast that inaugurates the opening of the Kingdom
- But now in v.32 we learn that not just the elect are gathered at that time, but *all* the nations are gathered, meaning unbelievers are also collected by the angels
 - Who are these unbelievers who are still alive at Jesus' return?
 - Well, we know these people are *not* those unbelievers who fought in the Antichrist's army in the battle of Armageddon
 - Revelation 19 and Zechariah 14 tell us that everyone engaged in that battle will be killed, including the Antichrist himself

- So these nations of unbelievers are people who did not fight in the army but they were worshippers of the Antichrist
 - So Jesus must now decide what to do with them
 - And that's the purpose of this judgment...it's a judgment to determine who will enter the Kingdom and who will not
 - And to explain this judgment moment, Jesus moves into a parable in v.32 of sheep and goats
- Jesus says this judgment will be like a shepherd sorting sheep from goats, which was a common shepherding task of the day
 - Goat and sheep could mix in the pasture during the day, but at night they were separated into separate pens
 - So a shepherd brought the herd in from the field and lined up his sheep to enter their pen and some goats would be mixed in
 - So at the door of the pen, the shepherd stood guard as sheep passed by, and the shepherd separated the goats out of the flock
- So Jesus is saying that is what He will do...He will determine who are sheep and who are goats and separate them one from another
 - So what does it mean to be a sheep or a goat in this parable?
 - To learn that, we need to read the rest of the parable

Matt. 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Matt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matt. 25:35 ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;

Matt. 25:36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

Matt. 25:37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?

Matt. 25:38 ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?

Matt. 25:39 ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

Matt. 25:40 “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

Matt. 25:41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Matt. 25:42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

Matt. 25:43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not

clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

Matt. 25:44 "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'

Matt. 25:45 "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

Matt. 25:46 "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- To determine what a "sheep" or a "goat" is in this parable, we only need to look at the ultimate outcome of each group
 - To cut to the chase, in v.34 we learn that sheep are those who will enter the Kingdom, while in v.46 we learn that goats are those who enter hell
 - So without a doubt, the sheep represent believers, for we know only believers will enter into the Kingdom in that day
 - And for the same reason, we know the goats are unbelievers, so only the unbeliever will be consigned to hell
 - So the separating of sheep from goats is a judgment to determine who may enter the Kingdom on the first day and who will be put to death
 - Death is the only possible alternative to entering the Kingdom because the Kingdom will fill the entire earth, as Scripture says

Psa. 22:27 **All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You.**

Psa. 22:28 **For the kingdom is the LORD'S**

And He rules over the nations.

- So if the Kingdom fills the entire earth, and only believers are in the Kingdom, then there will be no place left for an unbeliever
 - Therefore, the only option Jesus has for the unbelievers He finds waiting at His Second Coming is to put them to death
- At this point you may wonder why don't the unbelievers simply confess Christ at this moment rather than face certain death and an eternity in Hell?
 - Clearly, these "goats" will recognize that Jesus is the Lord, as He sits on His glorious throne with His angels preparing to judge them
 - And since they haven't died yet, we assume they still have time to make a confession of faith so why don't they do it?
 - Well, in fact, we know that these unbelievers *will* confess Christ, either now in that moment or at some later moment

Phil. 2:10 **so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in**

heaven and on earth and under the earth,
Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory
 of God the Father.

- So we know all humanity, including these unbelievers, will confess Christ sooner or later, but Paul *didn't* say all will have saving faith
 - In fact, it is literally impossible for these unbelievers standing before Jesus to have “faith” that Jesus is Lord
 - Any confession made at this point can't be based on faith, because Jesus can be plainly seen to be Lord and faith isn't sight
- Paul tells us this using the word “hope” as a synonym for faith

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

Rom. 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

- Paul says we can't have faith in something we already see, because once something is self-evident, it no longer depends upon faith to believe
 - Therefore, once these goats see Jesus, they won't be able to show faith in Him, because sight nullifies faith
 - Anything they confess at that point is merely stating the obvious, and so they will be found without faith
 - And being without faith, they will be judged and put to death and will enter Hell like all unbelievers
- Now as this judgment moment plays out, both the sheep and the goats are left with questions about what's their respective fates
 - So Jesus begins in v.34 to explain to both groups why they receive the judgment they do, starting with the sheep on His right hand
 - Jesus tells the sheep that they are blessed by God to inherit the Kingdom of God
 - Jesus uses the word inheritance to describe the eternal riches awaiting these believers and all believers in the Kingdom
 - So let's understand why Jesus is calling the Kingdom our inheritance
 - An inheritance is something we receive because we are an heir to someone who has died
 - For example, let's say you and your siblings are heirs of a great fortune to be handed down by your father when he dies
 - His fortune will be split among all the children, including you, and of course you did nothing to become an heir
 - You were made an heir by the actions of your parents who brought you into this

world and made you part of a family

- So the opportunity to be an heir had nothing to do with your actions or choices but you do have a part to play in the inheritance
 - Because you can influence how much of your father's wealth will be assigned to you in his last will and testament
 - Presumably, if you please your father during your life, you may influence him to assign you a greater portion of the inheritance
 - If you fail to please your father, you may receive less, but regardless of your behavior, you are an heir by birth alone
- That is the analogy that the Bible uses to describe our rewards in the Kingdom...it is our inheritance
 - First, the Bible says we are fellow heirs with Christ

Rom. 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,
Rom. 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

- Notice the Bible says that by our faith we were adopted into the family of God
 - We had to be adopted because we didn't come out of our mother's womb as believers in Christ
 - All humanity are born as children of wrath, members of Satan's family because of our sin nature
 - That's why we had to be born again by faith in Jesus, and adopted by God into a new family with Christ as our head
- But notice, Paul also says we are heirs with Christ, because Christ Himself is an heir of all things in Creation the Bible says:

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- The Father appointed His Son, Jesus, to be an heir of everything in Creation, but if Christ is the heir, who died to leave Him an inheritance?
 - Notice the writer also tells us Jesus is the One Who made all things
 - So Christ is both the rich father who has the inheritance and Christ is the child who receives an inheritance
- How is that possible? First, Christ is the Creator, so everything in Creation belongs to Him

- When He died on the cross, the Creation was His inheritance which became available to His heirs
- Anyone who was included in Jesus' last will and testament – or we could say anyone in His covenant – is an heir to that wealth
- But then three days later Christ was raised from the dead, and being alive again, He receives back His own inheritance
 - It would be like your rich father coming back to life... he would likely demand you return your inheritance until he died again
 - But here's the difference... Jesus will never die again, so He willingly shares His inheritance with His fellow heirs forever
 - Our inheritance is a share of what Jesus Created, the world and all it contains, and we receive that eternal reward in the Kingdom
- That's what Jesus is telling these sheep in this moment of judgment
 - They are heirs because they were chosen by God before the foundations of the world to be adopted into the family of God
 - Just like the children of that rich father, these believers did nothing to make themselves members of the family of God
 - The Father brought them to faith and adopted them into His family by the kindness of His will, as Paul says

Eph. 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

- And now that the Kingdom has arrived, these believers are being welcomed in to receive their inheritance
 - They are heirs with Christ, so they will inherit some portion of the Kingdom as their reward for serving Jesus in faith
 - James sums up everything we're learning in one verse

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

- Interestingly, these believers are all babes in Christ, relatively immature believers who have very little training or discipleship
 - We know they all came to faith during the seven year Tribulation, because they were not included in the Rapture of the Church
 - And during most of those seven years, it will be dangerous if not impossible to fellowship with believers or be discipled
- So these sheep will have had very limited opportunities during those short years to grow

in their faith much less to serve Jesus

- They will be like soldiers who received a battlefield promotion...they were thrown into the fight and expected to do their best
- And what we're learning now is that their understanding is so limited that they weren't even aware they were serving Jesus
- So to help them understand what they did to please Him, Jesus begins to recount the good things these sheep did after coming to faith in Tribulation
 - In vs.35-36 Jesus lists six things they did for Him including giving Him food, water, shelter, clothing, medical treatment, visits in prison
 - Notice in v.37 Jesus calls these individuals "the righteous" confirming they are saved by faith
 - In response, the believers wonder in vs.37-38 when did they do these things for Jesus, since they never saw Him before now?
 - Jesus answers them by pointing to another group of people standing nearby and says you did those things for this group of my brothers
 - Who is this other group of Jesus' brothers that received this service during Tribulation?
 - He could be talking about any believers persecuted in Tribulation, but I believe Jesus is speaking more specifically
 - Jesus' brothers likely refers to the Jews in Tribulation who ultimately come to faith at Jesus' Second Coming
 - The book of Revelation tells us that the Jewish people will be the people most persecuted by the Antichrist during Tribulation
 - Satan, who indwells the Antichrist, will seek to exterminate the Jewish nation using unprecedented level of persecution
 - But the Lord intends to rescue His people from the enemy in the end and ultimately bring them to faith in Him
 - In the meantime, the Jewish people will endure great trial, so they will need the support and comfort of allies
- Now we're learning that Jesus will send them allies in the form of new believers who come to faith in Tribulation and serve the Jews out of compassion
 - They will feed, clothe, protect and otherwise assist the Jewish people (and perhaps Gentile believers as well) from Satan's attacks
 - And they will do so at great personal sacrifice, because anyone who aligns himself against the Antichrist will become a target
 - It will be like those who hid Jews from the Nazis during WWII...they risked their own lives to save the persecuted
 - It was a demonstration of faith, and Jesus views that service as if it was rendered directly to Him personally
 - Now these believers hear this explanation, and they are clearly surprised to learn that these actions were serving and pleasing Jesus

- At the time, something inside them just told them it was the right thing to do
 - And even though they feared the consequences, that love and compassion compelled them to act
- I'm also guessing they were not disciplined in their faith during the short years they spent living during Tribulation
 - We can assume they had very little contact with a local church and more than likely they was no church at all
 - They probably couldn't study the Bible or perhaps even access one, so they probably had no understanding of eternal rewards
 - Nevertheless, just their faith alone was enough to cause them to serve others under such difficult circumstances
 - And that selfless service became a testimony to their faith and an opportunity for eternal reward in the Kingdom
- I suspect many of you may be struggling a little with what you've learned about eternal reward
 - Perhaps you're now wondering if you've done enough to please Jesus or whether you will receive a good reward?
 - Perhaps you're saying, "Oh great here's another thing I have to worry about... something else on my To Do list I can't get done!"
 - Or you're stressing over the pressure to know your spiritual gift or pressure to volunteer more, etc.
 - If that's how you're thinking right now, then let the story of these sheep be an encouragement to you
 - Listen to what Jesus told these believers, and allow it to take the burden off your shoulders
 - He says they were serving Him even when they didn't know they were doing it... think about that for a moment
 - Remember what Jesus said about what it's like to serve Him

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

Matt. 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

Matt. 11:30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

- Jesus says serving Him will be like resting from heavy burdens, because serving Jesus is doing things your heart *wants* to do
 - When we serve Jesus, we do so with spiritual abilities He gives us by His Spirit
 - And He gives us opportunity to serve, and He brings the fruit from our service... *so what exactly do we do?*

- Simply put, we show up...because serving Jesus isn't about our ability, it's about our availability
 - Notice back in Matthew 11:29 Jesus said serving Him starts with learning from Him
 - He is gentle and humble in how He teaches us, so even the process of learning isn't hard or burdensome
- We just follow His lead, going where He sends us, doing what He asks with the power He gives us and achieving the results He determines
 - Friends, that is easy work...that is a light burden
 - It's like Jesus gave us a box that says "Some assembly required"
 - He gave something to build, but He provided all the materials, all the tools and a set of well-written, easy instructions
 - All He asked us to do is open the box...take a step forward...serve Him where you are
- That kind of work is actually a form of rest when you compare it to the work of serving the world, because serving the world is truly a burden
 - We are never satisfied in this world, and therefore the work is never easy, and the rewards are fleeting at best
 - So if you think serving Jesus is just another burden on top of serving in the world, then friends you aren't doing it right
 - The work of serving Christ is supposed to replace the heavy burdens of serving the world
 - You're supposed to say no to something so you can say yes to Jesus...let's go back to those sheep again
 - When they served Jesus by feeding or clothing a needy Jew, they were trading something in the world for the chance to serve in that way
 - Maybe they took food off their own table to feed those in need
 - Maybe they had to sacrifice their family's safety or maybe they had to give up space in their house to take in a refuge
 - Those believers set worldly priorities aside to serve Christ because they felt compelled to love someone else more than themselves
 - They weren't Bible experts, they probably never set foot in a church
 - And they certainly didn't spend decades seeking out the perfect mission opportunity
 - They didn't even know they were serving Christ and yet they did and they were rewarded
 - That's what serving Jesus looks like when you're working for a gentle and humble Master
 - You don't feel pressured, you don't resent the sacrifices, you don't even think of it as work
 - You'll feel you're finally doing what you were created to do, and the sacrifices

are an honor, and the results come easy

- So if you're stressing over serving Christ or missing out on eternal rewards, let me make this easy for you
 - Just wake up every day, take a look at your to do list or calendar and ask yourself one question:
 - How do I make everything I'm planning to do today about serving Jesus? How will I show Christ's love to everyone I meet?
 - If you take that attitude into each day, the Lord will direct you into the moments where He wants you to serve
 - That's a light, easy burden and it's one that brings reward
- Before we end, we still need to cover Jesus' comments to the goats, because they too were confused by their circumstances
 - In v.41 Jesus turns to the "goats" on His left and says "Depart from me"
 - Remember, the Kingdom is on the whole earth, so when Jesus says depart, He means do not remain on earth
 - He also calls them accursed ones, meaning they are under the curse of eternal judgment
 - And they will go into the eternal fire which was originally prepared for the devil and the angels that follow him
 - There's a popular myth that when a person dies today and goes to Hell that they are greeted by Satan, but Satan isn't in Hell and never will be
 - The Lake of Fire is Satan's future home, and unbelievers will one day join him there after the Kingdom
 - But today Satan roams free while unbelievers go to Hell, so they will not find a party with the devil...they simply find misery
 - Now at this point the goats are thoroughly confused, because they can't tell the difference between themselves and the sheep
 - The two groups of people probably looked the same, both have suffered in similar ways over the past seven years
 - They see both groups are kneeling before Jesus now as He sits on His throne, so why are the sheep entering but not them?
 - Earlier when the sheep asked for their explanation, Jesus didn't say anything about their faith
 - But of course, we know the sheep were saved by their faith because Jesus called them righteous
 - But Jesus never made that point to them...He just pointed to their good deeds done in faith
- Now Jesus makes a similar point to the goats saying their lack of service to Him was a reflection that they never knew Him and He never knew them
 - Remember that one slave from the parable of the talents who never served the

Master...he just buried his one talent

- He knew the master was a hard man, but he didn't know the master was also a man who was prepared to reward His servants
- It was evidence that the servant never really had a relationship with his master and so he was put out of the master's house
- Now we see that again here...these unbelievers lived through the same Tribulation as the believers, but they had no inclination to serve Jesus
 - They didn't feed or visit or care for those being persecuted because they were the ones supporting the persecution
 - They were living exactly according to the biblical principle that Paul gives us in Galatians

Gal. 4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Gal. 4:29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

- It has always been true, since the days of Cain and Abel, that those of the flesh will persecute those of the Spirit
 - The unbelieving world will always and forever persecute the believing world, but when Jesus comes that persecution ends
 - These goats couldn't understand why they were condemned but that's understandable because they didn't know Jesus
- If you don't know you are a sinner, you don't have reason to need a Savior
 - If you don't realize you are going to be judged, then you don't look for a way to be forgiven
 - And if you don't realize what it means to have faith, then you won't understand when you are condemned for lacking it
- The only thing Jesus could do to explain the difference to these goats was to point to the way faith of the sheep led them to live differently
 - That's living for Christ...you know when you're pleasing Jesus when He can point to you as His example to explain faith to unbelievers
 - We have a word for that kind of life: it's called being a witness
 - A witness is someone who testifies to the truth, and that's the goal of serving Jesus...to be a witness to the world
 - It's not about achievements or being busy 24 hours a day...it's about a witness that leads people to know and follow Jesus
 - I hope you learned a lot about eternal rewards and the nature of the last days through the course of these two chapters
 - But more than anything, I hope you've gained a new perspective on serving Jesus

- I hope you want to please Him by serving Him better and more consistently
- Don't waste another minute...use every one because they are running out and He could appear at any moment

- The four Gospel accounts could have no purpose nor significance without the passion of Christ...in fact, they couldn't rightly be called "Gospels" without it
 - The "good news" of these four accounts is ultimately found in the death of the Lamb of God in our place and His resurrection to bring us to glory
 - Everything we've been studying for the better part of 2.5 years has been leading to this final section of Matthew's book
 - This final section begins in Chapter 26 and takes us to the end of the book in Chapter 28
 - We'll cover the Last Supper, Jesus' betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, His trials, crucifixion, and resurrection
 - We're going to take a fresh look at these events because our understanding is heavily colored by church tradition and even folklore
 - You probably know Jesus' birth story has been overshadowed by Christmas traditions and the lyrics of Christmas carols
 - Likewise, the passion of Christ has been colored by Easter traditions of various churches and by popular culture
 - Even the day of the week on which churches typically claim Jesus died is wrong
 - So we need to take a fresh look at Scripture as we move into the next chapter and set aside all our assumptions
 - And since we are moving into a new section, let's revisit our circumstances and the timeline of events
 - In His final week of life, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Sunday and went directly to the temple courts
 - He taught that day and again on Monday and Tuesday, being inspected by the religious authorities
 - Jesus passed their inspections, proving Himself to be a worthy sacrifice, the Lamb of God
 - Each night Jesus walked east over the Mt of Olives to a little town called Bethany and probably slept in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus
 - At the start of Chapter 24, Jesus was exiting the temple on Tuesday afternoon when His disciples posed those questions
 - Jesus answered them seated on the Mt. of Olives and then after the discourse was over, He continued to Bethany Tuesday night
- That's where we are now as we return to the text

Matt. 26:1 When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples,
Matt. 26:2 "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion."

- Jesus says that in two days He will be handed over for crucifixion on the Passover

- The phrase “handed over” implies a transfer of custody from one authority to another
- In its simplest sense, Jesus was referring to Judas handing Jesus over to the Jewish authorities
- Equally likely, Jesus was referring to the Jewish authorities handing Jesus over to the Romans to be executed
- But in a spiritual sense, Jesus was also referring to the Father’s plan to hand His Son over to the enemy
 - And that’s the story Matthew is now setting out to tell in these final chapters
 - It’s the story of how the Lord of all Creation, a man popular in His day, could end up crucified with criminals
- But before we get into that story, Jesus’ comments on the Passover give us an opportunity to introduce another important detail
 - There is still a good deal of mystery surrounding the timeline of the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection
 - Most have been taught that Jesus died on a Friday, but as we will see in future weeks, that doesn’t fit with Scripture
 - And the timing of other important events like the Last Supper are also confused
- So as we study the events, I need to review a couple of important rules that will guide our time-keeping observations in this study
 - First, the start and end of a Jewish “day” is reckoned according to the pattern God established during the Creation in Genesis 1
 - In Genesis, each day of Creation began with a 12-hour period of darkness followed by a 12-hour period of light
 - God called the arrival of darkness “evening” and the arrival of light “morning” and the two periods together form a single day
 - Because God described each day of Creation as an evening and a morning, Jews adopted the same convention for counting days
 - A Jewish day begins as darkness arrives which is typically 6 PM and then continues for 24 hours until the next evening
 - For example, a Monday begins at 6:00 PM on Sunday night
 - We count the beginning of our days at midnight, which means our day starts six hours later in the middle of the dark period
 - Comparing the two side by side systems, we can see that the Jewish “day” begins six hours earlier than a modern day
 - So when marking time, we need to remember that an evening event takes place on the next “day” in Jewish reckoning
- The second difference in Jewish reckoning is that when counting days, Jews consider any part of a day as equally a whole day
 - So if it was 5:00 PM on a Sunday afternoon, then the start of Monday is barely one

hour away starting at 6:00 PM Sunday night

- Nevertheless, a Jew in Jesus' time would still consider that one remaining hour on Sunday as equally the whole "day" of Sunday
- Therefore, if you asked how many days remain until Tuesday, the answer you would get is two days (i.e., Sunday & Monday)
- In summary, in Scripture new days start at sundown and we count any hours remaining in the current day as a day
- Looking at Matthew 26, Jesus says that the Passover would come after two days (or we could say it was two days away)
 - So to determine what day of the week Passover took place, we need to determine the day of the week Jesus spoke these words
 - We get the answer by carefully consulting the time references that we find in Matthew and the other Gospels
- First, the Gospels report Jesus came to Bethany and stayed in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus the day before He entered Jerusalem
 - Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, Palm Sunday as we call it now, so that means He entered Bethany on a Saturday
 - John's Gospel reports that the day Jesus entered Bethany was six days before Passover
 - So we count Saturday as one day and then five more days puts Passover on a Thursday that year
- After Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey on Sunday, He went to the temple to teach late that afternoon.
 - Mark tells us that Jesus spent Sunday afternoon and the next two days in the temple
 - Each night Jesus went back to Bethany to spend the night and the next day He returned to the temple
 - And all the Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus delivered the Olivet Discourse on Tuesday afternoon
- That brings us to the start of Chapter 26...it's Tuesday afternoon shortly before sundown, so Wednesday is just an hour or so away
 - And at that moment, Jesus says two days remain until Passover
 - Using our rules, we count the hour remaining on that Tuesday afternoon as a whole day plus the next day, Wednesday
 - So if Passover started two days later, then it must be on Thursday, which begins on Wednesday night...confused yet?
 - The point is, Matthew's time references in Chapter 26 agree with John's time references in John 14...the Passover happened on a Thursday
 - Which means that Jesus died on a Thursday, not on a Friday as tradition tells us
 - And we will see additional evidence later in Matthew that confirms Jesus did, in

fact, die on a Thursday

- Now you may be thinking this is interesting, Steve, but do we really need this level of detail? Is it really *that* important?
 - Let me answer that question with a question: is it important to you that your accountant can do math correctly?
 - What if your CPA's math was correct most of the time, but once in a while he was a little off...maybe he missed a zero here or there
 - Would that be important to you?
- Obviously, we want our accountant's math to always be precise because it's our money he's dealing with, and we don't want it mismanaged
 - But there's actually a more important reason why we want a CPA who does math properly...
 - Knowing how to add and subtract properly is a basic test of competence and trustworthiness for an accountant
 - If your CPA can't do math, he isn't competent to manage your finances
- That's why we should care about getting details like timelines correct when studying Scripture...it's a basic test of competence
 - Making sense of Scripture is ultimately the job of the Holy Spirit working inside us
 - But the Bible says He brings understanding to those teachers who handle the word with care and precision

2Tim. 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

- Those who work diligently to handle the word of God accurately are approved by God, and His approval is evidenced by insight
 - He reveals answers to those who seek the truth in a diligent manner because this brings Him glory
 - Conversely, when teachers approach study in a lazy manner or if we're content with "rounding errors," we will not be approved
- But as with our accountant example, the biggest problem with being a poor workman is the damage it does to our reputation
 - When any Christian upholds traditions that are not supported by Scripture, we set up ourselves and others for a crisis of faith
 - I've encountered believers who came across a Bible verse that contradicted what they had been told, and it rocked their world
 - They encounter a crisis of faith, because they suddenly wonder if the Bible can be trusted or if their faith was in something false
 - Some feel cheated or deceived to the point that they walk away from following Jesus

- So we may think understanding exactly which day Jesus died on to be a minor thing, and you may question why we spend time on it
 - But for a believer wrestling with the trustworthiness of Scripture, these details are the make-or-break differences
 - And if our Bible teachers and pastors can't find biblical support for traditions, we need to abandon our traditions
- And in their place, we need to teach what the Bible says, and more than that, we need to be able to defend it in detail
 - We need to take care with God's word so that we get everything right, as best we can, not overlooking even the smallest detail
 - Because the Bible validates itself, and there are no contradictions...just our own misunderstandings
- So let's return to Chapter 26, and from this point Matthew's narrative will jump around from scene to scene to highlight certain events
 - It reads a little like a movie script, where a writer weaves together action from different scenes so he can tell a single story
 - In this case, the events of this week involve three primary scenes
 - There is Jesus in and around the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mt. of Olives
 - The Jewish officials in their exclusive homes of the upper city of Jerusalem
 - And the Romans officials in the Praetorian
 - Chapter 26 started with the scene of Jesus in the Garden, and now Matthew moves to the home of the high priest, Caiaphas

Matt. 26:3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas;

Matt. 26:4 and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him.

Matt. 26:5 But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people."

- Caiaphas, the official high priest of Israel, convenes a secret meeting of the chief priests and the elders of Israel, referring to the Sanhedrin
 - The chief priests were leaders in the temple, and the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and Sadducees who collectively ruled the nation
 - Of course, all these authorities operated under Roman occupation and control, so their power was limited
 - They acted as a quasi-government that enforced Jewish law but still required Rome's approval to carry out most punishment
 - They meet in a courtyard on Tuesday evening, probably at Caiaphas' home in the wealthy, upper side of Jerusalem
 - Under the Law of Moses, the high priest was to be a descendant of Aaron, who

- inherited the position from his father
- But by Jesus' time, Israel was under Roman control, so Romans selected the high priest, and they chose men loyal to Rome
 - Decades earlier, a man named Annas had been high priest, but he resisted Roman rule, so the Romans removed him from the office
 - In his place, Rome eventually installed his son-in-law, Caiaphas, in AD 18 as high priest
 - But Annas was still living in Jerusalem at the time of these events, so Jews remained loyal to Annas
 - So at this particular time in history, there were said to be two high priests in Jerusalem
 - In this meeting, Caiaphas initiates a conspiracy to seize Jesus at some point during the week of Passover and kill Him
 - Jesus' popularity had become too much of a threat, and His public rebukes of the Jewish religious leaders were too damaging
 - There were rumors floating around that Jesus' disciples might try to install Jesus as king of Israel by force
 - And the religious leaders knew that if this happened, they would lose power as the Roman army retaliated against Israel
 - So they conspire to kill Jesus as a patriotic effort to save their nation and a cynical ploy to maintain their positions of authority
 - But they are caught between a rock and hard place...any attempt to kill Jesus during Passover would also be dangerous
 - The city of Jerusalem was not a large place, geographically speaking, and at Passover it swelled to over a million pilgrims
 - If these leaders moved against Jesus in a public way, the crowds might riot, they say in v.5
 - So their fear of reprisal leads them to seek a way to move against Jesus outside the view of the crowds, under cover of darkness
 - But that raised a new problem: how to find Jesus at night
 - There were no cameras or cell phones, so finding a single man among millions at night over such a broad region required help
 - They needed insider information to know where to find Jesus at a particular time of night so they could move against Him
 - This conspiracy sets the stage for Judas' betrayal later in this chapter, meanwhile Matthew switches the scene again

Matt. 26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper,
Matt. 26:7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume,
and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

Matt. 26:8 But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, “Why this waste?

Matt. 26:9 “For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.”

Matt. 26:10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.

Matt. 26:11 “For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.

Matt. 26:12 “For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.

Matt. 26:13 “Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

- Matthew goes back in time to Saturday afternoon to retell a story that connects the leaders' conspiracy to the man who eventually betrays Jesus
 - This scene took place in Bethany on the day before Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Sunday
 - Matthew says Jesus visited the home of a leper named Simon, and John reports Martha, Mary and Lazarus were there also
 - And during the course of the meal, a woman approaches Jesus with a valuable vial of perfume to anoint Jesus
 - John tells us that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and both women were serving Jesus at the table
 - In Jesus' day, people reclined on the ground toward the table leaning on their left elbow while eating with the right hand
 - So while Jesus is reclining, Mary approaches with this vial and begins pouring perfumed oil on Jesus' head and feet
 - The perfume was pure nard, a costly scent imported from India, and it was a large amount of perfume
 - John describes it as a *litre* of perfume, which was a Greek measure of 11 ounces, about the size of a soda can
 - This is a ridiculously large amount of perfume, and an extravagant gesture on Mary's part
 - Matthew confirms this vial was very costly, and John reports it was worth three hundred *denarii*
 - A denarii was about one day's wages for a working man, so we're talking about nearly a year's wages
- Mary had probably saved most of her adult life to purchase this vial of perfume in preparation for a future wedding day
 - In an age when bathing was not common, perfume was greatly valued for its ability to cover odor and “purify”

- Young women saved for years to purchase the perfume they would use on the special night they met their groom
- So for Mary, this vial probably represented her life savings and it was her most important preparation for marriage
- But now she's given all of it to Jesus instead in one, extravagant gesture of love
- Matthew says her perfume was kept in an alabaster vial which means it could only be opened once by breaking the cruse
 - Once opened, it would dissipate in time, so Mary pours the entire contents on Jesus lavishly
 - And both report that the scent filled the house, and I'm sure that's an understatement
- John tells us she not only poured it on Jesus' feet but then she also wiped His feet with her hair
 - This was a tender act, a sacrificial act of love, that both honored Jesus and humbled Mary
 - In those days, a Jewish woman never let down her hair in public before men, since to do so was considered shameful
- So in choosing to use her hair to dry Jesus, Mary was making a gesture of humility, accepting shame so she could bless Jesus
 - Anyone observing this moment would have been struck by a remarkable contrast
 - On the one hand, we see a humble woman assuming a position of great shame before her guests
 - Yet at the same time, her humble gesture and extraordinary sacrifice bestowed great honor upon Jesus
- In Jesus' time anointing with perfumed oil was a practice reserved for a handful of situations
 - First, it was used in consecration rituals in the temple
 - Secondly, it signified a man chosen to serve God either in a spiritual role like prophet or priest or as a king
 - Thirdly, oil was applied to a sick person as an appeal to God for healing
 - Finally, it was applied to a dead body to prepare the body for burial
 - Jesus tells us in v.12 that Mary was applying the oil to His body as a preparation for His coming death and burial
 - Jesus wasn't going to die for a few more days, but Mary heard Jesus say He would be crucified in Jerusalem
 - She knew what that meant, so before He was taken from her, Mary honors Jesus with a burial anointing reserved for kings
 - Can you imagine the conversation that Mary had with the Holy Spirit when she felt Him prompting her to give up her life savings?

- Do you supposed Mary felt a little conflicted at first?
 - What would *you* say if you felt the Lord asking you to take a prized \$60,000 bottle of wine and pour it out as an offering?
 - Or to burn \$60,000 in cash in your fireplace to warm your house on the occasion of a neighbor's visit?
- Wouldn't you question whether this is the best use of those resources? Wouldn't you look for an excuse to avoid the sacrifice?
 - I think Mary probably had a moment of reflection, because that would have been normal and expected
 - But then just as quickly, she grabbed the vial, opened it and poured it out on Jesus, giving Him the anointing God intended
- The Lord asks all of us to humble ourselves and make our lives a living sacrifice so that He may receive glory – are you prepared to do it?
 - Jesus makes this request because He gave Himself up for us, to the point of dying in our place to give us eternal life
 - So it's a reasonable request on His part...he made a dying sacrifice for us, so He asks us to make a living sacrifice for Him
 - But we tend to set limits on what we give God...He can have everything except that ONE thing we say we can't give up
 - It might be our money or our time or a relationship or a bad habit or an attitude or a grievance we can't forget, etc.
 - When you set a limit like that with God, guess what thing He will demand from you?
 - God knows the things we cling to in our hearts, and He will ask for that ONE thing standing between us and obedience
 - If you hold on to that thing, you miss the opportunity to see the Lord work miracles in your life and in your walk with Him
 - In Mary's case, the Lord promoted her to sacrifice her lifesavings for Jesus, and obediently she gave Jesus literally everything she had
 - But by her obedience, she glorified the Lord in at least two ways
 - First, she gave Jesus the burial honor He could not receive at His death, which honored Jesus in the eyes of His disciples
 - No man who died in Jerusalem was more richly honored in death than was Jesus by this woman's gift of anointing
 - Secondly, Mary created a beautiful picture of the purpose of His death
 - Mary humbled herself and endured shame to bestow great honor upon Jesus in death
 - So too Jesus humbled Himself, enduring great shame in death so that He might bring Mary and all God's children to glory
- Finally, the Lord also had a reward for Mary for making this sacrifice
 - Notice in v.13 Jesus declares that as a result of her obedience, her story will be

known by everyone in the church, everywhere the Gospel goes

- Can there be any higher reward than to be honored in God's word in this way?
- This woman made a great sacrifice, yes, but that great sacrifice brought a great reward
- And that reward could only be obtained through her sacrifice
- Moreover, I wonder how the Lord plans to reward her in the Kingdom for her obedience to Him in this life?
 - Whatever the value that vial of perfume was, it will pale in comparison to the value of her eternal inheritance
 - You will be more willing to make great sacrifices for God when you understand two things
 - The magnitude of Christ's sacrifice
 - And His willingness to reward us in eternity when we please Him
- Mary apparently understood both, but some of the men don't understand her motivation, so they object to her actions
 - Matthew doesn't name those who objected, but John tells us that the main objections came from Judas Iscariot
 - Judas criticizes Mary's actions as wasteful, saying they could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor
- At first, Judas appears to have a sincere concern for the plight of the poor, but John gives us the real reason for Judas' objections
 - Judas managed the money box for Jesus' disciples, like the treasurer for a small civic organization
 - He collected donations as they came to Jesus and used the money to pay for the disciples' meals, accommodations, etc.
 - But Judas frequently pilfered from the funds, so Judas was upset that he missed out on access to all that wealth
- That detail is a window into the heart of Judas, revealing him to be a man who didn't love Jesus or his fellow disciples and couldn't understand Mary's gesture
 - John's Gospel confirms that Judas was an unbeliever at the end of John 6
 - Jesus says He selected His twelve apostles knowing full well that one of them, Judas, was a devil, meaning an unbeliever
 - So Jesus intentionally picked an unbeliever to be included among His inner circle so that this man could betray Him
 - The conspirators imagine themselves driving events, but in reality God had hand-selected the man who would help them three years earlier
 - Perhaps nowhere in the Bible is the sovereignty of God more evident than in the fact that God selected His own enemy
 - And by this selection, the Lord ensured that His own death would take place on His terms according to His timing

- Finally, Judas' comments offers us a glimpse into the heart and motives of unbelievers, who use godliness as a cover for sinful desires
 - Judas spent three years with this group of disciples, hearing the teaching and experiencing the miracles of Jesus
 - Yet in the end, the best his unbelieving heart could do was adopt stereotypical religious thinking and ritual
- For example, when he saw Mary dumping out her perfume, he couldn't understand the value of her gesture
 - He considered giving money to the poor to be a greater way to honor God than worshipping God directly
 - Why? Because unbelievers are, by their nature, limited to seeing and understanding earthly, temporal matters
 - True spiritual understanding about eternal matters lies outside the grasp of an unbeliever
 - Because such understanding requires the Holy Spirit working in their heart

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- If unbelievers can't understand God in spiritual ways, they have to fall back on earthly expressions of religion
 - So for unbelievers, helping the poor is their highest form of religious expression because this world is all they understand or value
 - Unbelievers who are drawn to religion are seeking to make this world a better place, to make this world into heaven
 - But it's all a game, and in the end it's a hypocritical pursuit hidden behind a veneer of self-serving piety
 - And Christians need to be aware of this game too so that we don't become too distracted by trying to make this world into heaven
 - Those who have the Spirit of God know that this world is passing and so what truly matters is waiting in the world to come
 - Like Mary who willingly gave away her life savings, we need to be ready to make sacrifices
 - But we need to make sure we are making the right sacrifices according to the leading of the Spirit and not the spirit of this world
 - The Church is called to show charity to others, primarily to those in the church, and always for eternal purposes

- We pick up today in our study of Matthew right where we left off, with Matthew's introduction of Jesus' betrayer, Judas
 - Last week at Simon's house, Matthew described a moment when Mary poured out her vile of perfume on Jesus to anoint Him for burial
 - She made a tremendous sacrifice of what amounted to her life savings to honor Jesus in obedience to the Father's will
 - And I assume she was willing to obey the Spirit's leading at that moment because of what she had experienced earlier with Jesus
 - For example, we remember Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear Him teach when her sister, Martha, worked away in the kitchen
 - Clearly, Mary understood the significance of Jesus' earthly presence
 - Then just a few days earlier she witnessed Jesus raise her brother, Lazarus, from the dead
 - So obviously she understood Jesus' power over death
 - Moreover, by raising her brother, Lazarus, from the dead, Jesus gave Mary and Martha's family a financial blessing as well
 - In that patriarchal culture, a woman left without a father or husband or brother was vulnerable and a candidate for poverty
 - Having Lazarus restored ensured that Mary and Martha regained the benefit of their brother's protection and provision
 - So Mary also appreciated Jesus' ability to provide for her in miraculous ways
 - All these experiences changed Mary, moving her heart to greater faith and giving her understanding of Jesus' purpose and power in her life
 - Mary recognized that there were things in life more important than her life savings...namely, Jesus' presence in her life
 - Mary knew she could trust Jesus with her life savings, she knew Jesus had given her eternal life
 - That fact alone made it possible for Mary to sacrifice anything of this world for Jesus' sake knowing better things are coming
- So seeing this moment with spiritual understanding requires spiritual maturity, which Mary clearly had
 - But as we remember, there were other disciples of Jesus who couldn't see it the same way, specifically Judas
 - Judas suggested that Mary would have done better to sell her perfume and give the money to the poor
 - But John tells us Judas' true motive wasn't so selfless
 - In reality, he frequently stole money from the disciples' money box so he hoped to get his hands on some of that wealth for himself
 - In that exchange, Judas revealed himself to be an unbeliever in two ways
 - First, Judas imagined that we obtain God's favor through doing works of charity

and piety...good works in other words

- Unbelievers don't understand that good works are filthy rags to God and the only way to please God is by accepting Jesus' sacrifice
- So naturally an unbeliever like Judas would favor selling the perform for the poor over making it a sacrifice to honor Jesus
- That's why Jesus responded to Judas in v.11 saying we will always have the poor but Mary would not always have Jesus
 - He meant that if we feel moved to give to the needs of the poor, we will forever have opportunities to make that sacrifice
 - But Mary would not always have this opportunity to make this special sacrifice for her Creator
 - So Mary wisely prioritized dedicating her perfume as a sacrifice to honor Jesus over making it a sacrifice for lessor earthly needs
- Which leads to the second way in which Judas' remarks reveal him to be an unbeliever...he could only understand Jesus' ministry in earthly terms
 - Judas stole from the disciples' money box because for him, earthly gain was the sole attraction to being a disciple of Jesus
 - In the beginning, Judas was probably a little star struck and honored to receive Jesus' call to be a disciple
 - I also suspect Jesus expected this opportunity might translate into financial opportunity
 - But soon it became apparent to Judas that Jesus wasn't into fame and fortune, and neither were His disciples
 - So at some point Judas decided to make the best of his situation by helping himself to the money box from time to time
 - At least in that way he figured he could profit from his association with Jesus
 - Since following an itinerant rabbi around the Galilean countryside hadn't exactly turned into a great a career move
 - So Judas' reaction to Mary's sacrifice revealed a heart of resentment and greed, which too is a mark of his unbelief
 - Judas lacked the ability to see anything beyond this world, much less to prioritize spiritual things over earthly things
 - And it also explains why he would be wiling to betray Jesus to the Jewish leaders
 - His frustration over not gaining more from Jesus' ministry reached a tipping point

Matt. 26:14 Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests
Matt. 26:15 and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.

Matt. 26:16 From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

- So the next day on Wednesday, Judas leaves the rest of the disciples at some point and goes to the chief priests with an offer to betray Jesus for money
 - The Greek word used for betray is literally the word deliver, as in deliver over, so Judas asks what will you pay for me to hand over Jesus
 - First, why would the religious authorities be interested in paying anyone to betray Jesus? Why not just go get Jesus?
 - We heard last week how the religious leaders were concerned about how the crowds would react if they seized Jesus
 - They needed a way to seize Jesus outside the view of the people
 - Preferably, they wanted to take Jesus at night when it would be easier to conceal their actions
 - But in an age without instant communication, it was nearly impossible to find someone like Jesus wandering the hills around the city at night
 - Even if they paid someone to follow Jesus and report his position, Jesus could move again before they returned
 - Then the religious leaders would look foolish for having enlisted Roman soldiers for no reason
 - So they needed to know Jesus' position with assurance which required insider information
 - They needed someone who knew Jesus' movements and patterns to tell them where to find Him at night
 - And Judas is offering to be that informant for a price, and they agree to 30 pieces of silver
- We know Judas had a greedy heart, as evidenced by his willingness to steal from the disciples, but there's another reason he's acting against Jesus
 - In Luke's account we read this

Luke 22:2 The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people.

Luke 22:3 And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve.

Luke 22:4 And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.

Luke 22:5 They were glad and agreed to give him money.

- Now we see the real motivation behind Judas' actions
- No less than Satan himself enters Judas at this moment and propelled Judas to betray Jesus to suit his evil purposes

- So from a human perspective, Judas' betrayal was the result of greed and malice
 - But now we know there was also a spiritual actor working behind the scenes with Judas' sin to move him to action
 - Judas wasn't aware of Satan's presence or activity I'm sure
 - Judas had his own reasons to act, but Satan took advantage of Judas' evil heart leading him to betray Jesus
- Judas is an example of what Paul taught when he said the battles we have in this life are always more than they seem on the surface

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- When we clash with the world, we need to recognize these conflicts are the consequence of a much larger battle taking place outside our view
 - We can't see Satan or his demons, but we can see them working in the lives of unbelievers who come against us
 - Every unbeliever is a potential pawn that the enemy can enlist into his army to oppose God and His people
 - Satan and his demons can plant ideas in their hearts, tempt them into action and even indwell them when needed
- So from a human perspective, when an unbeliever opposes our faith or hates us for preaching Jesus, we may see them as our enemy
 - But Paul reminds us we're actually observing the effect of the enemy working in and through that person to oppose God
 - So as we deal with that person, we need to recognize they are a victim of a greater spiritual force, they are not our enemy
- By the way, the fact that Satan entered Judas and led him to betray Jesus is our best proof to know Judas was an unbeliever
 - We know from John 6 that Jesus said He selected Judas to be the "devil" among the 12 apostles
 - The term "devil" was Jesus' way of calling Judas an agent of the enemy, which means Judas was an unbeliever
 - First, a believer in Jesus as Messiah would never have betrayed Jesus in this way
 - Nor would a believer have been available to Satan in the same way, since Satan and his demons can't indwell a believer
 - So Jesus had to select an unbeliever to ensure someone would be available to betray Him in this day
 - Jesus' choice to include Judas among His twelve is one of my favorite examples of

God's sovereignty in all the Bible

- God controls every single event on earth, and His control is so complete that He even picks His own enemies
 - He chose the man that Satan would use, and ultimately that means God was also directing Satan in this plan
 - Truly, no one put Jesus on that cross...He placed Himself there willingly to obey the Father in the plan of our redemption
- So Judas and his fellow conspirators agree to a price of thirty pieces of silver in exchange for Judas helping these men capture Jesus
 - The price was not arbitrary...it was the religious leaders sending a not-so-subtle message
 - In the law, 30 pieces of silver is the price that must be paid if an animal kills another man's slave
 - So in effect they were assigning Jesus the same value as a dead slave, which was a insult
 - The prophet Zechariah foretold that the Messiah would be betrayed for the same price (Zechariah 11:13)
 - So Judas sells out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, and to be more specific, Judas was probably bribed to do three things specifically
 - First, Judas told the Jewish authorities where they could find Jesus later that week in Gethsemane
 - All the Gospels record Judas fulfilling this part of his agreement
 - Secondly, we know the Jewish authorities would have needed Judas' help to convince the Romans to send soldiers to arrest Jesus
 - Roman officials didn't dispatch soldiers in the middle of the night simply because a Pharisee showed up asking for it to be done
 - The Roman authorities would have required someone to make a formal accusation against Jesus to justify His arrest
 - So though the Gospels don't record it, we assume Judas gives a statement to the Romans before the soldiers are dispatched
 - Finally, at the Roman trial of Jesus, Judas would likely have been expected to testify against Jesus
 - Here again, there's no record of Judas appearing, and perhaps he doesn't follow through on that part of the arrangement
 - But given the very high price paid to him, it make sense to assume he was expected to do all these things
 - So now the stage is set for Jesus' betrayal, and all that remains is for Judas to find the right opportunity to betray Jesus...a moment Jesus selects too
 - And to set the stage for that moment, Matthew now moves us back to a scene with Jesus and His disciples

Matt. 26:17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

Matt. 26:18 And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’”

Matt. 26:19 The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

- As we prepare to study the Last Supper moment between Jesus and His disciples, we need to return to our timeline discussion for a moment
 - Matthew says this scene takes place on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which itself is a confusing reference
 - In the Jewish feast calendar there are two feasts that come one right after another on the calendar
 - The first feast of the year is the feast of Passover, which happens on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan (March/April)
 - Remember, the Jewish day starts at sundown, so the Jewish calendar flips over from the 13th to the 14th at sundown
 - Then the very next day, on the 15th of Nisan starts a seven day feast called the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - Once again, this feast starts at evening following the day of Passover
 - And because this feast followed immediately after the Passover, over time Jews came to see both feasts as a single event
 - So by Jesus’ day Jews had come to call the entire 8-day period the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - We can see that here as Matthew says the first day of Unleavened Bread had come, referring to the Passover day
 - Mark gives us confirmation in His Gospel

Mark 14:12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

- Notice Mark also calls this day the first day of Unleavened Bread
 - But then Mark goes on to clarify this was the day the Passover lamb was sacrificed, which means it was the 14th of Nisan
- So it’s Wednesday night, after sundown, the start of the 14th of Nisan, and the disciples ask Jesus what were his plans for the Passover meal that evening
 - Their questions gives us opportunity to clarify another Passover practice of that day: the timing of the Passover sacrifice and meal

- On our timeline from last lesson, we can now add Mary's anointing of Jesus on Tuesday evening (the start of Wednesday)
- And sometime during Wednesday Judas received 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus
- Now Mark say we've reached the day the Passover lamb was sacrificed, which means it's Wednesday evening, the start of the 14th
 - In the Law, here's what God told Israel concerning the Passover

Ex. 12:5 'Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

Ex. 12:6 'You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.

Ex. 12:7 'Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

Ex. 12:8 'They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

Ex. 12:9 'Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails.

Ex. 12:10 'And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.

- Each family in Israel was to take an unblemished lamb and kill it at twilight on the 14th of Nisan, which was Wednesday night on this week
 - Twilight refers to the moment two stars are visible in the night sky after sundown
 - So after nightfall on the 14th of Nisan, each family killed its own lamb at it home and roasted and ate the lamb that same night
 - That's the meal the disciples are asking Jesus about, and they expect to eat it with Jesus that night
 - Of course, we know this Passover meal will be a special one, and eventually it will be memorialized as the Last Supper
- But by Jesus' day, rabbis had concluded that the Passover lamb could only be sacrificed in the temple under the supervision of the priests
 - So each family had to bring its Passover lamb to the temple and killed it in the temple court on the day before Passover, the 13th of Nisan
 - The animal's blood was drained into bowls held by priests, who sprinkled the blood on the altar
 - The animals were then skinned, gutted and a portion cut away and burned as a burnt offering on the altar
 - Throughout the process, great care was taken to ensure that no one broke any of the lamb's bones

- Then the rest of the animal went home with the family to become the meal later after Passover began that night on the 14th of Nisan
 - So all these family lambs were sacrificed in the temple during the daytime of the *13th of Nisan*
 - Which means none of the Passover lambs were actually killed on the 14th, the day of Passover, as required by God's Law
- So, to ensure that at least one lamb was killed on the actual Passover, the rabbis sacrificed a symbolic lamb during the daytime on the 14th
 - In the same way that the U.S. has a national Christmas tree, Israel had a national sacrificial lamb
 - One lamb was brought into the temple courts on the morning of the 14th and sacrificed at 9:00 AM
 - This lamb satisfied the Passover requirement for a lamb to be sacrificed on the actual day of Passover
- And that's why as Jesus goes to the cross on Thursday morning, He will serve as Israel's national Passover Lamb
 - It's noteworthy that Jesus' betrayal was purchased by the Temple priests with money taken from the Temple treasury
 - This is ironic because temple treasury funds were used for (among other things) purchasing the national Passover lamb
 - So unknowingly, the priests used temple funds to purchase the true national Passover Lamb that year when they bought Jesus
- So as Wednesday comes to an end and everyone else was taking their lambs to the temple to be killed, the disciples ask Jesus how they will celebrate Passover
 - Jesus tells His men to enter Jerusalem looking for a certain man in the city
 - Luke tells us that Jesus specified to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water, which was a very clever sign
 - It would have been unusual to see a man carry a water pot in Jesus' day, because in that day men didn't do domestic chores
 - Only women did the job of carrying water, so this was a clever sign that would catch the disciples' attention
 - Why must Jesus be so mysterious about where to find this room? Why not just tell them plainly? Because Jesus knows His betrayer is present
 - Remember, Matthew told us that Judas is now looking for the first opportunity to betray Jesus
 - If Judas knew the place that Jesus was planning to eat the Passover, then Judas could alert the authorities to that location
 - And that could allow the Romans soldiers the chance to interrupt the meal before Jesus was finished with His disciples
 - So Jesus gives instructions to His disciples that offer Judas no clue as to where their final destination will be

- Jesus says this man would lead the disciples to an upper room prepared with a Passover meal waiting for Jesus and His men
 - I wonder what that man was thinking when he prepared this table with no one specifically in mind
 - Did he have his own meal prepared downstairs and then had a thought to prepare a second one upstairs?
 - Did he know Who would eat at that table? Did his wife wonder if he had gone crazy when he set the table?
 - And what did he say to her when she asked him to fetch the water on that day?
 - And what did he think when strange men approached him on the street saying they needed that extra table for their master?
- How many moments of faithful obedience did that man have to experience to be in a position to host the Messiah in his home?
 - Just one, really...he just had to respond to the first leading of the Spirit to set that extra table, and everything else came easier
 - I wonder the conversation he had in his head when the thought first came to him to set a second unneeded Passover table
 - I suspect he told himself it was crazy, foolish and sure to prompt questions he couldn't answer
 - But the Spirit of God made it clear that he should do it, and then the rest was a matter of blind faith
 - Blind faith is accepting the leading of the Spirit without challenge even though it makes no sense to us in the moment
 - It's the kind of faith that led Abraham to go to a place I will show, as God said and later to take his son Isaac to be sacrificed
 - It's the kind of faith that led Moses to return to Egypt and David to defeat Goliath
 - Blind faith is simply trusting God's word even before you have all the answers and acting on that trust and it's a beautiful thing
 - We all aren't Abraham or Noah or David or Moses, and we all certainly don't entertain Jesus for dinner
 - But we do all get opportunity to follow the Spirit's leading as He works through us to accomplish great things
- I believe the Spirit of God works like this constantly, placing opportunities before us to obey Christ
 - And I believe in most cases we aren't given the details of how our obedience will ultimately serve God's purposes in advance
 - In fact, in many cases, we may never know this side of Heaven how God used our obedience to bless someone
 - But we will know one day and there will be blessings for our blind faith and obedience

- For example, have you ever felt an inexplicable leading to send a check to someone you barely know or maybe someone you don't know at all?
 - I've known people who received a check like that from someone they didn't know
 - And that check came at the very moment they needed it and for the very amount they were lacking
 - And in that moment they told everyone they knew that the Lord had answered their prayers and provided in a miraculous way
 - That person's heart was lifted up and their faith encouraged and their needs met...all because someone acted in blind faith
- Have you ever felt prompted to walk up to a stranger and tell them you felt God telling you to pray for them?
 - I've had people tell me that someone walked up to pray with them, and from that simple encounter God changed their life
 - They had been feeling empty and lost inside when someone approached and offered to pray with them
 - And before they even knew what was happening, their heads were bowed and they felt an incredible peace washing over them
 - And when it was over, they couldn't stop thinking about Jesus which ultimately led to a profession of faith...blind faith
- Or perhaps you felt the Lord prompting you to start that conversation with your neighbor, to write a note of encouragement to someone you barely know
 - To give a Bible to someone at work, to start a Bible study in your home, to move to another country or plant a church
 - Every time God moves in our lives, He will ask us to take a step of faith and that step is almost always blind faith
 - It's a step that doesn't explain itself at the moment but in time it shows the wisdom and love of God
 - My life and ministry and my wife's life and ministry are nothing if not a testimony to countless steps of blind faith that God has used to His glory
 - And I sometimes wonder how many more I missed for lack of faith
 - I want to be more like that man who set the table on Passover with no one in particular in mind because the Lord asked him
 - I want to be that man – not because I want to show off my exemplary obedience or my mature faith
 - I just long to see Jesus walk through my door and eat at my table
 - In other words, I'm jealous for those moments when God works miracles by even the smallest acts of sacrifice that I might make
 - I want to experience the joy of seeing God blessing others and I want to see my faith grow as I become more dependent on Him

- And I want you to be jealous for those moments too...we all need a heart prepared and ready to say yes to the Spirit's leading
- We should look forward to the moments God says "go there", "give to that person", "speak to that person", "pray with that person"
 - Because in that moment, we become a part of something much bigger than ourselves as we serve the Living God
 - That man, whoever he was, had no idea why he needed to set that extra table that night
 - And had that man decided not to obey, the Lord would have found another place for the Last Supper that night
 - And his life would have gone on uninterrupted and unaware of what he missed that night
 - But because he did obey, in a very simple way, he became a part of one of the most important moments in the history of all Creation
 - And perhaps most of all, I love the fact that he is unnamed in this story
 - We serve a God who can do great things through the blind faith of strangers we will not know until we see them in the Kingdom...let's all strive to be that person

- In the New Testament church, Jesus commanded two rituals or ordinances for His church to observe on a regular basis
 - The first ordinance commanded for every believer is water baptism, which should take place soon after we come to faith in Jesus
 - And the second ordinance we observe regularly is the Last Supper or Communion meal
 - Believers perform this ritual periodically to remember the meal that took place on the night before Jesus was nailed to a cross
 - That's where we are now in the timeline of Jesus' final week on earth, the evening of Passover, the 14th of Nisan
 - On that year the 14th of Nisan began on a Wednesday night, as the entire city of Jerusalem sat down to share the Passover meal together
 - As evening fell, Jesus' disciples asked where they will eat their Passover that evening, and Jesus told them to find a certain man
 - This man would lead them to his home where he had prepared a meal in his upper room for no one in particular
 - In that upstairs room Jesus and His men celebrated the Passover, as Jesus says in v.18, and that's the meal we're about to study
 - But in the process, Jesus instituted something new and different better known as the Last Supper
 - Every Christian since that day has observed a version of this same meal
 - So this meal has united every generation of believers since the first until today
 - But what does this meal mean and why do we still repeat it today?
 - That's what we want to understand as we study it over the next couple of weeks
 - And next week we will celebrate communion together, and that will give us an opportunity to apply what we learn
- So we begin our study looking at the historical circumstances surrounding that meal and for the third time, Matthew's scene opens with a focus on Judas

Matt. 26:20 Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.

Matt. 26:21 As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me."

Matt. 26:22 Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?"

Matt. 26:23 And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.

Matt. 26:24 "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

**Matt. 26:25 And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?”
Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself.”**

- Evening has come, which means the Passover has started, and Jesus and his disciples are now reclining at a table somewhere in the city of Jerusalem
 - At a point in the meal, Jesus announces that one of His twelve will betray Him to the authorities
 - His men look around the table at one another aghast at the suggestion that one of them could do such a thing
 - Interestingly, no one seems to suspect Judas, yet we know he was a thief and an unbeliever
 - After each man issues his denials, Jesus says He will reveal the identity of His betrayer in a unique way
 - Jesus says the one who dips his hand in the same bowl as Jesus is His betrayer
 - Jesus’ comment reveals something about Judas and something about the meal
 - First, the fact that Judas’ hand could reach into Jesus’ bowl tells us something about the heart of Judas
 - A Passover meal was a carefully scripted event in which everything done happens in a certain order
 - In fact a Passover meal is commonly called a “seder” meal and the word seder means “order”
 - Even the seating followed a certain order around a rectangular table laying low on the ground
 - Traditionally, the Passover table was arranged so that the most honored person sat at one end of the table
 - Jesus being the most honored sat at one end of the table and the rest were seated according to honor from highest to lowest
 - The one seated immediately to the left of Jesus would have been the disciple of greatest honor and it moved around clockwise
 - So the one seated on Jesus’ immediate right hand would be the disciple of least honor
 - To preserve the dignity of the lowest ranking person, a special Passover rule required the youngest at the meal to sit to the right of the host
 - In this way the person seated there could rightly say they were required to sit there without regard to honor
 - And we know from John’s Gospel that John himself sat in this seat, so he was the youngest disciple
 - This may have explained why John supposedly lived the longest of the twelve apostles
 - Interestingly, seated on the other side of John was Peter, which means Peter

- uncharacteristically assumed a place of humility on that night
- Of all the seats available to him, Peter chose to sit in the place of least honor
 - So we know Jesus was at the head of the table, John was at Jesus' right hand, and Peter was next to John
- So which disciple chose to seat himself on Jesus' left hand, in the place of greatest honor among the disciples?
 - Jesus' comment in v.23 gives us that answer, and the answer may surprise you
 - Jesus says the one dipping bread in His bowl is His betrayer
 - And only the seats immediately to the left and right of Jesus were close enough to reach into Jesus' bowl
 - Since we know John wasn't Jesus' betrayer, that only leaves the person seated in the place of highest honor
 - So Judas placed himself in the seat of greatest honor on that night
 - Can you imagine the nerve of this guy? He's about to betray Jesus and yet he takes the place of honor at the table
 - This tells us even more about the heart of this man...his shamelessness, his arrogance, and his self-deception
 - This man was not merely some wayward prodigal-son disciple or a misguided believer tripped up by greed
 - This man was a calculating enemy of God who somehow believed himself to be the most honored of Jesus' disciples
 - Judas had never been physically closer to his Creator than he was on that night and yet never had he been so far spiritually
 - This reminds us that sometimes we can be in the company of those who mimic Christian culture but aren't truly born again
 - Judas' 3 years with Jesus is proof that association with other believers isn't enough by itself to bring saving faith
 - They participate in the gathering and sit under teaching, but the truth never penetrates their hearts
 - They aren't believers, but even they don't realize what they lack because until you're born again, you don't know the difference
 - Unbelievers aren't necessarily present in every gathering, but if one of the twelve could be an imposter, we should expect a few around us too
 - But this isn't a problem we solve through witch hunts or by asking people to show their "Christian" card at the door
 - The way to find a Judas among us is to simply do the same thing we've always done...preach the word
 - As we proclaim the Gospel and teach the Bible consistently, any unbelievers in our midst will show themselves in one of two ways
 - Either they will be driven to their knees in repentance from the conviction of the

word and the kindness of God's grace

- They will become Christians, and that is the solution we hope for since we were all once in their shoes
- Or they will be driven out the door in disgust over what they hear...because you can't sit still under the conviction of God's word
 - If your heart isn't submitted to the authority of God's word, then you will chafe and ultimately rebel under its demands
 - There is simply no standing still when the word of God is preached with authority
 - In Judas' case, Jesus' teaching eventually provoked his unbelieving heart to rebel and betray his brothers and his Lord
- While seeing unbelievers bolting out our door is not our first choice, it's better than having them sit still in our midst indefinitely
 - Because if an unbeliever can feel comfortable in our company without a changed heart, then we're doing something wrong
 - We've left behind the message of the Gospel and the power of the word of God, and we're failing at our mission
- So Jesus' method of revealing Judas showed us his prideful, arrogant heart, and it also reveals something about the timing of this meal
 - As I said, the Passover meal closely follows a script, so we can know where we are in the meal by noting the events taking place
 - But to appreciate that timing, we need to know the script for Passover, called a *haggadah* which means a "telling"
 - Here's a simple summary of the steps in a Passover seder meal
 - The meal is arranged around three activities: drinking wine, eating various food items and reciting liturgy
 - These three activities are spread out over the course of the meal in the following order:
 - 1st cup of wine, washing, vegetables eaten, a third of the bread is broken & hidden
 - 2nd cup of wine, washing, prayer, bread and bitter herbs eaten
 - The roasted lamb is eaten, then the hidden bread is "found" and eaten as dessert
 - 3rd cup of wine followed by the grace recited
 - 4th cup of wine as a door is opened for Elijah's return
 - Every one of these details contains symbolic meaning to help tell a story
 - Primarily, the symbols of a Passover meal tell the story of Israel's release from slavery in Egypt and their exodus under Moses
 - But Christians today also recognize that these symbols tell the story of Jesus' death on the cross as the Lamb of God

- So the meal looks backward to Israel's flight from Egypt and it looks forward to the Messiah's sacrifice for Israel's sins
- In v.23, Jesus mentioned dipping bread into herbs, and that event takes place roughly between the second and third cups of wine at this meal
 - More specifically, it happens after the second cup is poured but before the lamb and bread are eaten
 - Jesus dismisses Judas at this point because what follows in the meal after this point wasn't something Judas could share
 - All the events of the Passover meal up to this point symbolize the slavery of Israel in Egypt and humanity's slavery to sin
 - For example, the bitter herbs represent Israel's bitterness for the harsh treatment they experienced under the Egyptians while in bondage
 - And the 2nd cup of wine is called the cup of deliverance because it represents the Lord's promise to free His people from slavery
 - These symbols pertain to every Jew whether believing or unbelieving, because all share this history of slavery
 - Like the rest of the disciples, Judas' Jewish heritage included enslavement in Egypt and the Exodus under Moses
 - Moreover, the story of the Exodus is also a story of every human being being sold into bondage to sin by Adam
 - We came into this world already enslaved to our sin nature, and we need a Savior, our own Moses, to set us free from that slavery
 - Here again, this part of the Passover story is certainly representative of Judas, since he was an unbeliever in sin
- But after this point in the meal, the symbols move forward to the solution God will bring to His people
 - After this point in the meal, the lamb was eaten with the bread and the final two cups of wine called redemption and praise were consumed
 - These symbols represent Israel's exodus from Egypt under Moses
 - But more importantly they also represent our personal exodus from sin through our faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ
 - The lamb in the meal is a picture of Christ, the Lamb of God, Who is sacrificed to take away the sins of the world
 - The bread is striped, pierced and broken to represent the body of Christ scourged, crucified and broken for our sins
 - The 3rd cup of wine called the cup of redemption represents God's promise to redeem His people
 - And the 4th cup of wine called the cup of praise remembers God's promise to bring His people into glory in the Kingdom
 - None of these symbols and the events they represent pertain to Judas or any unbeliever

- Moreover, the new ritual that Jesus will institute after this night, which we call communion, is *only* for believers
- Because the symbolism of the communion celebration are only relevant and true for believers
- So for all these reasons, Jesus sends Judas away at this point so the meal may continue without him
- And as Jesus dismisses Judas, Jesus says in v.24 that the Messiah will go as the Old Testament prophecies foretold He would
 - In other words, Judas was not changing God's plan one iota, and in fact, he was the means by which God was enacting that plan
 - The OT prophets foretold that the Messiah would "hang on a tree," be "pierced for our sins," and be betrayed by someone close
 - Those things were written long before Judas and the religious leaders hatched their plans against Jesus the day before
 - In fact, Jesus even determined the timing of Judas' betrayal, so Judas has no control over these circumstances
- Nevertheless, Judas was still to blame for what happened to Jesus, and in v.24 Jesus pronounces woe on this man
 - Woe is a biblical term of eternal judgment indicating this man is being condemned at this moment
 - How can God hold Judas accountable if he's just doing what God expected and ultimately uses to bring a great blessing for all?
 - The answer is simple: Judas is acting of his own volition to sin, and all who sin are accountable to God
 - Judas participated in a conspiracy by taking a bribe to pervert justice and bring harm to someone he knows to be innocent
 - So Judas will be held accountable for his sin by a just God, Who can also turn Judas' sin to good for His eternal purposes
 - But just because God has the power to turn our sin into something good doesn't lessen our guilt before Him
 - Nor does it give us license to sin more, as if by sinning we make it easier for God to produce more "grace"

Rom. 6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

Rom. 6:2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

- God is using Judas' sin to accomplish something good, but Judas' sin still deserves severe consequences
 - Has anyone been granted more privileged than Judas to live with Jesus for three years, see His miracles and hear His teaching

- And yet, has anyone done more harm to Jesus than Judas did?
- Well, actually there *was* one actor who was closer to God and turned that access into even greater harm...Satan
- In Ezekiel 28 you can read how Satan served in the Heavenly tabernacle before he rebelled and began a war with God
- So I guess it's no coincidence that Satan is now indwelling Judas to bring down Jesus...
- Therefore, Jesus says Judas' punishment will make him wish he had not been born, which sounds like something your parents say when they're upset
 - But Jesus means it, and this is the perspective of all who come to know God's wrath for sin
 - Every person, when faced with the prospect of an eternity in punishment, will wish they had never been born
- But more than that, Jesus is saying that Judas' personal experience in judgment will be worse than most
 - Scripture indicates there are varying levels of punishment in Hell for unbelievers
 - Just as God makes distinctions in rewards for believers based on our service, so God also makes distinctions in punishments for unbelievers based on the nature of their sins
 - In a way we don't understand, some unbelievers receive greater punishment, but according to Jesus, none worse than Judas
- After Jesus identifies Judas, the traitor tries at first to maintain his innocence in v.25 saying surely it is not me?
 - To which Jesus replies you have said it yourself, meaning Judas had made a confession of sorts
 - Jesus never identified His betrayer by name, yet there were two men at that table close enough to dip their bread in Jesus' bowl
 - But only Judas spoke up to defend himself, and in so doing, Judas unwittingly identifies himself as the guilty party
 - So Judas, the unbeliever, has been exposed, and now that he has been dismissed, the rest of the meal can continue

Matt. 26:26 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

Matt. 26:27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;

Matt. 26:28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

Matt. 26:29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Matt. 26:30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

- With Judas gone Jesus can now move ahead with the rest of the Passover meal, except that Jesus departs from the normal seder
 - Instead Jesus strikes out in a new direction making changes to the normal Seder meal
 - And Jesus makes these changes because in this year the Passover feast would be completely fulfilled
 - We've already noted how the symbols of the Passover meal picture Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God
 - So every year as Jews gathered to observe Passover, they were unknowingly declaring Jesus' atoning death on the cross
 - But during this year's Passover in Israel, that prophecy will be fulfilled as the true Lamb of God will actually be sacrificed on Passover
 - And so now Jesus makes sure that His disciples will not miss that the symbolism of this meal is pointing to Jesus
 - And for that reason, there can only be one Lamb at this table
 - To explain what I mean, let's consider again where we are in the order of the Passover meal again
 - We know we're somewhere between the 2nd and 3rd cups of wine
 - The bread and herbs were eaten before Judas was dismissed
 - And the next thing required in the seder script is eating the Passover meal, consisting of the lamb and the bread together
 - But notice Matthew makes no mention of the disciples and Jesus eating a lamb... and in fact *none* of the Gospels mention a lamb at the table
 - Every other element of the Passover meal is mentioned except the lamb, which strongly suggests that no meat was present
 - In John's Gospel, we can see how this confused the disciples because they indicate something was missing from the table

John 13:27 After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."

John 13:28 Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him.

John 13:29 For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor.

- After Jesus dismissed Judas, the disciples try to explain why Judas would leave the room in the middle of the Passover meal
 - And the reason they land on is that Judas had gone out to buy supplies for the Passover meal, since he had control of the funds

- Now at this point, they are already halfway done with the Passover meal
- So why would they assume Jesus sent Judas on an errand to buy more food for the meal that was already underway?
- The obvious answer is that something was missing from the table that evening...something like the roast lamb
- Jesus didn't provide a roast lamb because seated before them *was* the Passover Lamb for that particular year, the Lamb of God
 - Until Jesus dies on the cross the next day, the lamb won't be sacrificed, so there can be no lamb eaten at this table
 - So without a lamb at the table, the men resort to eating the bread alone along with the herbs and vegetables already there
 - So in v.26, Jesus takes the bread, begins breaking it and handing it out
- The unleavened bread Jesus hands out is like a hard cracker, and He declares that as this bread is broken so will His body be
 - He tells the men that as they eat the bread, they are eating His body
 - This is symbolism, obviously, because Jesus is still alive before them, so Jesus isn't saying they should eat Him in any literal way
- Jesus means that we must take Him in spiritually, like we take in food, which happens when we believe in Him as Messiah
 - His Spirit enters our body and we become born again spiritually, so in that sense we take Jesus in as someone eats bread
 - Once more, Jesus has changed the seder meal to picture Jesus' body broken by taking the wrath of God in their place
- Then Jesus changes the seder a third time at the third cup of the meal, the cup of redemption
 - In the Passover celebration, the 3rd cup represented God's promise to redeem Israel from slavery in Egypt
 - But now Jesus says in v.28 that the cup represents His blood poured out to forgive us of our sins
- And then finally, Jesus alters the Passover meal one more way: He declines to drink the fourth cup of wine that customarily ends the meal
 - In v.29 Jesus says that the 3rd cup will be the last time He drinks the fruit of the vine until He drinks it in the Kingdom
 - The term "fruit of the vine" is significant because it specifically refers to the pure wine without additives served at Passover
 - So Jesus wasn't saying He won't taste *any* wine again, and in fact we know Jesus is given a small amount on the cross at one point
 - Jesus is referring specifically to the 4th cup of Passover wine which He will not drink until He does so with us in the Kingdom
- From these details, we know Jesus has clearly departed from the normal seder

script on this night by making a total of four changes

- He substituted Himself as the Lamb, He declared the broken bread was His body and He said the 3rd cup was His blood
- But perhaps most significantly, Jesus delayed the drinking of the 4th cup of wine until the Kingdom
- Which means that Jesus never brought that Passover to a close
- In effect, Jesus suspended that Passover meal so that it never finished, not even to this day, it will not finish until we all join Jesus in the Kingdom
 - Remember what that 4th cup of the Passover meal represented? It is called the cup of praise representing the fourth promise God gave Israel

Ex. 6:7 'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.'

Ex. 6:8 'I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'"

- This cup represents God's promise to bring Israel into the land He promised to their forefathers
 - And that promise is not fulfilled until the Kingdom, so now we can see why Jesus is waiting to drink that fourth cup
 - He will not drink it until the meaning of that cup will be fulfilled in that future day
- But rather than just stop the meal unfinished, Jesus suspended it, as if He put that Passover on pause
 - And then He commanded His followers to continue repeating that same moment to remember that it has never completed
 - Every time we pick up the bread and the cup at communion, we are jumping back in time to that same moment with Jesus
 - We are eating the bread of that Passover meal and we are drinking the third cup, the cup of redemption
- It's like an instant replay running over and over, so that each year more believers can be included in that moment
 - And that cup of redemption keeps being shared because the time for the forgiveness of sins is still open and available
 - Today remains a day of salvation for all who believe in Jesus as Messiah, and as long as that day remains, the meal continues
- Until a day to come when the Kingdom arrives on earth, and all of us will be gathered with our Lord after His Second Coming
 - And on that day the Bible says there will be a great feast to inaugurate the start of the Kingdom

- And at the start of that feast, the Lord will raise the fourth cup from that long ago unfinished Passover meal, the cup of praise,
- And all of us will raise a cup with Jesus, and we will all drink the cup with Him to praise God for our redemption and glory
- And in that way, the Lord is bringing everyone in the Church and Israel with Him into that moment in the upper room one generation at a time
 - We are there with Him each time we celebrate communion, and we will continue to be there until we see Him face to face
 - That's why the meal is called a remembrance, yet no longer is it a remembrance of the Exodus
 - Now it's a remembrance of the fulfillment of Passover, of Christ's death for the forgiveness of sins
- And that's why Paul ends his instructions on the communion meal this way

1Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

- This is a meal for those who know Jesus, because the symbols of this meal only apply to those who share Jesus' future
 - That's why we limit participating in the meal to those who are believing, just as Jesus limited his group to believers only
- Next week we will conduct our normal monthly celebration of communion
 - And as we do, I hope you will approach it with a better understanding of its meaning and its significance
 - We proclaim Jesus' death until He comes again to finish the meal with us
 - And what we proclaim is that the third cup of redemption is still available to everyone who will come to the table with Jesus

- Ask anyone to describe a moment from the Gospel accounts, and I suspect most would choose a scene from Christ's suffering and death on the cross
 - Even those who have never opened a Bible can tell you how Jesus died, at least some of the details
 - In fact, is there any human death in history better known and more remembered than Jesus' death?
 - For example, do you know how Buddha died? Do people retell the deaths of Muhammed, Confucius or countless Indian gurus?
 - But everyone – including Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and most everyone else – can tell you how Jesus died: on a cross
 - The story of Jesus' death is widely known, but the purpose of His death – that is, why He died – is not so well understood
 - And telling *that* story is the mission of the Church, according to the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through us
 - So that's our purpose today as we embark on a study of the final hours of Jesus' life and His sufferings to forgive us our sin
 - We want to understand not only what happened, but why it happened and what it means for us and the world
 - Today we begin with the first of Jesus' sufferings, which takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane
 - But interestingly, Jesus' sufferings don't begin with beatings or scrounging
 - Nor are they delivered by heartless Romans or hate-driven Jewish authorities
 - Jesus' sufferings begin with a rejection by His closest friends, the apostles

Matt. 26:30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matt. 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'"

Matt. 26:32 "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Matt. 26:33 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."

Matt. 26:34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

Matt. 26:35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

- The scene in v.30 picks up after the Last Supper, which we studied last week, and Matthew's account of the Last Supper is among the shortest in the Gospels
 - So if you want more detail, you need to read John's Gospel, which devotes five, long chapters to that meal conversation

- Among the things John adds is a moment when Jesus says He was leaving the disciples soon, referring to His ascension
- So Peter asks where Jesus was going, but Jesus said they would follow Him later, meaning they would die and enter Heaven
- Naturally, Peter didn't understand this comment, so in John 13 Peter declares that he would lay his life down for Jesus
 - Peter's comment was mostly bravado and pride, and he thought he could impress Jesus or the other disciples by it
 - But Jesus saw through it, so Jesus tells Peter that he would deny Jesus three times that same evening
 - That was the first time Jesus said this to Peter, and now in Matthew 26 we're studying the second time
- As Jesus and the disciples leave the upper room and the city of Jerusalem, they return to the Mt. of Olives
 - And as they reach a garden on the west side of the Mount called the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus returns to the conversation
 - In v.31 Jesus says again not only will Peter fall away, but all the disciples will abandon Jesus that very night
- Can you imagine the stunned look on the faces of those men as they heard Jesus' prophecy?
 - They couldn't have known the violence that was about to unfold, so they certainly couldn't anticipate the fear they would feel
 - And fear can make us say and do dumb, crazy things, including even abandoning and denying our Lord
- But for now, they are incredulous at the suggestion, so to support His prediction, Jesus cites Zechariah 13:7

**Zech. 13:7 “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
And against the man, My Associate,”
Declares the LORD of hosts.
“Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;
And I will turn My hand against the little ones.**

- Then the Shepherd is struck down, Zechariah says, His sheep will be scattered, and Jesus tell us this prophecy was about Him
- And Christ's abandonment was part of the suffering He experienced on the way to the cross
- Christ suffered witnessing His friends leave Him and deny Him in His time of need, just as we would feel the same under those circumstances
 - Obviously, God doesn't depend upon His Creation for emotional support, for we know God is sufficient in Himself

- But the Man, Jesus, did have emotions and feelings, and He was facing an unbelievably devastating experience
- So having the support of friends during a moment like this was not meaningless to Jesus
- And so as Jesus' disciples abandoned Him to His fate, Jesus felt sorrow and disappointment even as He knew it would happen
- Moreover, Zechariah 13 proves that the disciples' rejection of Jesus was a part of God's plan, and Jesus describes it as if it's nothing in v.32
 - Jesus says that after they disavow Him at His death, Jesus will meet them later in Galilee once He's been raised from the dead
 - Jesus nonchalantly moves from explaining how they abandon Him to looking forward to their next meeting
 - Clearly, Jesus didn't view their failure to stand by Him to mean the end of their relationship or opportunity to minister together
- Jesus' statement to these men is more important than you might have considered, and it deserves our attention this morning
 - This exchange teaches us something very important about the nature of our relationship with Jesus
 - Jesus' disciples will reject the Messiah during His greatest moment of need, and yet Jesus will not reject them
 - That is a cornerstone of the Gospel, a major point of theology in the Christian faith, and a powerful source of hope for all believers
- And to understand why, we need to go a little further in the text to focus on the example of the chief apostle, Peter
 - Back on the Mt of Olives, Peter speaks up again to declare his undying support and commitment to Jesus
 - Peter says that even if the other disciples fall away, he would never fall away from Jesus
 - The term fall away is the word *skandalizo* in Greek, and it literally means to stumble or separate due to an offense
 - We get the word scandalize from this Greek word, referring to an offense that turns someone into a pariah leading others to abandon them
 - For example, someone offends you with a Facebook post so you respond by "unfriending" that person...that's *skandalizo*
 - So Peter was telling Jesus that there was nothing that could ever offend Peter so much that he would consider abandoning Jesus
 - I'm sure Peter meant what he said in that moment, and I'm also sure he had every intention of keeping his promise, as far as he could know
 - And it's the same for all of us when we make a sincere promise to someone...we fully intend to keep our word as best we can
 - And yet, many times we fall short, and when we break a promise it's usually

- because we couldn't anticipate the future perfectly
- We make a promise based on what we know, but then later circumstances change which then cause us to fall away
 - In Peter's case, he promised that he could resist any force that might come against him demanding that he reject Jesus
 - But Peter *underestimated* the power of his own fear while watching Jesus being arrested and threatened with crucifixion
 - And Peter *overestimated* his willingness to suffer death with Jesus when that time came
 - Crucifixion is perhaps the most painful way to die ever conceived by man and Peter couldn't bear the thought of experiencing it
 - So Peter makes a promise he couldn't keep in the end, and Jesus knew this would happen, and He gives Peter a sign to make it clear
 - Using a colloquialism, Jesus says Peter would deny Jesus three times prior to the rooster crowing, meaning before sunrise
 - It was bad enough for Jesus to suggest Peter had the potential to reject Jesus at all
 - But now Jesus says it will happen more than once and in only a matter of hours!
 - So an indignant Peter responds defensively and pridefully by throwing his fellows disciples under the bus
 - He says even if these other guys reject you, I will never reject you
 - Clearly, Peter's not thinking right now...he's just reacting and for that reason Jesus doesn't even bother responding
 - Jesus knew that soon enough Peter would see that Jesus was correct, so there was little point in arguing it in the meantime
 - Matthew records Peter's three denials at the end of this chapter, and we'll study them more when we get there
 - But today we need to appreciate the significance of this exchange and why it's such a powerful example of hope for every believer
 - And to begin, you may have heard someone tell you in the past that it's possible for a Christian to become unsaved
 - Some believe that a Christian who professes Christ and is saved can later deny Christ and lose (or reject) their salvation
 - Those who support such a notion will use various Scriptures to support their view, and in all cases they misinterpret or misuse the text
 - And if we had the time today, I could walk through every one of those texts to show how they are misunderstood
 - And if you're interested in a deeper examination of the topic of salvation in general, I direct you to our Romans study
 - But even without an understanding of biblical soteriology, you can know that our

relationship with Jesus doesn't end by looking at Peter

- In Peter we have a case study to understand, how does our Lord respond to a disciple who repudiates Him publicly?
- Peter denied Jesus vehemently and repeatedly, but did Jesus accept his "resignation" from the faith? Did Jesus reject Peter?
- Peter's denial of Jesus is exactly the kind of rejection that some say results in a loss of salvation
 - And be assured, Peter does reject Jesus...in fact, at one point, Peter even swears an oath denying that he knew Jesus
 - This matches the claims of some that when we believe in Jesus we're saved, but if we turn away from Jesus we are lost again
- So let's look at how Jesus handles Peter's unfaithfulness beginning with that casual statement Jesus made in v.32
 - Jesus said that after His disciples rejected and abandoned Jesus, He'll meet them in Galilee
 - That doesn't sound like a Lord preparing to break off a relationship with His disciples, does it?
 - And we remember even earlier in the Gospels when Jesus told Peter that he would hold the keys to the Kingdom
 - It seems clear that Jesus wasn't going to hold Peter's denials against Him
 - But we find even more compelling evidence that Jesus was standing by Peter in Luke's record of this moment...

Luke 22:28 "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials;

Luke 22:29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you

Luke 22:30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

Luke 22:32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Luke 22:33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"

Luke 22:34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

- Luke is writing about the same moment that we're studying in Matthew 26, but notice how Luke begins the conversation
 - Jesus tells His disciples they are the ones who have stood by Him in His trials, and because of that faithfulness, they will have eternal rewards

- Remember, this is the same setting as Matthew 26 where Jesus just told these men they would all scatter and abandon Him
- So obviously, that momentary failure was not indicative of their hearts overall
- They will run in fear during an intense moment of persecution, but that didn't mean they lacked faith in Jesus
- The disciples' experience is an example of how the weakness of our flesh will cause us to live out our faith inconsistently at times
- And Peter is the poster child for faithlessness because of his three public denials of Christ, so his situation is the one we need to focus on
 - In v.31 we discover that Peter's denials were not merely personal weakness... they were the work of Satan
 - Jesus says that Satan has demanded permission from God to sift Peter like flour
- Sifting purifies flour by removing impurities, so Satan was asking for opportunity to search for impurities in Peter's heart
 - Satan wants to disqualify Peter, because he was the leader among the disciples and had the keys to the Kingdom
 - Satan was confident that if he brought threats of persecution against Peter, then Peter's devotion to Christ would crumble
 - And if Peter fell, then Satan expects the entire Church will fall with him, since Peter was the rock
- And as we know, Satan was partially right...Peter did fail the test when he denied Jesus not once, but three times in one night
 - But Satan was also wrong in his assumptions about the impact of Peter's faithlessness, because Peter's failure didn't mean the end of the Church
 - Satan's miscalculation was in assuming that the church's existence rests on the faithfulness of Jesus' disciples
 - But it doesn't, and that's why God granted Satan permission to test Peter knowing that Peter would fail that test
 - Jesus wanted His church to learn from Peter's experience so we could understand what happens when our faithfulness falls short
 - Because despite our best intentions, we too depart from Jesus, routinely, both in our actions and in our words
 - We say we love Jesus and will follow and obey Him, but then we spend the rest of our life doing much the opposite
 - We make promises and commitments and appointments and goals and resolutions...and then we break many of them
 - And in times of stress, a Christian can even come to denying they know Christ rather than face the consequences of faith
 - That's the reality of sinful flesh...we are weak and prone to wandering
 - So if believers are to have eternal life without fear of rejection, then that

salvation can't depend upon our faithfulness to Jesus

- Because we simply can't be faithful enough given the weakness of our flesh
- That's the primary error made by those who believe salvation can be lost...it's *not* their assumption that salvation comes and goes...
 - That's wrong too, but their primary error is in assuming that a Christian is *evertruly* faithful to Jesus
 - The only way you believe you are faithful to Jesus is if you lower your standard of faithfulness low enough to stay above it
 - But God's standard for faithfulness is the same as His standard for all behaviors: perfection
 - Only perfection meets God's standard for holiness and righteousness and we have all fallen short of the glory of God
 - Thinking you can be faithful enough to maintain your relationship with Jesus is the same kind of arrogance and pride that stumbled Peter
 - Peter declared twice that he would never abandon Jesus...only to deny Him three times a few hours later
 - And anyone who thinks that their own convictions hold them to Jesus is equally self-deceived
 - If our faithfulness to Christ was the criteria for maintaining our salvation, we would all be in big trouble
 - Because we all routinely act contrary to our profession of faith
 - We all disobey Christ's word by choosing to live in ways contrary to His commands
 - We all give in to worldly thought and behavior, we all live in the flesh at times, forsaking our obligations to the Lord and His body
 - And when pushed hard enough, we all would deny Christ publicly as Peter did
- Now perhaps you're saying, "No, not me Steve, I would never deny Christ," and if that's you, please allow me to direct you back to Peter's example
 - The Rock of the early church, the man who walked with Jesus in person for three years, rejected Jesus mere hours after promising he wouldn't
 - The Lord permitted Satan to intimidate and frighten Peter with threats of persecution, and when he did, Peter folded like a kite
 - In fact, Satan's plan worked so well that Peter denied Christ three times!
 - Do you honestly think you're stronger than Peter? Are we so foolish as to think we would have done better in that situation?
 - So if you're feeling secure because you've never publicly denied knowing Jesus, it just means Satan hasn't asked to sift you yet
 - And the fact that Jesus said yes to Satan's request should worry anyone who believes we hold onto our salvation by our faithfulness to Jesus
 - Good luck with that, friend, because you can't be faithful enough...you don't

have the spiritual strength to be that strong

- And in the day when Satan makes you the target, you will discover how weak your flesh truly is
- And in that moment you become thankful that your salvation doesn't rest on your faithfulness to Jesus but on Christ's faithfulness to you
 - The Bible says your salvation came by the grace of God, through a faith that is not of our own, it is a gift of God to us
 - You didn't obtain salvation by your own strength and you aren't holding onto it by your own power either, as Paul told us

1Cor. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

1Cor. 1:31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

- Paul says by *His doing* we are in Christ Jesus, which means we didn't even come to Jesus on our own...He came to us bringing us faith
 - At that moment, Jesus became our righteousness, Paul says, but Jesus' work in us didn't stop there
 - Paul says that Christ also becomes our sanctification and ultimately our redemption...Jesus does it all
 - He finishes the spiritual work in us that He began, so that all who are saved ultimately come to glory...and we add nothing
- Peter's example is proof to us that salvation doesn't rest on our faithfulness to Christ, but rather we rest in Christ's faithfulness to us and to His own word
 - In Peter's case, Christ promised he would have the keys to the Kingdom and that Peter was to lead the church
 - And then Christ promised Peter that they would meet again in the Galilee after he abandoned Jesus
 - And finally, Jesus promised Peter that He would join Jesus in Heaven after a short time
 - All those promises came from the mouth of God, and nothing in the Universe is more powerful than the word of God
 - So that even when we disobey or disregard Jesus or walk away from Him like a rebellious child, the Lord remains faithful
 - And how can a righteous God remain so faithful to a faithless people? Because Jesus died to make forgiveness possible
 - Take one more look at that passage in Luke 22...notice Jesus tells Peter in v.32 that He prayed for Peter that his faith wouldn't fail during the test
 - We know Peter did deny Jesus, but Jesus says that He would ensure that Peter's

faith wouldn't fail despite those denials

- Which means that while Peter was denying Christ three times, the Lord was working in Peter's heart to maintain Peter's faith
- Peter's faith was preserved by the power of God, not by Peter's own strength
- So even as Peter's actions demonstrated faithlessness, Peter could take comfort knowing his spirit remained in covenant with the Living God
 - That's why Jesus added that *when* Peter turned again, he would strengthen His brothers
 - The key words there are when and again
 - Jesus said *when* Peter turned, not *if* he turned, because Jesus was going to make sure that Peter turned back in time
 - And Jesus said *again*, because Peter's first turn would not be his last...in the end, Peter would remain in Christ
- That's why Jesus said Peter would strengthen his brothers...He meant Peter's failure and restoration would become a source of reassurance for our own hope
 - When we fall short in faithfulness, we remember that Peter fell first
 - And if we wonder whether Jesus will take us back, we remember that He restored Peter telling Him I'll meet you in the Galilee
 - So if you think you've done things too terrible to be forgiven, or perhaps you've walked away from the faith, remember Peter
 - You can't possibly do worse than Peter who swore a public oath that he didn't know Jesus even as Jesus looked on
 - And yet Jesus never rejected Peter and when Peter finally turned back, Jesus was there waiting to greet him in Galilee
 - Later in his life, a mature Peter taught the Church to learn from his own experience when he wrote

1Pet. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pet. 1:4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

1Pet. 1:5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1Pet. 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

1Pet. 1:7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

- Peter describes our salvation as an act of God's mercy, which caused us to be born again into a living hope in the resurrection of Jesus
 - And that hope means we will obtain an eternal inheritance that is reserved for us in Heaven and cannot be taken from us
 - And then Peter says that eternal future is "protected by the power of God" through faith
 - Peter knew perhaps better than anyone that our eternal life is protected by the power of God and that faith is preserved
- Which is why Peter goes on to say that we should rejoice greatly even as we are distressed by various trials
 - Because those trials ultimately become proof of our faith, even when we are faithless in a moment as Peter was
 - As we reflect on Peter's whole experience, we come to realize that his actions did not nullify a faith God placed in the heart
 - And therefore, neither will our faithless words or actions threaten a faith God gave us and is protecting for a future day of glory
 - And Peter says in that day to come, Christ's faithfulness to us and His preserving of our faith will result in praise and glory for Him
- That's why Paul tells us in Romans that we have no reason to fear anything in this life because nothing can separate us from our eternal future with Jesus

Rom. 8:33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

Rom. 8:34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Rom. 8:35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

- Paul asks rhetorically how can a Christian be condemned when Jesus is for us, referring to Jesus interceding for us before God
 - Paul is saying that no matter how faithless we are, we have a faithful advocate securing our forgiveness every time
 - Just as Jesus interceded for Peter asking that his faith would not fail, and because of Jesus' intercession Peter was restored
- So Paul asks us what worldly pressure could ever be enough to separate us from Christ?
 - If Satan brought the full force of his persecution against you, I assure you that you would recant your faith
 - If we are subject to famine or peril or the threat of death, most of us would say or do whatever we could to escape that moment
- But Paul asks how can those things stop Jesus from interceding for us? No matter how unfaithful you may be to Christ, He intercedes for you

- So when we fail Jesus – and we fail Him routinely – He comes through for us before the throne of God faithfully, every time
- In fact, Jesus' protection over His sheep is so complete and Satan must ask God's permission before Satan can even test us
- And even if that testing comes, and even if we fail in the face of tribulation or distress or sword, Jesus stands by us
- Even if we renounce Christ as Peter did, Jesus forgives us that offense too, protecting and preserving our faith in the meantime
- So if you believe salvation can be lost, that someone can repudiate Christ and walk away from their salvation, then Peter's story was written just for you
 - Jesus allowed Satan to sift Peter for your sake...so that you could see conclusive evidence of how faithless we are and yet how faithful Jesus is
 - You didn't earn Jesus' mercy in the beginning
 - You didn't impress Jesus by your confession of faith such that Jesus felt compelled to save you on merit
 - The Bible says He saved you as an act of His mercy by His grace
 - And in fact, we were dead in our trespasses and sins even as we were being saved, so clearly Jesus saves faithless people
 - And Peter's account is your reassurance that your hope rests in Jesus not in yourself
 - Paul sums up our relationship to Jesus in one verse in 2 Timothy 2:13...

2Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- If Jesus were faithless to us, He would deny Himself, meaning He would deny His own promises, and that's something God cannot do
 - Rejoice in your salvation made sure by the faithfulness of a God who keeps His promises
 - What better way to end this lesson than with the words Peter uses to close his first letter to the church:

1Pet. 5:10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

1Pet. 5:11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- Our study of the passion of Jesus starts today with Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane
 - The challenge for us in studying the passion of Christ is in coming to appreciate and balance our understanding of two contrary perspectives
 - On the one hand, we need to be able to put ourselves in the place of a man facing an excruciatingly painful experience
 - What was it like to face this certain future, especially knowing exactly what it would involve?
 - What were Jesus' emotions, fears, and temptations, and how did He face them with such strength?
 - But on the other hand, we also need to understand what it means that it was also God suffering and dying
 - Did the fact that Jesus was God make this process easier for Him? Can God truly die?
 - How do we explain this seemingly impossible circumstance and do so without wandering into theological error?
 - The early church had false teachers who tried to address this challenge by claiming wrongly that Jesus wasn't God at His death
 - They said the Spirit of God left Jesus before He died so that Jesus was just a man when He died, which is contrary to the Bible
 - So without introducing such error, we want to know how Jesus endured the torment of the cross and how an eternal transcendent God died
 - And we start that journey today looking at Jesus' anticipation of that process beginning late on Wednesday night
 - Jesus and the disciples have left Jerusalem after their Passover supper and are gathered in the Garden of Gethsemane
 - The exact location of this Garden is unknown today, except we know it was somewhere on the western slope of the Mt of Olives
 - The hour is late, probably near midnight, and the disciples are weary after a long day
 - Earlier Jesus dismissed Judas from the meal to allow him to betray Jesus
 - Most likely, Judas went first to the chief priests to report that Jesus liked to pray in the evenings on the Mt of Olives
 - From there, the priests would have taken Judas to the Roman authorities to seek an arrest warrant and soldiers to enforce it
- While this was going on in the city, Jesus sits awaiting His arrest in the Garden, knowing full well what was coming and being fully capable of preventing it
 - Thus began Jesus' extreme emotional and mental anguish, as He contemplates the terror that is coming and resists the urge to stop it

Matt. 26:36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

Matt. 26:37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

Matt. 26:38 Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.”

- As Jesus enters the Garden, He directs 8 of His disciples to stay near the entrance and pray
 - And then He takes Peter, James and John with Him further up the Mt of Olives for company in the midst of His suffering and distress
 - And that’s the perspective you need to have in your mind as you imagine this scene
 - Imagine a Jesus visibly distressed, just as you would be if you were in His place and knew what was about to unfold
 - In a few hours Jesus is going to endure beatings by Roman soldiers who were trained in how to inflict maximum pain without mercy
 - Those beatings will be followed by a scourging that often brought a victim near to death from the shock and blood loss
 - And then Jesus will have a crown of thorns thrust into his scalp
 - Then He will be forced to carry a beam of wood bearing down on His shredded skin, which was torture in itself
 - And of course, at the end of this unbelievable torment, Jesus will be nailed to a cross to hang in excruciating pain fighting for breath
 - We know these things happened because we can read about them after the fact, but even so we don’t know what it’s like to experience it all
 - But Jesus in His omniscience not only knew exactly what was going to happen beforehand
 - But more than that, He also knew exactly what it would *feel*/like, so in effect He could feel it all even before He experienced it
 - And then to add to His torture, Jesus possessed the power to stop all of it if He chose
 - In the next passage, Jesus will remark on His ability to end His own torture at any time merely by calling upon angels
 - Can you even imagine the suffering that comes with all that knowledge and power? The temptation to say no?
 - That’s the state of mind Jesus has right now as He enters the Garden and awaits Judas and the Romans
 - He is distressed both by what is coming but also by His flesh’s desire to say no to it

- That helps us appreciate what Matthew means when he describes Jesus' state of mind as deeply grieved to the point of death
 - You know, when our teenager says he is starving to death or she is so embarrassed she could just die, we know it's hyperbole
 - But when Jesus says He is deeply grieved to a point of death, He means it literally
 - Jesus was so disturbed by the thought of what was coming that He felt as though the stress inside Him would almost kill Him
 - For example, Luke reports that Jesus experienced a rare condition that night called hematohidrosis which is brought about by extreme stress
 - The small capillaries at the surface of the skin burst under pressure from the body's stress response
 - Then blood seeps out of the body through nearby sweat glands making the person appear to be sweating blood
 - Jesus experienced a kind of stress few have ever known which tells us that His anticipation that night was as much torture as the actual events
 - And Jesus has asked His disciples to accompany Him in prayer to comfort Him in His time of distress
 - Company in times of stress is comforting, but there was a larger, more important reason they needed to be there
- Notice Jesus says in v.38 that the three disciples should remain with Him to "keep watch with me..."
 - What was Jesus asking them to watch *for*? One obvious answer might be that they should watch for the approach of Judas and the soldiers
 - But that doesn't make sense, because they didn't know Judas was coming with soldiers
 - Moreover, why would Jesus need them to watch for that...it's not as if He would miss Judas and the soldiers when they arrived
 - Jesus has something else on His mind and we see what that is in the next section

Matt. 26:39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Matt. 26:40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?"

Matt. 26:41 "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

- From that point, Jesus goes a little farther by Himself and puts His face on the ground to pray alone

- And Jesus prays that the Father would allow this moment to pass Him by
- This is the only time in the Gospels when Jesus addresses God as “My Father” during a moment of prayer
- Which matches Jesus’ mood...He’s distressed like a child in trouble going to His Father for help
- Also, this is the only time in the Gospels where we see Jesus asking for something that the Father cannot give Him
 - But when you look more closely at Jesus’ prayer, we see clearly that Jesus knew that the Father couldn’t grant the request
 - In fact, Jesus was the Author of this plan
- The Bible says Jesus is the word of God, meaning He is the Author of the Bible, including the passages that foretell His crucifixion
 - For example, Jesus gave this word to Isaiah:

**Is. 53:4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.**

**Is. 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.**

- Jesus told us about His death centuries before it happened including that it would involve a piercing and crushing
- And even before that, Jesus told us in the Torah that He would hang on a tree, referring to His crucifixion
- So how does Jesus expect the Father to give Him any other option now? Clearly Jesus didn’t expect a “yes” to this request and His prayer reflects that
 - In fact, Jesus adds comments like “if possible” and “not my will but your will” to emphasize that He wants to do what the Father wants
 - And those additions are important, because without them we would find ourselves looking at a theological conundrum
 - If God the Son asks God the Father to do something then it would happen, for the Father and Son are always in agreement
 - But the Father can’t grant this request because it would contradict other Scripture, and God can’t violate His word
 - So we literally can’t have a moment where the Son asks the Father to go against His word or it calls into question His deity
 - Moreover, Jesus can’t be against the Father’s will or else Jesus ceases being a

voluntary sacrifice for our sin, which is also against Scripture

- The Bible says that Christ goes willingly to the cross for the sins of the World as an act of sacrificial love for Creation
- And elsewhere Jesus says that the definition of love is that we lay our life down for another
- So the voluntary nature of Jesus' death is critical to demonstrating the love of God
- So in His prayer, Jesus is careful to tell the Father that He should ignore Jesus' request if it goes against His will
 - Jesus asked for the trial to be taken away but only if that is what the Father willed
 - So in a sense, the Father gave Jesus exactly what Jesus requested
- From a human perspective, it's completely understandable why Jesus made this request even though it wasn't going to come to pass
 - This moment is one of the clearest examples of Jesus' humanity at work in Him and it's why this moment is recorded here
 - In fact, I would argue that if Jesus *hadn't* prayed this prayer, we would have reason to question whether Jesus was truly human
 - There's no way any human being could know what was coming and go into such a trial without wishing it would go away
- And as a model of prayer, this moment is perhaps the most important prayer moment in Jesus' earthly life
 - There is hardly a person alive who can't identify with Jesus here
 - How many times have we faced a circumstance where we want to pray for a different outcome
 - And yet we know that although God has the power to do anything, He is not likely to change things for us
 - We ask God to save a loved one's life who is close to death and unlikely to recover...we know God can, but we sense He won't
 - Or we ask God to reverse some situation in the world, something big like war or natural disasters...He could, but it's not likely He will
 - And even as you pray in situations like that, you may feel as if it's a waste of time
 - Or perhaps you question whether you are guilty of not having enough faith in God, etc.
 - When you get to those moments, remember Jesus' prayer here and know your time in prayer was not a waste and you did nothing wrong
 - If Jesus can ask that His crucifixion stop, knowing there was no way God could say yes, then you are not wrong either
 - It's only human to bring requests to God, and we should, and even when we ask

for things God won't do, there is value for us

- Prayer isn't merely a transaction with God...it's an opportunity to gain the mind of God so that we can persevere in His will
 - Jesus knew the plan...He *wrote* the plan...yet here He is asking God to change it if He willed to do so
 - Did God the Son want the plan to change? No, but the Son of Man certainly felt the stress of going through with it
 - And that caused Him to reach out to God just as we do seeking for some solution
 - And the solution God gave Jesus was the strength to go through with it, and that's why we pray in difficult times too: for strength
 - Sometimes we pray for things to change and they do because that's God's will, and we rejoice when His will and our will are aligned
 - And other times we will be praying for God to bring us that alignment, to strengthen us so we can accept what He brings
 - And in both cases, our prayer life becomes a witness to the world of the work of God and the will of God
 - And I believe that's what Jesus meant when He told the three disciples to watch... He meant they should watch Him in prayer to learn God's will
 - These men were the witnesses to this prayer moment
 - By watching Jesus in prayer, they were in a position to record what Jesus said and report it to us
 - They could see Jesus' anguish in facing crucifixion, yet they also hear Jesus praying for the Father's will to be done in the end
 - So that then as they reflected on this moment later in life, they could write things like this to the church:

1Pet. 2:20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

1Pet. 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

1Pet. 2:22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

1Pet. 2:23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

1Pet. 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

- Peter says that Jesus kept entrusting Himself to the Father who judges righteously, and I think He was referring to this moment among others

- Peter was thinking back to the Garden prayer where Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father's will in the midst of trial
- And Peter says there's your example, there's your model for how to endure suffering...thank the Lord that He made Peter watch
- So what else did Jesus pray on that occasion? Well, we don't know because of what happens next...
 - In v.40 we're told Jesus gets just one sentence into His prayer when He notices that the men have fallen asleep
 - So Jesus gets up, goes to the men and wakes them and chastises them for not staying awake to watch even one hour
 - One hour is probably Jesus' approximation of the time remaining before Judas appears
 - Then Jesus says that they should pray as well to avoid temptation
 - Some think Jesus meant the temptation to deny Christ or run away, which we know these men will eventually do
 - That may be true, but I think Jesus was speaking of the temptation to sleep, since that's His primary concern now
 - If they sleep they will not watch His prayer
 - So with His disciples awake again for the moment, Jesus returns to prayer and repeats His request in a new way

Matt. 26:42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

- Jesus says again that if the cup can't pass away, then the Father's will should be done
- Jesus is using the metaphor of drinking a cup as a picture of receiving the wrath of God
- The Bible describes the wrath of God being filled up in a cup and poured out on those deserving of it in the book of Revelation
 - And Jesus is using that same imagery here, except that the wrath of God is about to be poured out on Jesus
 - He is going to receive the wrath that God had reserved for all those who come to faith in Jesus
 - So the wrath that you and I deserved for our sin is being redirected to Jesus
 - And that's the "cup" Jesus doesn't want to drink yet knows He must
- So while Jesus' humanity is desperately seeking a way out, His divine nature remains intent on being One with the will of the Father
 - And in a sense we face a similar struggle in our walk with Jesus
 - Like Jesus, we have a spirit inside us that knows the right thing to do and wants to do God's will if it can

- But standing in the way of our obedient spirit is our sinful flesh that always wants to do the opposite of God's will, Romans says
- And these two sides of us battle against one another constantly for control, and in a sense Jesus shows us that battle here
 - Of course, Jesus didn't possess sinful flesh, because He was not born of Adam and did not have sin in Him whatsoever
 - But in a similar way, Jesus is battling against the desire of His fleshly body in its desire to stay alive and avoid pain
- Those desires weren't sinful in and of themselves, yet if Jesus had given in to His body's weakness, then it would have become sin
 - So that's the struggle Jesus is waging here for our sake, as He's tempted to avoid the cross
 - Jesus endured that temptation and ignored His flesh's desire to avoid the cross so that He could do the Father's will
- Look, if Jesus had to experience this struggle to do the right thing, then we know He understands our battles and He's prepared to help us
 - As the writer of Hebrews tells us

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Heb. 4:16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- Jesus can be our source of strength in times when we know what we need to do but can't find the strength to do it
- But our obligation in those moments is to do what Jesus is doing here...turn our struggles into prayer
- We ask the Father to either remove the trial or help us remain in His will in the trial, and He will hear us and give us one or the other
 - I think that may have been the lesson John learned as he watched Jesus in between moments of sleep on that night

1John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1John 5:14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

1John 5:15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

- John says that when we pray we know the Father hears us, and that He is answering our requests
- John doesn't say He will do what we want, but John does say we can be sure we are getting an answer in every case
- That's what we're watching Jesus model in this moment, no thanks to these three men who can barely keep their eyes open
 - For a third time they drift off, which forces Jesus to interrupt his prayer once more

Matt. 26:43 Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

Matt. 26:44 And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.

Matt. 26:45 Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Matt. 26:46 "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

- This scene repeats a third time with Jesus commanding them to remain awake and then praying again and then returning to find them asleep
 - As a result, the Gospels don't record anything else besides Jesus' request to avoid the cross if it's the Father's will
 - If Jesus did say more, these men slept through most of it, but at least they got the main point
- Jesus' persistence in pressing His disciples to fight sleep offers us an important footnote to the model Jesus gives us here
 - We find two important ingredients for a godly prayer life, beginning with persistence
 - And not just the persistence to pray regularly, but persistence in the fight against the weakness of our flesh seeking to stop us
- How many of us can identify with this situation: we start praying and almost immediately we feel sleepy and can't keep going?
 - Or you find your mind wandering away in the moment and you lose focus on what you're praying about?
 - Or you are tempted to stop praying when your mind turns to something you've forgotten to do, etc.?
- All of these examples are your flesh tempting you to cease in prayer, which is a challenge in everyone's prayer life
 - We are tempted to fall asleep, to avoid the opportunity, to leave early, to give up altogether
 - Jesus reminds us here that our flesh is weak in everything, including in engaging in prayer

- So persistence is an essential ingredient to a godly prayer life and knowing our flesh is weak requires strategies to address it
- For example, if you get sleepy, then make your habit to pray in the morning or while you are taking a walk when you can stay alert
 - If you find your mind wandering, then make a list before you start to pray and focus on each item as you pray
 - If you are easily distracted by other demands in your life, then block your prayer time on a calendar, turn off the phone, etc.
- If you ever face a trial like the one Jesus is facing, you won't have to worry about sleep or distraction, because you will be desperate to talk to the Father
 - But in your normal day-to-day prayer life, you may need some of these strategies to address the weakness of your flesh
 - And Jesus shows us that persistence is important...sleeping on the job is not OK when prayer is the order of the day
- Finally, Jesus asked these men to watch Him pray because He knew His public, vocal prayer would be an encouragement to them and to us
 - And in that detail, we learn that our public prayer is a powerful witness to others, believers and unbelievers alike
 - We don't pray in public to be noticed, of course, because that's just pride, but that wasn't Jesus' heart here
 - He wanted His disciples to watch Him because He was teaching them even as He was speaking to the Father
 - And that should be our heart as well...praying publicly with other believers in church or a small group or some other setting is good
 - It's good for us and for those around us because it can be used by God to teach everyone
 - It will teach you to be a more public witness for Christ and to be more comfortable in sharing what you believe about Jesus
 - And it will teach others the importance of prayer as they see your heart of prayer in that moment and as they witness God's response in time
 - Prayer is primarily a private experience done in secret, as Jesus tells us, but there are times when we share it with others too
 - Just as Jesus kept eight of His disciples back but allowed three close men to come with Him to hear His prayer
 - Look for opportunity to bring others along with you in your prayer life so that you can model for them and encourage them
- Our passage ended today with Jesus announcing His betrayer was approaching, and we will pick up our study here again with Judas' arrival

- Last week we studied Jesus' time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and we stopped in the middle of the action as Judas and the soldiers approached
 - So now the moment of Jesus' arrest has come...Jesus has been intimating and explicitly stating this would happen for some time
 - Just a short time earlier at the start of this chapter, Jesus told His men He would be handed over for crucifixion
 - By that one statement, Jesus implicated both the Jewish authorities and the Romans of their parts in that transaction
 - Since only the Romans practiced crucifixion, they were obviously the ones who were going to receive Jesus
 - And the only ones who can hand over Jesus to the Romans were His fellow Jews in authority of Israel
 - And so now in v.45 the arrest of Jesus unfolds, beginning with Jesus announcing His betrayer's arrival

Matt. 26:45 Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Matt. 26:46 "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

Matt. 26:47 While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Matt. 26:48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."

Matt. 26:49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

Matt. 26:50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

- Last week we studied as Jesus challenged His disciples to remain awake and keep watch over Jesus during His prayer time
 - But now the moment has passed, because Judas has arrived with an entourage
 - And as he does, Jesus announces it even as it happens, as if Jesus is narrating His own arrest
 - This has been going on for a while as Jesus has made several statements about what was coming for Him
 - And all this anticipation and foretelling begs one big question...why didn't Jesus run away or prevent this outcome?
 - And the answer we already know...Jesus was entering into His own death voluntarily as a matter of necessity
 - He was a willing sacrifice for our sake, not a victim in the sense of someone Who

is unable to defend Himself

- On the contrary, Jesus is the author of this plan having determined it from before the foundations of the earth
 - Moreover, Jesus has the power to stop it if He desired
 - And that truth is a major theme in the way Matthew and the other Gospel writers approach the telling of this story
- They will show time and again that Jesus was in control over these circumstances, and that detail is important to understanding the events
 - If you didn't know better, you might assume Jesus was being swept away by a grand conspiracy that He was powerless to stop
 - And if that's how you see this story, then you would likely question Jesus' claims to be the Messiah and to be God
 - In fact, some argue that the Father "murdered" the Son of God by putting Him on the cross, which grossly misrepresents the facts
 - The truth is exactly the opposite: Jesus is voluntarily going to the cross just as He planned to do from the foundations of the earth
 - And to ensure it happens just as Jesus planned, by harnessing the enemy and the sin of the world to orchestrate events
 - That's why Jesus remained in the one place on that night, knowing that was the place Judas would know to look
 - Obviously, Jesus was in control to bring about these events even as His humanity dreaded them and desperately wished for some other way
 - And now things kick into high gear in v.47 as Judas and a crowd arrive brandishing clubs and spears
 - At first, it sounds as if Judas is being followed by a bunch of angry villagers with pitchforks following behind
 - But John tells us in John 18 that this "crowd" is actually a Roman cohort with weapons, torches and lanterns
 - A cohort of soldiers could vary in size from 200 to as much as 600, but in this case it's likely the smaller number
- Even a contingent of "only" 200 soldiers still seems like overkill to arrest one man, but it makes sense given the circumstances of Passover
 - As I said in an earlier lesson, Judas would have been required to give testimony before Pilate so the priests could secure soldiers for this arrest
 - Roman law required that a witness testify to a crime before soldiers were dispatched for an arrest
 - But during Passover, Pilate would have been particularly receptive to such a request and standing by to receive it
 - Traditionally Passover was a time of unrest in Jerusalem when Jews would riot or protest Roman occupation

- For the Jewish people, Passover was equivalent to our 4th of July or Independence Day because it remembers the Exodus
- So every year when this feast rolled around, Jewish passions were stirred up against the Romans
- The Romans hated anything that broke the peace, so they brought many additional soldiers into the city for Passover
- And if the Romans heard rumors that an instigator was inciting insurrection, they reacted quickly and harshly to put it down
- So we assume that when Judas went to Pilate claiming that Jesus was seeking to become king of Israel, Pilate responded with a Roman cohort
 - That leads to this comical scene of 200+ Roman soldiers with weapons and torches coming for one man from Nazareth
 - Since the high priest did not leave his house before Passover to avoid becoming unclean, Luke says he sent his slave instead
 - Luke also says that the captains of the temple, the Jewish police force for the temple, also came along
 - Finally, Luke says members of the Sanhedrin counsel were present
- The presence of the Jewish authorities is one of many injustices that take place in the course of Jesus' trial, conviction and death
 - First, the Romans were acting on the false testimony of Judas, so the charges are obviously false
 - Secondly, the Jewish authorities were in violation of their own law by arresting someone at nighttime
- Jewish law prohibited arrests or trials conducted at night
 - Yet here we have the high counsel of Jewish rulers and the temple guard and the high priest's representative arresting Jesus
 - All of them willingly disobeying the law in order to bring down Jesus
- So now to the arrest...it's dark of course and there were many people on the hillside at Passover, and the Romans don't know what Jesus looks like
 - So without photos, the Romans needed a positive ID of their suspect by someone who knew Jesus, namely Judas
 - And Judas has arranged a particularly personal way of identifying Jesus to the Romans
 - Judas tells them in v.48 that whoever he kisses is the one they should seize
 - Now why did Judas choose that method? It was Judas' self-serving means of hiding his true motives
 - By pretending to be greeting Jesus in a friendly way, Judas hoped he wouldn't appear to be working for the Romans
 - So that after greeting Jesus with a kiss, Judas could act surprised when the Romans appear out of the dark to arrest Jesus

- His wanted plausible deniability in front of the other disciples
- Judas is acting in a cowardly way to hide his betrayal of Jesus but Jesus ruins the game when He announces Judas' intentions to the others
 - In Luke's Gospel we read this

Luke 22:47 While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him.

Luke 22:48 But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

- Jesus speaks up as Judas approaches and gives away the sign even before Judas carries it out, asking will you betray Me with a kiss?
 - Obviously, it's a rhetorical question, because Jesus knew exactly what Judas was doing
 - Jesus made the statement for the benefit of the other disciples to inform them of what was about to happen
 - But after being called out, Judas goes through with the gesture nonetheless because he wants to earn his money
 - Interestingly, John's Gospel tells us that even before Judas gets the chance to kiss Jesus, Jesus identifies Himself to the Romans
 - Jesus asks the Romans who they were seeking, and when they say Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus responds "I am"
 - Jesus called Himself the great I AM to remind them of the Lord's appearance before Moses in Exodus 3 when He said I AM WHO I AM
 - And at that moment, the entire Roman cohort and all who were with them fall backward to the ground
 - They slowly get back on their feet, Jesus asks them a second time, and the Romans respond "Jesus" again
 - Even as He was being taken, Jesus makes clear that He wasn't being *taken* to the cross...He was *going* to the cross
 - Finally, Judas steps forward to kiss Jesus, and in v.50 Jesus tells Judas "Friend, do what you have come for"
 - Judas just used an insincere gesture of friendship to betray Jesus, so Jesus returned the favor by calling him "friend" sarcastically
 - And then at that moment, the Romans seized Jesus and placed Him under arrest
- Having heard Jesus' comment about Judas and seeing the soldiers arresting Jesus, the disciples now understand what is happening and leap into action
 - In Luke's account, we're told that the disciples ask Jesus if He wants their help to

fight off the Roman soldiers

Luke 22:49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”

- The disciples’ willingness to fight for Jesus was admirable, if a bit stupid, since there was literally no way they could defeat a Roman cohort
 - But it is surprising that they thought Jesus needed their help and they needed to resort to violence to help Jesus
 - They’ve seen Jesus walk on water, calm a storm, multiply food and escape from angry crowds without help and more
 - Surely they knew Jesus had the power to stop the arrest if He wanted to do so?
- I think there are two reasons driving their response...first in an earlier moment, Jesus told His disciples this:

Luke 22:35 And He said to them, “When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?” They said, “No, nothing.”

Luke 22:36 And He said to them, “But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.

Luke 22:37 “For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, ‘AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS’; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment.”

Luke 22:38 They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” And He said to them, “It is enough.”

- Jesus told these men a few hours earlier that the time had come for them to carry money belts and swords
 - Before this moment, they never needed such things because Jesus was their supply and protection
 - But now Jesus was preparing them for ministry after Jesus was gone at His ascension
- From this point forward, these men would be in a world that would hate them for their association with Jesus
 - They will be attacked, slandered, persecuted and martyred
 - They would need money and they might need to act in self-defense against thieves or others determined to stop them
- And since these men had just heard Jesus warn them to be prepared with swords, I think they were primed to act here
 - So when the threat materialized, they were ready to draw their swords, but of

course Jesus would have said no

- But this wasn't a moment of self-defense, certainly not the moment Jesus was talking about earlier
- And so Jesus is prepared to tell these men to stop...except that before Jesus can answer, one of the disciples decides to act

Matt. 26:51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

- One of the disciples gets carried away by the moment, leaps forward and strikes a blow to a member of the arresting party
 - I'll give you one guess which apostle chose to act so impulsively...according to John it was Peter
 - Peter jumps in front of Jesus and attacks the high priest's slave by cutting off his ear with a sword
 - The Greek word for sword describes a small dagger that can be concealed underneath clothing
 - Peter's act of "bravery" is actually a story of pride and cowardice, and this is the second reason for why this scene turns violent
 - Earlier at the Passover meal, Jesus told Peter he would abandon and betray Jesus three times that same night
 - And knowing Peter's pride, I imagine Jesus' comment weighed heavily on Peter's heart in the hours following
 - Peter was probably brooding and looking for a way to prove Jesus wrong about His prediction
 - Then when the Romans move in to arrest Jesus, Peter sees his opportunity to use that sword Jesus told him to carry
 - But Peter isn't as brave as he appears, because Peter carefully chose to attack probably the only unarmed man in the crowd
 - As I said earlier, the High Priest couldn't join this party for fear of becoming unclean, so he sent his representative
 - This man was a servant or slave of the High Priest, and as such, he would not have been allowed to possess a weapon
 - All the Romans and the temple guards had weapons, as did the Sanhedrin members most likely
 - So Peter attacks the one guy in the crowd who had no weapon and couldn't defend himself or retaliate
- It appears Peter wanted to look like he was willing to die for Jesus without actually having to die, further proof Peter is doing this out of pride
 - The final proof is in the way Peter attacks the slave...Peter doesn't land a lethal

blow but instead only cuts off the man's ear

- That move seems calculated on Peter's part to avoid a serious charge or counterattack
- We could give Peter the benefit of the doubt and assume he was trying to cut the guy's throat and just missed the mark
- Even still, it hardly makes Peter look better, since it would just show how inept Peter was at swordplay
- So Peter comes off looking prideful, impulsive, foolish and even a bit silly trying to defend Jesus against a cohort of soldiers with a dagger
 - And in the process, he almost ruins the plan of God and gets himself imprisoned or worse
 - He could have prompted the Romans to react with force killing Peter, Jesus and everyone else
 - Imagine the problems if Peter is convicted for murder or Jesus dies by a Roman sword instead of on a cross?
- Obviously, Jesus wasn't going to allow any of this to happen, for two reasons:

Matt. 26:52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.

Matt. 26:53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

Matt. 26:54 "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"

- First, Jesus objects to Peter's methods
 - He orders Peter to put his sword away, and you get the sense that Jesus is primarily concerned that Peter was going to hurt himself or Jesus
 - And then Jesus warns those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword
 - To take up the sword means to relying on violence to achieve our objectives
 - Jesus is saying those who resort to violence will find violence returning back upon them
 - And that is hardly a controversial statement...it just makes sense...violent people invite violence in return
 - But violence or force in any form will not be a tool of the Church in accomplishing the mission of Christ
- Secondly, violence only leads to more suffering, and conflict, which is the opposite of our calling
 - Jesus makes this point, Luke tells, by turning to help the unfortunate victim of Peter's violence

Luke 22:51 But Jesus answered and said, “Stop! No more of this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.

- This is the only record in the Gospels of Jesus treating a violent injury and it's also the final healing Jesus performs in the Gospel
 - Jesus' healing of the slave was an act of compassion, of course, but it was also an act of necessity to correct Peter's mistake
 - Consider what would have happened had Jesus not healed the slave from this injury?
- First, more than likely Peter would have been arrested as well, and possibly executed or at least imprisoned
 - Peter's place as Christ's appointed leader in the early church could have been in jeopardy
 - And it would have changed the entire course of that night
- Secondly, this incident gives support to the Jewish charges against Jesus and His disciples that they are violent insurgents against Rome
 - No longer would the Jewish leaders need to concoct lies against Jesus
 - The fact that Jesus' chief disciple attempted to murder a member of the delegation could be used to convict Jesus of rebellion
- Jesus is determined to go to the cross willingly, but for that reason He must also go without just cause
 - He will be a willing sacrifice, but He must be an innocent sacrifice
 - So Jesus heals the man to eliminate any evidence to legitimize the conspiracy against Him
- So by His words and actions, Jesus make clear that violence and opposition to authority are not the way of His church – not in the Garden nor afterward
 - And this gives us an important corollary to Jesus' earlier command to His disciples to begin carrying a sword
 - During that earlier moment Jesus was addressing the need to be prepared in self-defense when faced with violence
 - Being a follower of Jesus doesn't require that we become helpless victims or surrender our right to self-defense
 - But on the other hand, neither are we to instigate violence or force or circumvent law to achieve our goals in the Church
 - In this case, Peter used violence in the hope of protecting Jesus' ministry, but violence is antithetical to Jesus' mission
 - Jesus came to save the lost with a message of self-sacrifice, and Peter was turning that message on its head
 - He was ready to *kill* the lost in the name of Jesus, which is nothing less than murder and not something God said to do

- Paul tells us the way Christians are to operate in the world in Romans 12

Rom. 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Rom. 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

Rom. 12:20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”

Rom. 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- When we act violently or unlawfully to avenge ourselves or defend God or advance our agenda, we become as an enemy of God...how?
 - Three ways...breaking the peace interrupts our participation in the plan of God, hurts other people and forfeits our opportunity to overcome evil
 - For example, back in v.54 Jesus asked how can the Scriptures be fulfilled which say Jesus must be arrested unless Peter allows it?
 - Jesus isn't suggesting that Peter *could* change the plan of God; on the contrary, Jesus was saying it *can't* be changed
 - Therefore, Peter's fight against events ordained by God was sin and bound to fail in the end so why work against God?
 - That's what Paul means when he says leave room for the wrath of God
 - When we break the peace, we separate ourselves from the plan of God, and we get in His way, so to speak
 - We need to leave God room to work...not that we change God's plan in the end but we do change our ability to participate in it
 - Secondly, when we resort to force or violence or law breaking thinking we are helping advance God's plan, we inevitably hurt someone else
 - And though Jesus can heal and restore anyone we hurt, why be the kind of person who makes that restoration necessary?
 - So far as it depends upon us, be at peace with everyone
 - Finally, forcing things to go our way means we become the source of evil instead of being the one overcoming evil by doing good
 - Ironically, the only one who used their weapon that night was Peter
 - That night evil was at work to bring Jesus to the cross, and Jesus was working to overcome evil with good by dying in our place
 - And here's Peter trying to stop that plan by assaulting an innocent man... becoming evil instead of overcoming evil
- Peter made all those mistakes by interfering in the plan of God and foolishly, trying to stop what God had ordained, and in the process he hurt someone
 - Here's a simple rule...if you can only accomplish your ministry by breaking laws or

resorting to violence, you have the wrong ministry

- Because self-evidently, the Lord isn't working for those outcomes or at least He isn't accomplishing them through you at that time
- You need to back up and figure out where and how God is truly working and then join Him there without sinning
- So that as far as it depends upon you, you remain at peace with all men
- It comes down to trusting in God's sovereignty knowing He has the power to accomplish anything...He doesn't need us to force anything
 - Look back at v.53...Jesus reminds Peter that He could call down twelve legion of angels to stop this arrest if He so desired
 - Jesus refers to legions of angels to make a comparison to the cohort of Roman soldiers standing around Him
 - A cohort was a few hundred soldiers, but a legion of Roman soldiers was about 5,000 men
 - So 12 legions of angels would be 60,000 angels, which is a lot of angelic power
- Peter should have thought about that before leaping forward with a sword to "protect" Jesus
 - And that's what we need to remember too when we feel tempted to force an outcome in ministry or otherwise
 - If God isn't doing things your way or in your timing, then there is some good reason why a delay or another path is better
- I bet many of us have been tempted to force things lately, because it seems everywhere we turn the pressure is building to force things our way
 - Whether it's the pressure to get back to work or school or to get sports going again or to open our churches
 - Or maybe we feel the pressure to fight for political outcomes
 - Or our family relationships are struggling under the pressure of too much time together
 - These pressures have the potential to bring us to the same point Peter was on that night
 - We feel our ego threatened, we feel defensive and on edge, we have something to prove
 - We're tired of limits or restrictions...we feel mistreated or unheard
 - And suddenly we're determined to take matters into our own hands
 - If that's you, it's time to put that sword away, and turn to the Lord in prayer and ask Him for patience and understanding to work with Him
 - Don't step out of His plan by trying to force outcomes in your life or ministry
 - Don't hurt someone or become the evil you're trying to correct
 - As far as it depends on you, be at peace and look for how God is at work in the

circumstances around you

- And then ask Him how He wants you to minister in the midst of that turmoil

- The action in our story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion is heating up, and from this point forward, much of what we study in this story will be familiar to most of us
 - We've probably all read the Passion account at some point or heard a pastor teaching it or at least watched one of the many movies about it
 - And that's good and helpful to a degree, but it's also a challenge for us as we study it anew now
 - Because certainly the majority of what you've heard or seen in movies is likely an accurate reflection of the text of Scripture
 - But just as likely, some of those accounts may have overlooked important details, or in some cases even misrepresented them
 - And details make a difference in our understanding of what's happening in Jesus' death and resurrection and why it's happening
 - So as we go forward, let's try to put aside what we remember or what we think we know, and let's allow the text to speak to us
 - And that process starts today, as we move to Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders
 - The Roman soldiers have appeared in the Garden led by Judas and followed by the conspiring Jewish religious authorities
 - The Romans provided the muscle to arrest Jesus, but the Jewish leaders were the brains behind the operation
 - And Jesus knows this, which is why He doesn't even bother to address the soldiers but speaks directly to the Jewish leaders

Matt. 26:55 At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me.

Matt. 26:56 "But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

- Jesus asks the religious leaders why they enlisted so much force to arrest Him
 - Jesus is mocking the leaders' weakness, relying on Gentile soldiers to enforce Jewish Law
 - Jesus says these Jewish leaders could have seized Jesus in the temple grounds at any time but they didn't do it
 - And to explain what Jesus is talking about, we need a moment of background on the relationship between Israel and Rome
- Israel was governed by two systems of law in that day...first, Israel was ruled by the Law of Moses which was both a religious law and a civil law
 - Israel's political leaders were rabbis on the Sanhedrin Counsel, their judges were Pharisaic rabbis, and their local leaders were priests

- Every rule of society and life came out of the Law or more specifically, out of the Mishnah, which was the rabbis' rule book
- So for a Jew, there was no distinction between church and state, so to speak, because they were one and the same
- Before Rome conquered Judea around 66 BC, Israel ruled itself according to Mosaic Law
 - But after Rome invaded, Judea became a province of Rome, and Rome ruled Judea according to Roman law
 - They brought Roman language (Latin) and Hellenistic culture and pagan worship practices
 - And as Romans did everywhere, they forced the local populace to adopt these practices in place of the previous culture
- But the Romans soon discovered that Jews could not be ruled in the same way as other peoples they conquered
 - They resisted Roman culture and language, and they were especially resistant to the introduction of other forms of worship
 - Unlike other cultures, Jews would willingly die rather than worship foreign gods or allow Gentiles to enter their temple
- This posed a serious dilemma for the Romans, because though they had the military power to enforce their policies, it led to constant unrest
 - The Jews resisted and rioted almost continually, leading to endless conflict in Judea
 - Quickly the Romans realized that the Jewish people weren't going to be won over to Roman ways
 - So if the Romans wanted peace and stability in Judea, they must either wipe out all Jews or make an exception for their culture
- Since the Romans valued peace and stability over almost anything else, they decided to give Israel certain exemptions they offered no other people
 - First, the Caesar permitted Jews to worship Jehovah instead of Roman gods, which was the only such exception permitted in all the empire
 - Jews throughout the Roman empire were not required to pay homage to Caesar nor were they required to worship him
 - No other conquered people received this exemption, which is why the Jewish temple was the only such structure in the empire
 - Secondly, the Romans agreed to recognize the Jewish temple as sovereign territory and allowed Jews to control and police its grounds
 - In fact, Roman soldiers would not even be permitted to enter the temple except in times of rebellion or social unrest
 - So as long as the Jews kept the peace, the Romans would refrain from entering or interfering with the temple operations
 - And within the temple, Jews could conduct business in their own currency and

without Roman taxation

- Finally, Jews could govern other Jews under the Mosaic Law including conducting trials and punishing offenders with Roman approval
 - But there was one major exception to Jews governing themselves...Rome reserved capital punishment for itself
 - If Jewish authorities wanted to execute someone for a violation of Mosaic Law, they needed Rome's approval
 - And since Rome wasn't particularly impressed by Jewish law, it could be a challenge to convince Rome to allow an execution
- As a result, the Jews found a way of getting around this limitation...by seizing a Jew inside the temple grounds outside of Roman oversight and intervention
 - Because of the exception given by the Caesar, Romans were not allowed to enter the temple or police its operations
 - In fact, a sign was posted at the entrance of the Court of Women declaring that Gentiles would be killed if they entered
 - So the Jews had almost free reign to apprehend, convict and even execute criminals inside the temple walls
 - Technically, the Romans did not approve of such things, and if the need arose, they could intervene to put down unrest in the temple court
 - But in most cases, the Romans just looked the other way, as long as the event didn't turn into a riot or disturbed the peace
 - And that's what Jesus is talking about now as He mocks the Jewish leaders for arresting Him with the help of Romans
 - If these men had wanted to seize Jesus, they could have done so without Roman intervention at any time in the temple
 - Jesus has spent the better part of the last four days in the temple, and Jesus is asking them why not take Me there?
 - In other words, the religious leaders' choice to arrest Jesus with Roman soldiers outside the temple proves they have no case
 - If they had arrested Jesus in the temple, they would have charged Jesus in full view of the people and the ruling counsel of the Sanhedrin
 - Under those circumstances, their accusations would have been subject to public scrutiny – yet they lacked any hard evidence
 - Under those circumstances, the Jewish crowds would have rioted against them, as they mentioned earlier in the Gospel
 - Moreover, they would have likely lost the resulting trial, since they didn't have evidence against Jesus and their eye witnesses were inconsistent
 - So the religious leaders couldn't risk those outcomes, which is why they chose to use Romans at night away from the crowds
 - And Jesus is mocking the weakness of their case and their own cowardice in arresting Him in this underhanded way

- Jesus adds that all this happened to fulfill Scripture, referring to His own prophecy that He would be handed over by the Romans to the Jews
 - Jesus also predicted that he would be abandoned by the disciples and notice at the end of v.56 it happens as He said
 - This little detail is one of those key moments you find recorded throughout the Gospels that proves their authenticity
 - If the apostles had invented the story of Jesus, we would not expect to find moments like this recorded in their account
 - Throughout the Gospels, the apostles report themselves in a negative light either bumbling about, making poor choices and acting cowardly
 - But if these men had invented the Gospel accounts, we wouldn't have expected them to depict themselves so poorly
 - On the contrary, liars who invent tall tales portray themselves as heroes or at worst innocent bystanders
 - But these men represent themselves as weak, ignorant and foolish, which argues for their authenticity
 - In fact, in Mark's account of this moment in the Garden, he describes his own behavior this way

Mark 14:51 A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him.

Mark 14:52 But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.

- Not the the most flattering way to remember your part in that evening's events, yet Mark reported it
- The fact that these men tell it like it was is strong proof for us to know these accounts came from accurate, eye-witness reports
- So Jesus is now in Roman custody, but how did we get to the point that the Messiah and Creator of the Universe is being manhandled by godless Gentiles?
 - Luke tells us that God gave Satan the upper hand over the Light of the World for a brief moment that God planned and purposed

Luke 22:52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber?"

Luke 22:53 "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

- God appointed Satan and his forces to accomplish this plan, yet Satan doesn't even realize he's following God's script

- Once again, Jesus is in control here with events going just as Jesus said they would over 4,000 years earlier in the Garden

Gen. 3:15 And I will put enmity

**Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”**

- After the fall of Man in the Garden, the Lord told Satan that He would establish enmity or conflict Satan's forces and God's forces
 - The Lord called those who belong to Satan his “seed” and those who belong to God are the “seed of Woman”
 - The seed of Woman is an oblique reference to a virgin birth, since women don't have “seed,” biblically speaking
 - And as Paul explains in Galatians 3:16, the term seed was singular, not plural, because it refers to a certain person: Christ
 - So the seed of Woman is Jesus, therefore those who are born of this seed are those born again by faith in Jesus Christ
- So there will always be enmity or conflict between the enemy's followers (unbelievers) and Christ's followers (believers)
 - Ultimately this conflict comes down to a battle between Christ Himself and Satan, which climaxes at two different moments
 - In v.15 the Lord summarizes these two moments, saying Satan will strike at Christ's heel but Christ will strike at Satan's head
- The Lord was foretelling His plan of redemption, where Satan would first strike Jesus but in a limited way
 - This was a prophecy of the cross, where Jesus is struck on the “heel” by Satan indicating that this blow won't be strong enough to destroy Christ
 - Jesus will die on the cross as a result of Satan's blow, but Jesus is raised again by the power of God
 - And by His resurrection Christ conquers Satan's only power, which is the power of death
 - The second battle comes much later, when Christ one day strikes Satan on the “head,” meaning with a fatal blow
 - This striking will result in Satan's destruction at the end of the Kingdom when Jesus casts Satan into the Lake of Fire
 - That's the plan that Jesus Himself wrote, since He is both the Author and Perfector of our Salvation
 - So as we watch the first of these battles unfolding here, remember that darkness gets the upper hand only because Jesus ordained it

- The enemy is striking Christ on the heel with a blow that accomplishes the plan of redemption
- But in a day to come, the Lord will return that promised death blow to Satan once and for all
- And if the Father allows Satan this hour of authority over His own Son, then we shouldn't be surprised when the Father opens the same door for us at times
 - As He did with Jesus, God will allow Satan and his forces opportunity in our life to bring trial and even suffering as part of His plan for good
 - First, remember that we are not above our Master, so if Jesus was persecuted by Satan, so will we be persecuted at times
 - But persecution isn't merely someone pressuring us not to practice our religion or attacking us for our faith
 - More often, the enemy brings persecution in the form of temptations for us to disobey God or to walk away from practicing our faith
 - He brings us trials or other temptations that lead us into sin of one kind or another, and that's the purest form of persecution
 - If you've never understood your own tendencies to give in to sin as a form of persecution, then you haven't understood the battle
 - And if you don't understand the battle you're facing, then you're certainly not prepared to triumph in it
 - Remember the story of Job...the Lord allowed Satan to persecute a righteous man in horrible ways to prove his faithfulness
 - But how did Satan bring that persecution? Did God cause the government to attack Job's freedom of religion?
 - Did Job's neighbors protest his desire to worship God?
 - No, Satan's persecution of Job came in the form of hardships that made life so hard for Job that it removed the joy of obedience
 - Satan was hoping that Job would become so upset and discouraged that he would become unfaithful and curse God
 - And although Job was very unhappy and couldn't understand why this was happening, nonetheless Job said this about God

Job 13:15 “Though He slay me,
I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

- The Bible says that Satan is allowed to attack believers at times, just as he attacked Jesus, so that God might use the trial to accomplish something good
 - That is the enmity God promised would exist between unbelievers and believers, and it's the purest form of persecution

- But when the enemy persecutes you, you can be sure the enemy is just following the Lord's script
- The Lord is bringing that trial for a good reason, and it requires spiritual maturity to recognize and benefit from that purpose
- Moreover, the Bible says that the Lord will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle
- Nor will we be without the Lord's help to withstand the trial

1Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- Successfully enduring persecution is first and foremost recognizing there is something larger going on behind the scenes
 - Persecution is bigger than some enemy coming against you
 - It's evidence of the fight between God and His enemies, between Satan and Christ, and we're just foot soldiers in that battle
- So when we experience temptations to sin or to walk away from serving Jesus, you need to know that is persecution from the enemy
 - And therefore, when you resist the enemy's schemes, you are battling with God, in the name of Christ and for His glory
 - On the other hand, when we give in to temptation to sin...when you neglect the disciplines of your faith and fall away into sin...
 - Then you are essentially throwing your support behind the enemy and his purposes...you have put on the enemy's uniform
- But the Lord will provide ways of escape from moments of temptation, if only we look for those opportunities
 - I think of these ways of escape as "off ramps" that allow us off the freeway of our sin desires
 - God gives us ways to say no to temptation or to stop what we're doing, and all we have to do is take the off ramp
 - Once we take it, God guides us along that new path and the farther we go, the more that sin desire fades in our rear view
- So with that, the trial of Jesus begins

Matt. 26:57 Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.

Matt. 26:58 But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.

Matt. 26:59 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.

Matt. 26:60 They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward,

Matt. 26:61 and said, “This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’”

Matt. 26:62 The high priest stood up and said to Him, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?”

Matt. 26:63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Matt. 26:64 Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”

- The trial of Jesus was a complicated affair involving two separate trials held in four different locations and we’re just going to introduce it today
 - First there will be a Jewish religious trial conducted by the two High Priests operating in that day
 - That trial begins in the home of the High Priest, Annas, and we learned in an earlier lesson about Annas
 - Annas had been High Priest of Israel about 30 years earlier, but had been deposed by the Romans when he failed to cooperate
 - In his place, the Romans installed their own choice as high priest, a man named Caiaphas
 - Because Annas was still alive, the Jewish people still honored him as God’s choice for high priest, even as Caiaphas ruled by Rome’s approval
 - So in that day, there were two men who could lay claim to be High Priest, and both these men wanted a turn at Jesus
 - So that meant there was a joint religious trial split between the two homes of the high priests
 - And according to John’s Gospel, the trial starts at Annas’ home and then moves to Caiaphas’ home
 - Matthew only records the second part of the trial at Caiaphas’ house, but both trials proceed in a similar way
 - Both involve multiple abuses of the Jewish justice system, including physical abuse of the prisoner and false testimony
- And following closely is Peter who watches at a distance so as not to be associated with Jesus yet wants to know what’s happening
 - So in v.58 we’re told that as the trial moves from Annas to Caiaphas, Peter gets a little more brave and enters the courtyard
 - John tells us in Chapter 18 that he helped Peter gain access

- John was known to Caiaphas, probably through a family connection, so John was allowed access to the courtyard
- Then later, John goes back out and convinces a guard to allow Peter to enter the courtyard as well
- So Peter seats himself by some officers, and Mark tells us Peter begins to warm himself over a fire in the courtyard
 - These men may have been the same temple police who accompanied the Romans in arresting Jesus in Gethsemane
 - But in the darkness, they don't recognize Peter at first
- Meanwhile, inside the house Jesus is undergoing interrogation and the priests are calling witnesses to testify against Him
 - Under Jewish law, a court could only convict upon identical testimony from 2 or more witnesses
 - But the religious leaders were so disorganized in their conspiracy that they are having trouble finding two witnesses who agree
- Matthew says in v.60 that many false witnesses come forward to testify falsely against Jesus, and the fact that it is many means they don't agree
 - If the testimony of two witnesses had agreed, then the religious leaders would have had all the evidence they needed to convict
 - And surely at that point, they would have concluded the trial and pronounced a guilty verdict
 - But it's been a kangaroo court of one form of slander or another with no two liars able to say the same thing twice
- Then in v.60 Matthew says they finally succeeded in finding (or coaching) two witnesses to testify to exactly the same charge
 - Two men testify that Jesus claimed He was able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days
 - One of the witnesses' statement is recorded in Matthew's Gospel and the other witnesses' statement is recorded in Mark's Gospel
 - If we compare the two statements, we find they are not exactly the same, which should have disqualified their testimony also
 - But after a night of frustration, the priest has judged it close enough to convict Jesus, and so he turns to Jesus demanding He offers defense
 - In v.62, the high priest tries to goad Jesus into making an incriminating statement, which was against Jewish law
 - Under Jewish law an accused was not permitted to make a statement at trial to protect them from self-incrimination
 - And notice in v.63 Jesus follows Jewish law by not defending Himself at this point but remains silent
 - Obviously, the Jewish authorities were not interested in justice nor worried about breaking rules to get the result they want

- Then out of frustration, Caiaphas says I adjure you by the Living God to answer my question
 - With this phrase, Caiaphas has officially placed Jesus under oath and according to Jewish law a person under oath must answer
 - So where before Jesus followed Jewish law by remaining silent, now Jesus follows Jewish law by answering the question
- And in v.64 Jesus responds under oath saying “you have said it” meaning you are speaking the truth, and in Mark’s Gospel Jesus adds “I am”
 - Jesus specifically and directly answers the question affirmatively...He is the Son of God, He is the Messiah
 - Moreover, Jesus says one day you will see Me in My glory, and in that day you will realize how true your words were
- By the way, you may have heard some scoffers think to claim that Jesus never declared Himself to be the Son of God or to be Messiah
 - They suggest that Jesus spoke of the Messiah, but He never claimed to be that Messiah
 - That’s one of the easier lies to disprove, and here’s one of several places where we find Jesus openly declaring His identity
- So after Jesus declares under oath that He is the Messiah, the high priest has heard enough, and from here the religious trial ends and the next one begins
 - The Jewish leaders can’t pronounce a death sentence on Jesus without Roman approval
 - If they tried to kill Jesus outside the temple grounds, they could be charged with murder under Roman law
 - So they will hand Jesus over to the Romans while making a case for the Romans to execute Jesus for offenses under Jewish law
 - But before they do that, the Jewish authorities will take their opportunity to abuse Jesus viciously while they still have Him in custody
 - This will begin Jesus’ physical abuse, and before the abuse ends, Jesus will be rendered unrecognizable in appearance
 - We will study the physical effects of Jesus’ torture in coming weeks
 - But more importantly, we will also study the godly purpose in Jesus receiving this treatment
 - If you’re one to shrink back from the troubling details of Christ’s suffering or from studying the events of His passion, then I sympathize
 - But trust me when I say, there is something good for us in this study, something God intended
 - And I hope you will be with us through this study in the two remaining chapters
 - Moreover, if we are to face our own trials of persecution and suffering in the way God intended, then we must learn from Jesus’ own suffering

- We need to learn from Jesus' courage, His perseverance, His godliness and His submission
- So we study His suffering to learn from His example

- We return to Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities, with Jesus in the home of Caiaphas, the second high priest He's stood before that night
 - The religious leaders have long sought to discredit Jesus by trapping Him in violation of some rule of the Mishnah
 - Once found in violation of the rabbinical code book, they assumed the people would lose interest in Jesus' ministry
 - But Jesus did something they hadn't expected...He declared the Mishnah to be invalid and not binding on Him
 - And the people loved it when Jesus thumbed His nose at the pompous and hypocritical Pharisees
 - So then these leaders turned to seeking a way to charge Jesus either with blasphemy or insurrection, both of which carried the death penalty
 - Blasphemy was punishable by death under Jewish law, while insurrection carried the death penalty under Roman Law
 - And now finally, the Jewish authorities led by the high priest believe they've caught Jesus in blasphemy
 - Last week we studied how two so-called witnesses claimed that Jesus said He could tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days
 - Though tearing down a Roman building would have violated Roman law, that wasn't a credible charge
 - So the high priest is looking for more, something that incurs the death penalty under Jewish law
 - And the easiest way to trap Jesus in a capital crime is under the charge of blasphemy
 - So back in v.64 the high priest placed Jesus under oath and compelled Jesus to answer whether He was the Son of God
 - The high priest expected Jesus to say something that would give him reason to charge Jesus and Jesus complied
 - Jesus affirmed that He was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel
 - And Jesus said in a day to come, these men would see Him sitting at the right hand of the Power, meaning God the Father
- Now moving forward, notice the high priest's response to Jesus' testimony

Matt. 26:65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy;

Matt. 26:66 what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!"

- In response to Jesus' words, the high priest tore his robes, which is a traditional Eastern way (and very Jewish way) of showing distress

- And when the high priest tore his clothes, it sent shock waves through the people of Israel
- So naturally, it was highly prejudicial for a high priest presiding in a court case to tear his robes at hearing the accused's testimony
- Imagine how a jury would react today if a judge suddenly shouted "this is absurd" during the defendant's testimony?
- Based on the judge's reaction, the jury would be influenced into thinking that the accused was lying
- For that very reason, Jewish law prohibited a high priest from tearing his robes during a court proceeding
 - The only exception to that rule was in the case of blasphemy during trial
 - If blasphemy was spoken in trial, then the high priest was permitted to tear his clothes
- And that's the excuse the high priest cites now as he tears his clothes...in v.66 he says that Jesus has spoken blasphemy
 - He was probably referring to both Jesus' statement that He was the Messiah and His promise to be seated at God's right hand
 - But looking at both those statements closely, Jesus never commits blasphemy according to Jewish law
- Blasphemy is speaking in a way that dishonors or diminishes the name or character of God
 - In fact, just mentioning the name of God could be cause for a charge of blasphemy under certain circumstances
 - But in this case, nothing Jesus says dishonored the name or character of God
 - In the first case, Jesus didn't diminish God's name or character by claiming to be the One through Whom God keeps His promises
 - And that's especially true when you truly are the Messiah!
 - And in the second case, Jesus said He would be seated next to God, which is also true and not a diminishment of God in any way
 - In fact, Jesus never even used the name of God
 - Notice in v.64 Jesus said He would sit at the right hand "of power" which is clearly a reference to God and it glorifies God as well
 - But God's name is not "power," so Jesus has very clearly avoided any type of blasphemy
 - Nevertheless, this is close enough for the high priest and closest thing he will get that night to proof of a crime
 - So with that he charges Jesus with blasphemy and asks the jury, why have further need for witnesses?
 - He makes the statement as if to say we don't even need our many witnesses to convict Jesus

- But in reality, the so-called witnesses hadn't been any help, and in fact he had no witnesses to verify the charge of blasphemy
- The high priest just wants to end the trial and move to the penalty phase, so he calls for a vote from the counsel members present
 - Demanding such a quick verdict was yet another violation of Jewish court law, and the offenses just keep adding up
 - In fact, there were so many violations of Jewish law that this trial was the greatest miscarriage of justice in all history
 - This is the only time in history when a sinless human being stood trial, and of course the only just outcome was exoneration
 - God Himself was on trial, and God's people found Him guilty of blaspheming God...how does something so ridiculous happen?
 - He was convicted in the only way possible: everyone else involved has to engage in endless corruption and sin while calling it justice
 - Which makes this trial a perfect illustration of how sin and depravity distort our view of self and God
 - The Bible describes that state of every human being's heart this way:

**Psa. 53:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God,"
They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice;
There is no one who does good.**

**Psa. 53:2 God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there is anyone who understands,
Who seeks after God.**

**Psa. 53:3 Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
There is no one who does good, not even one.**

Eccl. 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

- The heart of man is so desperately wicked that Solomon describes it as a an "insanity" of the heart
 - In our natural state, we are literally incapable of knowing or loving God and that condition lasts throughout our lives
 - That's why the Bible says there are none who seek after God, and none who do good, meaning none who know and obey God
 - It's not even a matter of choice... we have a spiritual birth defect that prevents us from doing otherwise

- We are programmed from birth to sin and to disobey and to hate God yet all the while calling it "good"
 - It's spiritual insanity and there is no cure apart from an act of God to change us from within
 - Only if we are born again by the Spirit of God do we gain the ability to know, love, honor and obey God truly
- But unless and until that time arrives for a person, he or she will see all that God does as evil and all that he or she does as good
 - Unbelievers see themselves self-righteously and they treat God as an enemy and you see that clearly here in this trial
- That's why these men, who are supposedly priests of God and experts in the Law, can condemn God Himself through a kangaroo court of injustice
 - They scheme and lie to find fault with an obviously innocent man, and the more Jesus acts righteously, the more their insanity increases
 - So that by the end, they are acting irrationally in trying to find cause against Jesus
 - Jesus Himself explains this phenomenon in John 3

John 3:19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

John 3:20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

- Jesus is the Light that came into the world, and Light is a metaphor for truth, righteousness and the love of God
 - The world He entered was filled with darkness, which stands for sin, evil and hatred toward God
 - Light came in as if a spotlight, piercing through the darkness, but Jesus said men loved the darkness more than light
 - In fact, everyone who does evil hates light, because light exposes the sinful deeds done in darkness
- This statement is both literally and figuratively true...literally, evil people prefer to practice their evil deeds under cover of darkness
 - That's why we install security lights on homes and businesses
 - The light chases away the criminal who prefers darkness
- But it's also true figuratively speaking, because the light of God's word declares what is right and true, and it exposes what is sinful and false
 - So when God brings the light of His word into that darkness, evil people will hate the exposure
 - They will seek to put out that light, just as these evil leaders in Israel were seeking to

put out Jesus' light

- The truth of His words exposed the evil in their hearts and they could not stand for it
 - But notice they didn't view the situation in that way...they weren't acknowledging what was really happening
 - None of the leaders said, "Boy, we really hate the way this righteous man makes us feel convicted for being so evil"
 - No, they were suffering spiritual insanity, which led them to explain away their conviction
 - Earlier, the high priest Caiaphas said this about Jesus

John 11:47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.

John 11:48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

John 11:49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,

John 11:50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."

- The high priest himself acknowledged Jesus was performing many signs...why didn't that cause him to step back?
- Why didn't he consider what those signs meant and then respond in accepting Jesus' claims?
- The answer again is spiritual insanity...he acts in a crazy way fighting against the obvious truth because he's programmed by sin to do so
 - He loved darkness and therefore he could not enter the light...not without God's help
 - And God was obviously not inclined to help Caiaphas
- That's what you're studying here...the Light of the World rejected by the darkness because they did not want their evil deeds exposed
 - The only way any human being overcomes their spiritual insanity is if God brings them the cure...a new heart
 - When a person is born again, they receive a new spirit that no longer fears the Light because it agrees with the Law of God
 - And in that agreement, it no longer fears judgment or death, and so Light is no longer a threat
 - Moreover, darkness no longer appeals because the believer has nothing in common with darkness any longer
- So the high priest demands an immediate guilty verdict without deliberation, and the rest of the counsel members in attendance agree

- They all state that Jesus deserves death, which results in more violations of Jewish law
 - Under Jewish law the sentence could not be pronounced on the same day as the trial verdict
 - A span of at least three days must separate the two, but these men aren't interested in justice...just revenge
 - And a Sanhedrin trial could not end with a unanimous verdict, because 70 Jewish men could not be expected to agree
 - At least one man must vote not guilty if a person was to be convicted
- So as the Jewish trial ends, it doesn't settle the issue because the Jews do not possess the power to carry out the verdict
 - Rome reserved the "right of the sword" only for the procurator of Judea, the Roman official who governed this province for Rome
 - The procurator was Pilate (Pilotos), a politician appointed by the Roman Senate and responsible for keeping the peace
- The Jewish leaders will need to bring their case before Pilate in the hope of convincing him that Jesus needed to die
 - And if Pilate agreed, then he would do the Jewish leaders' dirty work by condemning Jesus and putting Him to death
 - As I mentioned last week, this hand-off was intended by God to ensure both Jews and Gentiles played a role in Jesus' death
 - Neither group can claim they had no blood on their hands, so that truly everyone was responsible for Jesus dying
 - And God can say His Son died for the sins of the world
- Now Jesus will be handed over, but before they transfer custody to the Romans, the leaders want one last chance to abuse the man they have hated for so long

Matt. 26:67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him,

Matt. 26:68 and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"

- Now the physical torture of Jesus begins while He is in the custody of the Jews at Caiaphas' home
 - So again, both Jew and Gentile abused our Lord physically
 - And in light of all that Jesus eventually suffers, these assaults may not seem like much
- But the offenses listed here represent some of the worst possible ways one Jew could treat another
 - First, they spit in Jesus' face, and spitting was a particularly humiliating way for one Jew to show contempt to another

- In fact, even today it's customary for orthodox Jews to spit on the ground merely at the mention of Jesus' name
- Which shows you how badly they saw the act of spitting
- Secondly, they slapped Jesus with an open palm across the face, and again that may not seem like much
 - A slap was among the greatest rebukes for a Jew, and it was preferred since there would be little evidence of the abuse
 - But imagine the hardest slap you've ever seen, and that's how a Jew conducted this form of abuse
 - The point was to inflict as much pain as possible without leaving a mark...and the stinging blow would take your breath away
- Finally, they blindfolded Jesus and beat his body with their fists while mocking Him by saying tell us who hit you
 - You blindfold someone to prevent them from knowing where the blow was coming from, so the person couldn't anticipate it
 - When you see a blow coming, you can move to protect yourself or at least steel yourself to absorb the blow
 - But being blindfolded, Jesus couldn't know what was coming
- But as it turns out, Jesus wasn't doing anything to protect Himself anyway
 - Isaiah tells us exactly how Jesus faced this moment

Is. 50:5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear;

And I was not disobedient

Nor did I turn back.

Is. 50:6 I gave My back to those who strike Me,

And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;

I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.

Is. 50:7 For the Lord GOD helps Me,

Therefore, I am not disgraced;

Therefore, I have set My face like flint,

And I know that I will not be ashamed.

- Isaiah says explicitly that the Messiah did not become disobedient by turning back
 - In v.6 it says He did not cover His face to the spitting or slapping
 - He set His face like flint, a very hard rock, meaning He did absolutely nothing to soften or avoid the blows
 - And we learn that Jesus endured another painful insult not recorded in Matthew... they plucked out Jesus' beard
 - If you've ever pulled out a hair, then you know how much that can sting, but Jesus stood by while they ripped out handfuls

- Was Jesus showing He was too tough for them? Not at all, and in fact Isaiah acknowledges it was humiliating
 - And throughout the New Testament we find references to Jesus' suffering during these early moments of His passion
 - So Jesus felt the pain just as you would, but unlike you Jesus was determined to obey the Father by not resisting in any way
- In other words, Jesus accepted His torture as according to the will of the Father, and therefore He didn't resist it for to do so would be to disobey
 - This shows you how determined Jesus was to remain a sinless substitute for our sake that He would not even protect His body
 - And that made His suffering all the worse
- The writer of Hebrews tells us this:

Heb. 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Notice the writer says Jesus "endured" the cross and Jesus "despised" the shame
 - Jesus despised everything He experienced, meaning He could barely stand to bear it
 - And yet, Jesus went through with it as a matter of obedience and for the opportunity to achieve something eternally important
 - And of course the writer of Hebrews reminds us to carry the same attitude as we face various trials and suffering
 - Remain obedient to God though you despise your circumstances because you know eternal things are on the line
- And the worst of Jesus' pain and humiliation were still yet to come...things just go from bad to worse for Jesus
 - The whole experience lasted about 12 hours from start to finish, but it must have seemed like an eternity to Jesus
 - And as we come to understand just how hard this experience was for Him, it begs a question:
 - Why did the Father want Jesus to suffer so much?
- I've asked the question this way before: we know Jesus had to die for our sins, but why did the Father require Jesus to suffer first?
 - Why couldn't Jesus just die in His sleep, or perhaps Jesus could have been executed an easier way like beheading or stoning?
 - I think it's safe to say that virtually ANY other method of execution would have been better than the one Jesus endured
- The point is that Jesus' sufferings *on the way to the cross* were just as important to God's plan of redemption as the death itself

- So why did the Father require Jesus to experience such a cruel, slow and painful death in our place?
- What purposes did His suffering serve in the plan of redemption?
- We'll answer this question in two parts during the course of our study of the crucifixion, one now and one later
 - Answer 1 comes from Peter

1Pet. 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

1Pet. 2:22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

1Pet. 2:23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

1Pet. 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

- Peter says that not only did Jesus die to save us, but Jesus also suffered for us to set an example for how to receive suffering
 - The Father in Heaven determined that Jesus needed to suffer in the course of His death so Jesus accepted it obediently
 - Resisting the suffering would mean disobeying God, and if Jesus had disobeyed then His suffering would have been for nothing
- And that's the example we're supposed to learn here
 - Sometimes God brings suffering into our lives for good purposes, but if we resist the suffering, we lose the benefit
 - And that's often the hardest part of enduring a trial, because when we feel unfairly treated, we naturally defend ourselves
- But Peter tells us that is not the way we should respond, but instead we should follow Jesus' example
 - And Jesus above all people had reason to defend Himself
 - Quoting from Isaiah 53, Peter says Jesus was completely innocent and had done absolutely nothing wrong
 - Nevertheless, Jesus didn't fight back or defend Himself when attacked by unholy and evil men
 - Jesus didn't even utter a word in His own defense
- Jesus did nothing to stop or lessen the suffering that the Father planned to bring against Him because He knew it was God-ordained
 - And His attitude was to be an example for us to follow
 - Living righteously isn't just a matter of living justly...it's also a matter of how we respond when we are treated unjustly

- And the godly response to injustice is to endure it patiently knowing God is in control and has allowed it for some good purpose
 - Listen to what Peter also says

1Pet. 2:19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

1Pet. 2:20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

- When we suffer unrighteously, as Jesus did, we are walking in His footsteps in a sense
- We are being asked by God to endure suffering, to endure harsh treatment with patience, just as Jesus did
- And we may say to ourselves, but I did nothing wrong so I have the right to fight back and make accusations and defend myself
 - But the Bible says it's not about your rights...it's about your obedience to God
 - And if you do what is right (i.e., don't sin), and if you suffer anyway at the hands of unkind or evil people, then endure it
 - That will find favor with God, because you are following in Jesus' footsteps
 - And if God the Father could turn Jesus' suffering into so much good, then He can certainly do the same with your patience
- So the first reason Jesus suffered on the way to His death was to set an example of how we respond to persecution and suffering, which all believers will know
 - And it's particularly ironic that Peter should teach us this important biblical truth at this point in the story
 - Because it was also Peter who showed us how *not* to respond to suffering and persecution

Matt. 26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."

Matt. 26:70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."

Matt. 26:71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

Matt. 26:72 And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."

Matt. 26:73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away."

Matt. 26:74 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed.

Matt. 26:75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a

rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

- Earlier we looked at Peter’s denials of Jesus when we studied Jesus foretelling they would happen during the Last Supper
 - So today we will simply look at how Peter’s three denials take place
 - They happen over a very brief period of time, almost one right after another while Peter is in and around the courtyard
 - First, in v.69 Peter is recognized by one of the high priest’s servant girls
 - Remember, Peter was in this courtyard because John knew the high priest’s family and was able to gain Peter entrance
 - Being so close is what allowed Peter to be recognized, and I wonder if Peter was staying so close precisely so he could disprove Jesus’ words
 - Jesus said Peter would abandon Him, so maybe Peter stayed close to show Jesus He was wrong
 - So how ironic is it that Peter’s pride gave opportunity for the three denials to take place?
 - That’s a reminder that once God’s word has gone forth, it will not return without having accomplished what He sent it out to do
 - It’s also a reminder that our pride goes before our fall
- So the servant-girl casually remarks to Peter that he too was with Jesus the Galilean
 - Peter quickly denies it saying I don’t know what you’re talking about, and with that he’s made his first denial
 - Her comment causes Peter to leave the courtyard, but before he even gets past the gate, another servant girl recognizes him
 - She then announces to the courtyard that Peter had been with Jesus, to which Peter more forcefully says I do not know Him
 - This time Peter says it with an oath, which was a statement made before God
 - Finally, a few moments later some in the courtyard who heard this exchange find Peter and make a third accusation
 - They say surely you were with Jesus, since you have a Galilean accent
 - Apparently, the Galilee was Israel’s version of the Deep South and Peter’s accent gave him away
 - At that Peter loses it, and he begins cursing and swearing that, “I do not know the man”
 - And with his third denial, Peter’s attention is suddenly drawn to a rooster crowing somewhere nearby in the yard
 - And immediately, Peter remembered Jesus’ prophecy and so he leaves to weep bitterly over what he had done to Jesus

- What's so sad about Peter's denials is that he never needed to deny Christ, because there was no indication Peter was at risk
- Remember, John was there with Peter the whole time and no one threatened John, and John never denied knowing Christ
- In fact, John is present while Jesus is hanging on the cross
- Obviously, the Lord didn't intend for John or Peter to be persecuted during this time, and that was never something Jesus said would happen
 - The Lord had simply said that His disciples would scatter, but Peter pridefully denied that this prophecy would apply to him
 - And that statement triggered Jesus to declare that Peter would deny Christ personally
 - The Lord was forced to make Peter an example to expose his bravado and show that God's word would be found true
 - If Peter had simply remained quiet in that earlier moment, perhaps he never would have experienced these denials
 - So what do we make of these denials? Remember, in our earlier lesson I explained that Peter's denials were not a repudiation of his faith in Jesus
 - They were exactly what they appear to be: a scared man saying stupid things without thinking in order to save his own skin
 - And if you wonder how Peter could do this, consider that as Peter was speaking, he could see and hear inside the house
 - He saw Jesus being mercilessly beaten, and he heard the slaps and body blows, Jesus gasping for breath and perhaps moaning in pain
 - And Peter knew the counsel declared Jesus would die
 - If you had heard and seen those same things, you might very well have done the same even three times
 - So maybe we aren't so different from Peter after all, and if that's true, then there is hope for all of us...how?
 - Because remember the same Peter who swore and cursed and angrily denied ever knowing Jesus is the man who wrote this

1Pet. 3:14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,
1Pet. 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;
1Pet. 3:16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.
1Pet. 3:17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

- We all could do much worse than to be like Peter

- Today, we move to Jesus' second trial conducted by the Romans
 - Jesus has spent a sleepless night, first with His disciples at a Passover meal, then praying in the Garden and finally under arrest and at trial
 - The Jewish trial started with Annas, one of two high priests at that time, and then moved to Caiaphas, his replacement
 - These trials were shams, perversions of justice, that found an innocent man guilty of false charges
 - But Jesus has submitted to this charade in keeping with the Father's will to sacrifice His Son for the sins of the world
 - As the trial with Caiaphas ended, the Jewish authorities pronounced Jesus guilty of blasphemy, which was punishable by death
 - But the Romans did not allow the Jews to engage in capital punishment
 - So the Jewish authorities had to find a way to convince the Romans to put Jesus to death on their behalf
 - The Jews had charged Jesus with blasphemy, but Romans couldn't care less about a man blaspheming the Jewish God
 - So that necessitated the Jews accusing Jesus of a crime that was punishable by death *under Roman law*
- Therefore, our focus now shifts to the Romans and to the way the Jews manipulated the Roman authorities to bring Jesus to death
 - And like the Jewish trial, the Roman trial took place in two different places under the authority of two different men
 - First, Jesus will stand before the Roman governor of the province of Judea, a man called Pilate
 - Pilate is the true power of the province, and ultimately he condemns Jesus to death and sends Jesus to the cross
 - But along the way, Pilate does his best to wash his hands of the whole affair, both figuratively and literally
 - So at one point Pilate sends Jesus to another authority, Herod Antipas, the supposed king of the Jews at that time
 - Pilate hoped Herod would deal with Jesus in some way and leave Rome out of it, but in the end Herod just sends Jesus back
 - Jesus' time before Herod is not recorded in Matthew's Gospel, so we won't cover it either in our study
 - You can study the details of Jesus' movements between Pilate and Herod in Luke's Gospel
 - Throughout the back and forth, the Jewish leaders remain determined to see Jesus die
 - And eventually they succeed in prodding a weak and vacillating Pilate into condemning Jesus against his better judgment

- Matthew gives us only a brief overview of Jesus' time before Pilate, so we'll expand on the details as we go through it
- But before we get to the Roman trial, Matthew first returns to the subject of Judas, the man who betrayed Jesus in the Garden

Matt. 27:1 Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death;

Matt. 27:2 and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

Matt. 27:3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

Matt. 27:4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

Matt. 27:5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

- Chapter 27 opens with morning dawning on the daytime of Passover, which was a Thursday morning in the year Jesus died, specifically April 10, 27 AD
 - Remember, Jewish days are counted sundown to sundown, so Passover began the night before at sundown on Wednesday
 - On that evening, each family observed a Passover meal and ate their family lamb, which had been sacrificed earlier in the day
 - Then the next morning on the daytime of Passover, a single, national sacrificial lamb would be offered in the temple at 9 AM
 - Only this year, there would be two national sacrifices taking place, one inside the temple and one outside the city
 - According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus was placed on the cross on the "third hour," using the Roman system for counting time or 9 AM
 - So as Jesus was nailed to the cross, at the same moment the national lamb died inside the temple
 - We'll study more about that moment later
 - Meanwhile, the Jewish trial of Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas took place overnight during the pre-dawn hours of Thursday morning
 - And as that trial was ending and Jesus was being beaten in Caiaphas' home, Peter stood outside denying he knew Jesus
 - But when Peter issued his third denial, Peter heard that rooster begin crowing nearby as Jesus promised
 - Roosters typically start crowing shortly before sunrise
 - So that tells us Jesus' Jewish trial ended shortly before sunrise at about 6 AM or so

- So it's now roughly 6 AM on Thursday morning, the first hour of the Roman day, and in three hours Jesus will be on the cross
 - Jesus has spent the better part of five hours in the custody of the Jewish authorities before dawn, and now He's beaten, bloodied and bound
 - Jesus is marched from Caiaphas' home in the upper district of Jerusalem to Pilate's residence in the city
 - The Jews waited until daylight when Pilate was awake and in his office ready to receive visitors
 - Pilate normally lived in Caesarea, which was the seat of Roman government in Judea, located on the coast about 50 miles northwest
 - But during major feast days, Pilate would travel up to Jerusalem to be on hand in case of unrest in the city
 - Remember, Pilate's primary responsibility was keeping the peace in Judea, and Romans had learned that ruling Jews wasn't easy
 - As millions of Jews flooded the city and surrounding area for the major feasts each year, feelings of nationalism ran high
 - And the Jewish tendency to riot at the drop of a hat greatly increased, so it didn't take much to trigger unrest
- To keep the peace, Pilate brought additional soldiers to the city for Passover, and set up his Praetorium, or headquarters, at the Antonian Fortress
 - The Antonian Fortress was a Roman military fort that overlooked the Temple Mount in Jerusalem
 - Herod the Great built it to house Roman military forces in the city as part of his overall expansion of the Jewish temple
 - Rome had installed Herod the Great as the king of the Jews, so Herod needed Roman military forces nearby to protect himself
 - And on important feast days, like Passover, the fortress became the remote headquarters for the governor of the province
 - Therefore, on Passover each year, Pilate rose early and took his post in the fortress ready to deal with any rumor or charge of unrest quickly
 - Pilate was determined to see Passover come and go uneventfully without any disruption to the peace
 - During the previous night, the religious leaders had gone to Pilate with Judas to accuse Jesus of insurrection
 - Based on Judas' testimony, Pilate dispatched a cohort of soldiers to arrest Jesus that night
 - Now that morning has arrived, Pilate expects to see the prisoner presented to him so he can determine if the charges were true
 - That's why the Jewish religious leaders conducted their trial of Jesus overnight, though Jewish law prohibited trials at night
 - They knew Pilate would demand to see Jesus early Thursday morning, so they

only had the overnight hours to try Jesus

- Now the Roman trial begins, and once again the Jewish authorities look to Judas expecting him to fulfill the second part of their bargain
 - As I mentioned, the Jewish religious leaders would need more than a charge of blasphemy to persuade Pilate that Jesus should die
 - And that's where Judas came in again...Judas was paid to testify against Jesus before Pilate saying He sought to be king of Israel, etc.
 - Judas wasn't needed at the Jewish trial, of course, because the religious leaders could find any number of ways to trap Jesus
 - But Judas' testimony would be essential for the Roman trial...but at the last moment, their witness gets cold feet
- In v.3 Matthew says that Judas observes the Jewish trials and when he hears the verdict, suddenly Judas realizes that he is being manipulated
 - Judas recognizes that his testimony will be responsible for Jesus' death sentence, and apparently that had not been Judas' expectation
 - At this point, we wonder what did Judas *think* would happen to Jesus after Judas betrayed Him?
 - Perhaps Judas wasn't really thinking at all, especially at the prospect of receiving more than a month's wages
 - But now the weight of Judas' actions are coming to rest on his shoulders, so he feels remorse and decides he can't go through with it
 - Some of our Bible translations use the word "repent" instead of remorse, but that is not the best translation of the Greek here
 - There are two different Greek words in the New Testament that can be translated as repent
 - One of those Greek words, *metanoeo*, is always used when describing godly repentance or a sincere change of heart
 - But a second Greek word, *metamelomai*, describes worldly remorse in response to negative consequences
 - That's the word used here to describe Judas' reaction, so he's feeling worldly remorse, not godly repentance
 - Judas feels guilty for having sold out Jesus and he regrets the consequences that are now coming upon Jesus and himself
 - So Judas goes to the religious leaders to return the money and back out of his agreement to testify against Jesus
- In v.4 Judas recants his testimony before the religious leaders and says Jesus was innocent of the charges he made
 - Judas is expecting that by returning the money and recanting his testimony, he could put a halt to Jesus' trial and reverse the damage
 - But Judas is foolishly assuming that these religious authorities were motivated by truth and justice in the first place

- Obviously, they had been manipulating Judas' greedy heart from the beginning, and they aren't about to let Judas off so quickly
- So much to Judas' surprise, they respond by saying "What is that to us?"
 - In effect they are saying the same thing that Pilate will say to Jesus in John's Gospel: "What is truth?"
 - In other words, they will decide what is true and what is not true, not Judas
- And then at the end of v.4 they say "See to that yourself" but a better translation would be "you shall see," meaning you will see this through
 - In other words, they tell Judas he will testify to Pilate just as he promised to do
 - And they are also implying a threat...because if Judas violated his word to them, they had the power to kill him also
- So the religious leaders refuse to allow Judas to back out of his agreement and they warn him not to change his testimony
 - But Judas will not back down, so in v.5 Judas throws his money into the temple sanctuary as a protest against their conspiracy and he leaves
 - But Judas faces a dilemma...if he testifies, he will assure the success of the religious leaders' conspiracy against Jesus
 - On other hand, if he refuses to testify or recants his testimony on the stand, he knows he will likely be killed by the Jews
 - So Judas takes the only escape he has – suicide – preferring to die by his own hand than to suffer crucifixion or stoning
 - Much has been written about Judas' remorse and his choice to take his own life, and most of that conjecture ignores the context here
 - When we see Judas' situation for what it was...an unbeliever caught in a conspiracy and outfoxed by evil men...
 - Then we can understand Judas' response: he was trapped by his own bad choices and forced to choose the lesser of two evils
 - Judas was a devil, as Jesus says, who sought to make a quick buck but gave no thought to the consequences until it was too late
 - In that regard his story isn't much different than any unbeliever's life story...
 - Unbelievers live ignorant of the truth, manipulated by an unseen enemy, and unaware of the consequences until it's too late
 - And then the only path remaining is death...eternal death
- So what can we learn from Judas' experience? Although he was an unbeliever, I think he offers a clear lesson for believers: you can't compete with evil
 - If we allow ourselves to be drawn into the evil of the world, we will always come out the loser
 - Because there is always someone willing to be more evil than us
 - If we involve ourselves with the wrong people or allow ourselves to get tangled in sinful or illegal schemes, we will get burned

- Eventually, we will be the one taken advantage of, we will be the one abused or manipulated, we will get hurt
- You simply can't compete with evil, because there is always someone willing to be more evil than you and they will do so to your detriment
 - Judas thought he could swim with the sharks and make the system pay off
 - But he was a fool and a stooge and in the end he lost the money and his life
 - Judas was certainly evil but he aligned himself with men who were far more evil and ruthless than he was prepared to be
- And what of those religious leaders? They were certainly evil, but they too couldn't compete with an even greater evil
 - The Jewish leaders aligned themselves with the Romans expecting to manipulate the Caesar and become rich
 - But in the end, the Romans were far more ruthless and evil than the religious leaders imagined
 - And in a few decades after Jesus died, the Romans burned Jerusalem to the ground and killed nearly 1 million Jews
 - And as a result, the Pharisees and Sadducees were wiped off the pages of history
- You cannot compete with evil, because there is always someone more evil than you, so the only way to avoid getting burned is to stay out of the competition
 - As Paul told us

2Tim. 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2Tim. 3:13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

- Desire to live a godly life, but that doesn't guarantee you will live a trouble-free life
 - On the contrary, we will all know persecution at some level because we seek to live for Jesus
 - But even those persecutions will have godly purpose in your life and the Lord will bring you through them
- But if we choose to play with evil and to live according to their standards and rule, we will find our lives moving from bad to worse
 - As we seek to deceive others for our purposes, then sooner or later we will be deceived as well
 - Just as Judas sought to deceive Rome but soon found himself deceived by his fellow Jews
 - Guard yourself from sinful desires, seek to live a godly life, and don't try to compete with evil
- Before we leave Judas' story behind, Matthew gives us an interesting footnote

concerning the 30 pieces of silver

Matt. 27:6 The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, “It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.”

Matt. 27:7 And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter’s Field as a burial place for strangers.

Matt. 27:8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Matt. 27:9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel;

Matt. 27:10 AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER’S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME.”

- The money Judas threw into the temple could not, by law, be kept by the priest since it was gained through a conspiracy
 - As Matthew says in v.6, it was illegal for the Temple treasury to benefit from funds obtained through dishonest means
 - But since Judas was dead, the money couldn’t be returned to its owner either
- So the priests decide to use the money to purchase a field near the city to be used to bury strangers, meaning travelers who died in the area
 - That field became known as Akeldama, a field of blood
 - And Matthew tells us that this outcome fulfilled Scripture, quoting prophecies from both Jeremiah and Zechariah
 - Once again, the evil of Judas’ heart was harnessed by God to fulfill Scripture and prove that the Lord is in control of this story
- So now Jesus stands before Pilate in the Praetorium, and Pilate begins his interrogation of Jesus

Matt. 27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.”

Matt. 27:12 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer.

Matt. 27:13 Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?”

Matt. 27:14 And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.

- Right away we can tell that Pilate isn’t very impressed with Jesus nor does he believe the charges of insurrection

- Notice Pilate asks Jesus if indeed Jesus is king of the Jews?
- Obviously, the religious leaders told Pilate of this charge, but without Judas to testify against Jesus, Pilate needs proof
- So Pilate has no choice but to ask Jesus to confirm or deny the charges against Him
- Now if Jesus had simply denied the charge, He would have been set free by Pilate, because there was no one to testify against Him
 - So just one denial from Jesus and this entire episode is over, which is why Scripture says Jesus remains silent

**Is. 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.**

**Is. 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.**

- Isaiah says that Jesus did not open His mouth, but not in the literal sense of speaking no words at all
- The Scripture means Jesus did nothing to defend Himself or to stop the process of going to the cross
- And why not? Because as Isaiah said the Lord caused our iniquity to fall upon Jesus... Jesus was willingly going to His death for our sake
 - So when Pilate asks Jesus if He is the king of the Jews, Jesus says only “as you say”
 - Jesus remained silent in the sense of refusing to exonerate Himself though He was innocent
 - Of course, Jesus IS the king of the Jews, and I might add, He is also the King of all people including Pilate and the Romans
 - But His kingdom won’t appear on earth until much later, so for now His claim looks ridiculous to men like Pilate
- Meanwhile, the religious leaders who are standing nearby are concerned that Jesus could squirm out of the charges at any moment, so they double down
 - Imagine the scene...Jesus is standing bound and bloodied before Pilate, looking pitiful and altogether unimpressive
 - Standing outside the doorway are the religious leaders of Israel, decked out in their robes and adorned with precious things
 - They won’t enter the room, according to John’s Gospel, because they won’t be defiled by Gentiles on the Passover

- Yet they act like a crazed mob, shouting out false charges against Jesus as Pilate looks on
- Probably no moment recorded in the Gospels reveals the wicked hearts of these men better than this one
 - On the one hand, these men appear pious and scrupulous, not even willing to enter the building for fear of being defiled
 - On the other hand, they stand outside lying and conspiring to pervert justice, two of the worst crimes under the Law
 - So while they are externally religious and clean, they are internally filled with deceit and violence, as Jesus said

Matt. 23:25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

- So Pilate turns back to Jesus in v.13 in wonder at the fact that Jesus is not responding or denying the charges
 - Pilate must have suspected that the religious leaders were giving false testimony and he fully expected Jesus to say so
 - Yet Jesus says nothing, so Pilate asks Jesus “Do you not hear the many things they testify against you?”
 - Once more, Jesus remains silent against His accusers, not even refuting a single charge
- Matthew’s account skips over a lot at this point, but John explains the scene in detail, and the whole thing would be comical if it wasn’t so deadly serious
 - Pilate vacillates back and forth between worrying about condemning an innocent man and worrying that the Jews will riot if he frees Jesus
 - Most of all, Pilate worries about losing control and losing his job which leaves him open to manipulation by everyone
 - So according to John, Pilate shuttles back and forth between talking to Jesus and talking to the Jewish leaders outside
 - He’s the governor of a Roman province, and yet he bounces around like a ping pong ball trying to find a way out of this mess
 - John tells us that as Jesus and Pilate talked, Jesus gets Pilate to acknowledge that he cares nothing of Jesus’ claims to be king
 - Pilate doesn’t believe in Jesus’ claims and would prefer to release Him since Pilate takes no pleasure in condemning innocent men
 - But Jesus won’t give Pilate the easy escape that Pilate seeks, and at one point Jesus tells Pilate he has no control over Jesus
 - Moreover, Jesus tells Pilate that though Jesus is a king, His kingdom was not in that world in that day

- And in fact if Jesus was claiming a kingdom in that day, his followers would have been fighting to free Jesus
- But they weren't fighting against the Romans because their King's kingdom hadn't arrived yet
- Meanwhile, they had a different mission...a mission to recruit citizens out of this world for a kingdom to come
 - Jesus' mission was to die for our sins so that He could reconcile people to God without fear of condemnation
 - And our mission is to witness that truth to others in the hope they will sign up for the Kingdom to come too

- The passion of Christ is one of the best known, most frequently retold stories of a man's death in the entire history of mankind
 - Certainly, Christians know about Jesus' death from the accounts in the Gospels, or from hearing it preached about in service
 - And probably most of the world has at least seen the movies or the paintings or heard the musical tributes
 - And certain moments in Jesus' passion story have even become part of our culture by giving birth to iconic phrases
 - Today you will still hear hear people saying "carry your cross" or "washing your hands" of a situation
 - Which is why I've said multiple times that this intense familiarity with the story of Jesus' death is a doubled-edged sword
 - On the one hand, it means we all have a reasonably good understanding of what happened to Jesus and why
 - But on the other hand, it also means that we're likely to pay less attention to the details of the story when we revisit it
 - And yet those details can make a big difference in our appreciation of the account
 - So as we continue forward in the story today, I remind you to reset your expectations and try to set aside what you know
 - Last week we left Jesus standing in the Antonian Fortress before Pilate as the religious leaders press for a guilty verdict
 - Though Matthew doesn't record it, at one point Pilate sends Jesus to Herod for a short time, but then Herod returns Jesus
 - After receiving Jesus back from Herod, Pilate is utterly perplexed with what to do with Jesus
 - Pilate knows Jesus is innocent, and in fact, on three separate occasions Pilate declares that he finds no guilt in Jesus
 - But at the same time, he's struck by the religious leaders' fierce determination to see Jesus put to death
 - Mark tells us that Pilate had figured out the religious leaders were acting purely out of spite against Jesus
 - So now he can't decide what is worse: convict an innocent man or release Jesus and risk a Jewish riot at Passover
- So Pilate lands upon a scheme to enlist the Jewish crowd to his advantage hoping they will give him cover to release Jesus without a riot

Matt. 27:15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted.

Matt. 27:16 At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.

Matt. 27:17 So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do

you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”

Matt. 27:18 For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

Matt. 27:19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.”

Matt. 27:20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.

- As we read, a tradition had begun during the time of Roman control of Judea to release one Jewish prisoner to the crowds each Passover
 - This tradition is not mentioned in history outside the Gospel accounts but it's easy to understand how such a tradition might have started
 - Passover in Jerusalem was always a time of unrest and agitation for the Jews living under Roman occupation
 - And since the Romans valued peace and stability above virtually anything else, they looked for a way to please the crowds
 - So Rome happened upon the practice of releasing a Jewish prisoner to the crowds each Passover as a gesture of goodwill
 - Pilate hopes this tradition can be his “get out of jail free” card to bypass the pressure of the Jewish leaders while pleasing the crowds
 - So Pilate arranges to put Jesus and another prisoner before the crowd and allow them to decide who will be released
 - And to ensure Jesus will be the One selected for release, Pilate arranges for the alternate to be a notorious mercenary, Barabbas
 - Pilate hopes he's made the crowd's choice easy and obvious, because by all accounts Barabbas was an unloved career criminal
 - Matthew says Barabbas was notorious, meaning everyone knew Barabbas was a troublemaker
 - And in John's Gospel we're told Barabbas was a robber, and in the book of Acts we're told he was also a murderer
 - And Luke tells us he was arrested this time for leading an insurrection against Roman authorities
 - So this guy is nothing but trouble, and Pilate assumes there's no way this crowd will want to release someone like Barabbas
 - In contrast to Barabbas, Pilate expects the sight of Jesus will likely generate sympathy
 - By this point, Jesus has been roughed up pretty badly, and His face was bloody and bruised...He was pitiful
 - So surely the people would favor Jesus, especially in comparison to a rogue like Barabbas
 - So in v.17 Pilate seats himself in the judgment seat on the steps of the Antonian

Fortress and brings the two men out before the crowd

- And Pilate puts the question to the crowd, who should he release?
- At this point, there's a brief pause as the crowd contemplates its choice
- Meanwhile, the religious leaders are getting nervous that the crowd might fall for Pilate's plan and release Jesus
- But before the crowd can answer, Pilate is interrupted by an urgent note sent from his wife at home, so Pilate suspends the proceedings and excuses himself
 - Back in the fortress, Pilate reads that his wife has had a dream the night before and in her dream she says she suffered greatly because of Jesus
 - We don't know what she meant exactly, but her dream was disturbing enough that she feels the need to report it
 - Likely Pilate told her about Jesus being arrested the night before when he dispatched the cohort with Judas
 - In any case, based on the dream she tells her husband now to have nothing to do with this righteous man
 - Again, we don't know what she was expecting Pilate to do, since he couldn't exactly ignore Jesus under the circumstances
 - But perhaps she's warning him not to condemn Jesus
 - Still, like most husbands, Pilate stupidly ignores his wife's counsel
 - Now the question we do need to answer is why did the Lord give Pilate's wife this dream...what was the Lord trying to accomplish through it?
 - Obviously, the Lord didn't expect it to result in Pilate releasing Jesus, since we know the plan is for Jesus to go to the cross
 - So why give Pilate's wife this dream at all? We have two reasons, one from Church tradition and one in this passage of Scripture
- First, church tradition going back to the first century maintains that this woman's name was Claudia
 - And the tradition says Claudia, unlike her husband, came to faith in Jesus based on her dream and the testimony of the disciples
 - We can't know if this is true, though it could be true
 - And if so, then it gives us a clear reason for the Lord to appear to Claudia in this way
 - The Lord was working in her heart to prepare her to believe as a testimony to the Church thereafter
 - As wife of the governor, she would have been in a position to hear the details of Christ's testimony before Pilate
 - She would have heard the reports of His missing body and His disciples' claims of resurrection
 - And later as an unlikely convert, she would have possessed a powerful witness in her circles of influence

- Imagine this woman's testimony..."my husband condemned our Lord to death"
- So this moment shows the extent to which the Lord is willing to move in the life of a person to bring them the truth according to His will
 - That's what Paul was talking about when he told us to pray for the salvation of all men and women

1Tim. 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

1Tim. 2:2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

1Tim. 2:3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

1Tim. 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- Paul says that the Lord wants us to pray for the salvation of all men and women
- And taken in its context, Paul defines "all men" in v.2 as "kings and all who are in authority"
- Paul was saying he didn't want us to overlook the possibility that God can bring saving faith even to those who seem outside His reach
 - While the rich and powerful don't come to faith very often, since God chooses the weak things to shame the strong
 - Nevertheless, some will come to faith according to God's will, and we should pray for them as much as we pray for the poor
 - And Paul adds that by praying for those in authority to come to faith, we may arrive at a more tranquil and quiet life for ourselves
- So Claudia receives this dream from God to set herself on a path to saving faith, according to tradition
 - She responded to her dream by trying to stop her husband, but God's purpose in the dream was to prepare her heart for faith
 - And in that way, the Lord provided protection and support to the early believers through her influence on her husband
 - Just as the Lord placed Joseph and Daniel in positions of authority to guard Israel's future, she guarded the early church
- And that leads us to the second reason for the Lord to give her a dream, and it's a particularly ironic twist that shows the sovereignty of God
 - While Pilate is dealing with the messenger with the note arriving from his wife, he must leave the proceedings with Jesus
 - And during that brief delay, the religious leaders see their opportunity to influence the outcome of Pilate's scheme
 - They realize that Pilate is preparing to present both Jesus and Barabbas to the

crowd and they don't want Jesus released

- So during the delay created by Pilate's wife, in v.20 we see the Pharisees moving through the crowd influencing everyone against Jesus
 - Perhaps they threatened the crowd in some way if they didn't demand Jesus' death or perhaps they promised bribes
 - But one way or another, they convince the crowd to call for Jesus' death and Barabbas' release
- This is so ironic because they wouldn't have had this opportunity except because Claudia delayed the proceedings with her note to Pilate
 - In a sense she was trying to save Jesus and her husband, and in the end her note became part of the conspiracy to convict Jesus
 - And therefore, God gave her the dream so she would interrupt the proceedings so that the leaders could influence the crowd
- It's an amazing display of how God sovereignly ensures everything works together according to His sovereign purpose
 - And it's perhaps the most important thing you should remember from today and most days
 - God is in control...but not just in the ultimate sense that He determines how everything turns out in the end
 - But also in the sense of every little details on the path to the end
 - Because you cannot determine the end unless you also control the means to that end
 - God controls every single detail of life, and everything that happens whether good or bad (from our perspective) is according to His will

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.

- We can see this truth at work in this simple moment where a wife gets a dream and reacts in a certain way
- And that small moment simultaneously makes possible a woman believing in Jesus and her husband killing Jesus
- Remember this next time you face troubling circumstances and remind yourself that God brought this for a reason to work good in some way
 - The good may be hard to see in the midst of the pain, just as I'm sure Claudia was upset at Pilate when she learned his decision

- But give God time to work and to reveal His purpose, and trust Him in the meantime and know He is in control
- Not just of how your story ends...but of every step along the way
- So Pilate returns from dealing with his wife's interruption, sits down again in the judgment seat, and commences with his plan to give the crowd a choice

Matt. 27:21 But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

Matt. 27:22 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!"

Matt. 27:23 And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

Matt. 27:24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."

Matt. 27:25 And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

- Now Pilate's shrewd plan to release Jesus has turned into a strategic blunder and plays right into the hands of the Jewish leaders
 - In v.21 when Pilate puts the question to the crowd again (Who do I release?), this time the religious leaders and the crowd are ready
 - They've been primed with the answer, so in unison they all call out: Barabbas!
- Pilate is astonished...he can hardly believe it...so he asks again, what evil has Jesus done to deserve such a painful death?
 - Of course, the crowd does not have an answer to that question, they only know what they are supposed to say: Crucify Him!
 - Matthew records Pilate asking the crowd just this one time, but altogether in the Gospels Pilate asks the crowd three times
 - Each time Pilate tries to lead the crowd into choosing to release Jesus, and each time they repeat they want Jesus to be crucified
- In fact, at one point Pilate goes so far as to take Jesus away and have him scourged in the hope of increasing sympathy for Jesus
 - Next week we will cover the effect of Roman scourging (parental warning) but for now you need only know it was devastating
 - And yet when Jesus is brought back before the crowd, there was still no sympathy for Him despite his miserable appearance
- Altogether the Gospels record Pilate trying to release Jesus five separate times, and each time the crowd grows more vociferous in their demands
 - Until finally Pilate realizes he is in danger of starting the very riot he was trying to avoid, and at that point he knows he's beaten

- So from the judgment seat he pronounces Jesus will die despite being innocent
- So Pilate will put Jesus to death while Barabbas will be released, and in that moment, the Lord's sovereignty was on display once more
 - On one side of Pilate stood Yeshua (Jesus) the Son of God the Father
 - Jesus was the righteous one, the Son of the Living God
 - And the Bible tells us Jesus is the First Born among many brethren, meaning He brings forth a family born again by faith
 - And then on Pilate's other side stood Barabbas, a criminal
 - Barabbas was not the man's actual name, because Barabbas is a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew title
 - The term "bar Abbas" in Hebrew means "son of Abbas" and Abbas is the Aramaic word for father, so he was called "son of the father"
 - And an early church father, Origen, records that this man's given name was Yeshua, which was a very common Jewish name in that day
 - So that means that on that day, on either side of Pilate stood two men both called Yeshua son of the father
- God prepared that moment such that Jesus and Barabbas would serve as federal representatives of their respective spiritual families
 - Barabbas was the son of his father, the devil, and as such he was the perfect representation of Satan's nature
 - The Bible calls Satan a liar, a thief, a murderer, and a usurper of thrones
 - And we've already heard that Barabbas was a liar, thief, murderer and a usurper of Roman rule
 - Meanwhile, Jesus is the Son of the Father of Lights, the perfect representation of God in Heaven
 - He is innocent and righteous in every way, and all who are born again by faith in Jesus are children of God and share in His nature
 - That was the choice standing before the crowd that day: choose righteousness or sin, life or death, God or Satan
 - And as Paul tells us in Romans, the crowd could not make the right choice:

Rom. 3:10 as it is written,

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

- Each of these men stood as the perfect examples of the two types of people in the world
 - Barabbas was the picture of every unbeliever, dead in his sins, in constant rebellion to God and His word, and due death
 - While Jesus represents those who have been born again by faith, counted righteous yet hated by the world
- As should be obvious, God has prepared this entire scene in every detail to make clear that Jesus represents a fork in our spiritual road
 - Every human being finds him or herself on one side of this moment or the other
 - There is no third choice...like that crowd, we have to pick our Yeshua, so to speak
 - Spiritually speaking, either our “Barabbas” dies and we live to Christ, or we reject the son of God and remain dead in our sins
- So Pilate declares his verdict, and in v.24 he ceremonially washes his hands of the decision, declaring Jesus’ blood was on the Jews and their children, not him
 - To be clear, this little ceremony Pilate performed before the crowd on that day didn’t absolve him of his guilt, not one bit
 - We don’t get to decide for ourselves which of our decisions God will hold against us and which ones He won’t
 - Five times Pilate declared Jesus was an innocent man, and yet he has Jesus scourged and ultimately crucified anyway
 - Pilate tortured and killed a man he knew to be innocent, and why? Because he feared losing his job over a riot on Passover
 - And his little ceremony at the end certainly didn’t lessen his guilt
 - Ironically, not only did Pilate not succeed in escaping his guilt, he also failed to preserve his position over Judea
 - History records that Pilate lost his job a few years later when Caligula removed Pilate from his office
 - Pilate was probably manipulated into some bad decision by the religious leaders so the Caesar banished him to Gaul (France)
 - Gaul was not a vacation spot...it was a Roman region under constant raids by barbarians, ripe with disease and not a desirable post
 - History records that Pilate committed suicide while in Gaul, a fitting end for the man who killed the Messiah of God
 - Both the man who betrayed the Lord and the man who acted on that betrayal both died by their own hand
- Pilate knew the right thing to do and yet chose to sin anyway for something he wanted, but then he tries to have his cake and eat it too by excusing his choice
 - In that respect, I think Pilate serves as a poster child for how the unbelieving world looks at sin in general
 - The world wants its sin because of what it gains them, yet no one thinks they play a part in any wrong doing

- And when they are caught and have no choice but to admit their part, they excuse it away
- They say it wasn't their choice, or they claim the act was made necessary by another's sin, or they shift the blame some way
- Just remember, you can't wash your hands of sin...the only thing that washes away your sin is the blood of Christ who died for you
 - So in the words of that wise philosopher, Bob Dylan, you're gonna have to serve somebody, God or Satan
 - And someone will pay the price for your sin...either you pay your own price or you let Jesus pay it for you
- And what of the Jewish leaders who conspired to see Jesus die, including persuading the crowds to call for Jesus' death?
 - In John 19:11 Jesus tells Pilate at one moment that those who turned Him over to Pilate were guilty of a greater sin than Pilate
 - We don't know how exactly God differentiates between varying levels of sin and punishment but He does
 - And the religious leaders were due an even greater punishment than Pilate when that day came
- And what about the Jewish crowd that called for Jesus' death on that day?
 - Notice in v.25 the people say to Pilate they will accept the guilt on themselves and their children for that day's decision
 - And here again, the choice to accept or reject guilt was not theirs to make, for they were certainly guilty regardless
 - And their decision had very severe and longterm consequences for the nation of Israel
 - In Matthew 12, we studied the moment when the official representatives of Israel, the Pharisees, rejected Jesus' claims as Messiah
 - They committed the unpardonable sin, Jesus called it, by declaring the testimony of the Spirit to be the work of Satan
 - As a result of that sin, Jesus said that this generation of Israel lost their opportunity to receive their King
 - The Kingdom would not come to Israel in that day, nor will it come to Israel in the future until they call upon His name
 - Now we see the next step in that judgment playing out as the people declare openly and repeatedly Jesus is not their king
 - In Chapter 12 it was the religious leaders speaking on behalf of the people, but now the people themselves speak judgment
 - As they proclaimed Jesus was not their king, that generation of Israel lost the Kingdom promised to Israel
 - And in a few decades, they lost their temple, their city and their place in the land...all judgments that God brought for this sin

- But this is not the end of God's plan for Israel, for even when we are faithless, God remains faithful the Bible teaches
 - And in a future day at the end of this age, the Bible teaches that another generation of Israel will reverse this mistake
 - A future generation of Israel, all Jews who are alive on a certain day, will return to Jesus in trembling and repentance

Hos. 3:4 For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols.

Hos. 3:5 Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

Rom. 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Rom. 11:26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

**“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”**

Rom. 11:27 **“THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”**

- The Bible tells of a day at the end of this age when all Jews remaining on earth will be moved by the Spirit of God to confess Christ
 - As Paul says, the Lord will come from the Heavenly Zion to earth to remove ungodliness from Jacob, Israel
 - But God promised to take away Israel's sins in the covenant He made with them, so they will receive His grace in that day
- What an amazing display of God's sovereignty working through the sin of humanity to accomplish good on that day?
 - Everyone involved was acting out of sinful hearts with evil motives, and yet all were under the authority and control of God
 - From the Jewish leaders who plotted to save Israel by killing their rival but ended up ensuring Israel's destruction
 - To Pilate who knew the right thing to do but knowingly condemned an innocent man to save his job...and lost it anyway
 - To Claudia who acted to help her husband and Jesus with her warning but ended up sealing Jesus' fate
 - To Barabbas who must have rejoiced being freed in place of Jesus yet who served as the representative of all that is ungodly
 - To Jesus, the only innocent One in the scene, Who said nothing and did nothing to

defend Himself, yet lost everything for our sake

- Next week we study through the beginning of Jesus' crucifixion
- And as we do, we'll return to the question I posed a few weeks ago...why did Jesus need to suffer on the way to His death?

- This morning's lesson covers important material though some of it may be a little difficult
 - In just 40 verses, Matthew tells the story of Jesus' crucifixion from start to finish following Pilate's sentence of death
 - We will cover it in a few weeks, focusing on details that are often missed or misunderstood
 - Last week we concluded our study at the moment Pilate washed his hands of the decision to crucify Jesus
 - Today we pick up there again in the scene, and as we do, we will focus on a few key aspects of this account as Matthew tells it
 - First, we want to understand at least to some degree what Jesus experienced, though obviously we can't fully appreciate the full horror
 - I intend to explain the circumstances in detail but without dwelling on the gore any more than is necessary
 - Our goal is to understand what happened sufficient to appreciate why it needed to happen this way
 - Secondly, we will return to the question of why did Jesus need to suffer at all on the His way to death?
 - You may remember in an earlier week I raised this question and we began to answer it from the text
 - I asked why couldn't the Father allow Jesus to die for our sins without the added suffering beforehand?
 - At that earlier time, I gave you the first of two reasons why Jesus needed to suffer and today we will look at the second reason
 - Finally, we want to understand the timeline of Jesus' death and allow the Scripture to reset some of our established ideas about these events
 - The Church has adopted a number of traditions in how we remember Jesus' death, some of which are simply wrong
 - So let's take time as we go to note time and place references to help us understand these events correctly
- Speaking of our timeline, let's start there this morning by remembering where we are in the events of this week in Jerusalem
 - Let's return to an overview chart for the Passover week in the year Jesus died and add the events of Matthew 27
 - For the first four days of the week, Jesus taught in the Temple during the day and slept in the evenings in Bethany
 - While in the temple, the Jewish religious leaders "inspected" Jesus trying to discredit Him, but they failed
 - That fulfilled Scripture's demand that a Passover lamb be inspected for 4 days to see it was spotless before being sacrificed
 - Then it came to the day of Passover, which began at sundown on Wednesday night

according to the Jewish way of reckoning days

- We learned that on the day before Passover on Wednesday afternoon Jews took their lambs to the temple to be sacrificed
- Then each family ate their lamb that night to celebrate the Passover meal after sundown
- On that same night, Jesus and His disciples celebrate their Passover meal in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, which we call the Last Supper
 - Then Jesus and His disciples left the city to go to the Mt. of Olives and wait for His arrest by the Roman cohort
 - After His arrest, Jesus then endures His overnight trial before the high priests of Israel
- Then at 6AM, at sunrise, Jesus is taken to Pilate for His Roman trial, where He is found guilty despite being innocent of all charges
 - That's where we pick up now, early on a Thursday morning, and the events that follow can be divided into three parts
 - According to the Gospels, we will have three key time markers to use in timing the events of this day: 9AM, 12PM and 3PM
- We are now approaching the first of these time markers, 9AM, because Mark tells us that Jesus was placed on the cross at that exact hour
 - That's where we pick up today, with Jesus being prepared to carry His cross and to be crucified at 9AM...

Matt. 27:26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Matt. 27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.

Matt. 27:28 They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.

Matt. 27:29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Matt. 27:30 They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.

Matt. 27:31 After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

- After failing to convince the crowd that Jesus should be freed, Pilate reluctantly agrees to release the career criminal, Barabbas
 - Last week we learned how Barabbas' true name was Yeshua, son of the father, which is also Jesus' name and title
 - So Barabbas represented one side of humanity, the guilty among all who descend from Adam who are dead in their sins

- While Jesus represented those who are born again children of God, righteous by faith in Jesus
- The world faces the same choice that the crowd did on that day: choose rebellion to God or the righteousness of Christ
- And then one Man, Jesus, was condemned to receive a punishment He did not deserve to set free the guilty man, Barabbas
 - As Matthew says, Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified
 - Which creates another picture of Jesus' sacrificial death in the place of the guilty so that we may go free by the grace of God
- Notice Matthew says that Pilate ordered that Jesus be scourged on the way to the cross, but this is not the actual order of events
 - Matthew and Mark report the scourging of Jesus took place as part of the process of crucifixion, but that was not the case
 - John tells us specifically that Pilate had Jesus scourged at a point in the middle of the proceedings with Barabbas
 - After trying unsuccessfully to convince the crowd to release Jesus, Pilate had Jesus scourged to satisfy the crowd
 - Luke doesn't mention scourging specifically but confirms that Pilate had Jesus "punished" hoping it would be enough
- But after the scourging, Pilate brought Jesus back before the crowds bloodied and torn to pieces and they showed no pity for Jesus
 - The religious leaders had prepared the crowd to demand Jesus' death no matter what Pilate said or did
 - So from John we learn that the events recorded in vs.27-31 actually happened before Pilate sent Jesus to the cross in v.26
- So Jesus had already been scourged before He was convicted to die, and scourging was nothing short of devastating
 - It was a form of whipping, but the Roman style of scourging was far worse than most
 - Romans scourged prisoners using a short whip consisting of multiple strands of leather each about 2-3 feet long
 - And at the end of each strand were tied either small metal balls or sharp pieces of sheep bone to inflict severe lacerations
 - The person was stripped naked, tied upright to a post with their backside exposed
 - Then two soldiers on either side struck the man's back either left-to-right or right-to-left dozens of times
 - The metal balls and sharp bone shredded the layers of the skin tearing it away and exposing muscle and even bone
 - Besides the intense pain, there was also blood loss and the prisoner was often left unconscious or in shock
 - Some even died from the scourging alone, and that was largely the point...to bring a

man to the brink of death

- Scourging was used by Romans to hasten the death process of crucifixion
- An otherwise healthy man could remain alive for days nailed to a cross, which forced Roman guards to remain nearby throughout
- But following a Roman scourging, a prisoner was so debilitated that death happened in a few hours or a day at most
- So Jesus was scourged and then returned to Pilate, and though Hollywood has made efforts to show the horror of scourging, they still can't do it justice
 - Some scholars who have researched Roman scourging report that the whips would reach around to catch the sides of the prisoner's face
 - The person's cheeks would be torn to shreds by the whips, leaving the face horribly disfigured and unrecognizable
 - Scripture says this very thing happened to Jesus
 - Isaiah tells us that the just the sight of Jesus was appalling more than observers could take in

**Is. 52:14 Just as many were astonished at you, My people,
So His appearance was marred more than any man
And His form more than the sons of men.**

**Is. 53:3 He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.**

- Isaiah foretold that people would be astonished to look upon the Messiah as He was abused and killed
 - The word for astonished literally means to be appalled or horrified at Jesus' appearance
 - Because His appearance was marred more than any man, and the Hebrew word for marred is literally disfigured
- Jesus wasn't just bloodied...His body was torn to shreds, disfigured like something from a horror movie until He didn't even look human
 - Isaiah says people hid their face from Him rather than look upon His body
 - They had to wonder how Jesus was even still alive
- Yet in this condition, Jesus was still made to stand before the crowd and in vs.27-30 Matthew says the Roman soldiers added insult to injury
 - Despite His debilitated condition they tormented Jesus with further beatings, a crown of thorns and mocking

- None of these punishments were especially harsh by themselves, but consider how they would have felt following a scourging
- The pain must have been unbearable, and it must have taken all of Jesus' strength to remain standing to endure it
- Remember, every detail in this process was ordained by God to serve a purpose in His plan of redemption
 - For example, even Jesus wearing a crown of thorns serves a purpose
 - Genesis tells us that after Adam fell into sin, the Lord pronounced a series of curses on the condition of the world
 - The primary curse God pronounced was physical death for all humanity and animals
 - So all humanity exists under a curse of death, but the Bible also says that Jesus took the penalty of God's curses on our behalf

Gal. 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE” —

Gal. 3:14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

- And another curse God spoke in the Garden said this:

Gen. 3:17 Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’;

Cursed is the ground because of you;

In toil you will eat of it

All the days of your life.

Gen. 3:18 “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;

And you will eat the plants of the field;

- God made it harder for humanity to work the field by promising we would now fight against thorns and thistles in the field
 - So when we see Christ wearing a crown of thorns, it symbolizes Jesus taking the curses of Creation upon Himself for our sake
- But seeing Jesus suffering so much drives us back to that question I posed earlier: couldn't Jesus have died for our sins without suffering in the process?
 - What did Jesus' suffering accomplish for us in the plan of redemption?
 - The first time I raised this question, I told you there are two answers given in Scripture
 - The first answer came from Peter who explained that Jesus suffered on the way

to the cross to set an example for us

- All who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted, and when that happens, we remember how Jesus handled suffering
- And from His example we learn that the Lord wants His people to accept the mistreatment without striking back
- And now we reach the second answer, which comes from Paul's letter to the Romans

Rom. 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Rom. 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Rom. 3:26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- Paul says we are justified – declared not guilty of our sins – because Christ redeemed us
- To redeem means to pay the price that is required to set free someone under bondage or penalty
- We were under the penalty of the curse and in bondage to sin, but Jesus paid the price we should have paid
- And that price was His blood, referring to Jesus' sacrificial death in our place, and the application of His blood on the mercy seat in Heaven
 - Now that could have happened without suffering, without us even seeing a drop of His blood spilled
 - In fact, Jesus could have died in His sleep, and His blood would have still sufficed as a payment for sin
- But in Romans 3:25 Paul goes on to clarify that Jesus needed to be displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood
 - The word propitiation means to appease or satisfy anger
 - For example, let's say your mother gets angry at you because you forgot her birthday
 - So to appease her anger, you send her an extra large bouquet of flowers and an apology card
 - Those gifts are a propitiation to satisfy your mother's anger, because she is willing to accept that gesture
 - Likewise, God has wrath against all sin, and the only thing that will appease the wrath of God is the blood of Christ
 - The Bible says Jesus is our propitiation, because the Father is willing to accept His Son's death in our place

1John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- But Jesus' death needed to be public so that God could demonstrate His righteousness in having overlooked sin
- Back in Romans 3 Paul says God passed over sins previously committed so that He could demonstrate His righteousness in punishing Jesus
 - God cannot turn a blind eye to sin...sin deserves God's wrath and Jesus took that wrath for us
 - We are forgiven because Christ took our place, but God needed us to understand what it took to bring us His mercy
- So Paul says God made Jesus suffer greatly and publicly to demonstrate that God is just in overlooking our sin
 - Jesus suffered on His way to death to make it clear what sin deserves and what we have avoided
 - We didn't just avoid a painful death but we avoided an eternity of suffering because of Jesus' blood
- And Jesus' extreme suffering on the way to the cross serves as a disturbing reminder of how God sees our sin
 - We may not like to hear how much our Lord suffered as He made His way to death, but God doesn't want you to forget it
 - Because our sin made that treatment necessary, and not just the sin you did yesterday, but the sin you will do today
 - Allow your appreciation of Christ's suffering to cause you to pause the next time you contemplate a moment of sin
 - The writer of Hebrews cautions us this way:

Heb. 12:1 ...let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **Heb. 12:2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb. 12:3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Heb. 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

- Jesus endured hostility and fought hard against the temptation to avoid the suffering and shame that He experienced
- And why? The writer says He did that so that we would not grow weary and lose heart

and become entangled in sin

- And if you think you've done enough to resist sin, the writer says you haven't resisted to the point of having your face shredded
 - You haven't suffered to avoid sin as Jesus did, but that's exactly what Jesus was doing...avoiding sin by going to the cross
 - The good news is that we can fail but it doesn't change where we're headed – that is the definition of grace
 - The point is, knowing what was done for us, should change how we live now
 - The power to stop sin in our life comes from the Holy Spirit working in us, but it is our job to stop and yield
 - Jesus' suffering and disfigurement was God's demonstration of what wrath for sin looks like
 - Knowing that wrath has been poured out on Him and not us, should give us cause to live differently...
 - ...for the sake of our testimony or the very least out of a thankful heart
- Back in v.31 Matthew, we're told Jesus is led away to the cross, and at this point, I want to return to our timeline to clear up another misconception
 - Commonly, you will hear people say Jesus died on a Friday, but the Bible never names the specific day Jesus died
 - The view that Jesus died on Friday comes from references to the Jewish Sabbath and a tradition called a "day of preparation"
 - All the Gospels report that the evening on the day Jesus died was the beginning of a Sabbath
 - And the day before a Sabbath was called a "day of preparation" because Jews used that day to prepare for the Sabbath
 - Since no work could be done on the Sabbath day, Jews used the day before to accomplish the work needed
 - So all the work to be done like gathering firewood or making bread, etc. was prepared the day before the Sabbath
 - So when the Gospel writers say Jesus died on a day of preparation, many have assumed it was Friday, the day before the Sabbath
 - But we find out this isn't what the Gospel writers meant when we look more closely at the Gospel accounts
 - And it begins with understanding how Jews celebrated Passover
- Passover is a single day feast held every year on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan, roughly March/April
 - Passover begins in the evening, like every Jewish day, and that night Jesus had the Last Supper followed by His death the next day
 - Passover is always followed immediately by a second feast called Unleavened Bread which lasts seven days

- And in the Law, the Lord told Israel that the first day and the last day of Unleavened Bread would always be a Sabbath
- The first and last days are Sabbaths no matter what day of the week they fall
- These special Sabbaths are called High Days, and they are observed in addition to the regular weekly Sabbath
 - So Passover is always followed by a Sabbath called a High Day Sabbath, which means every Passover is a day of preparation
 - So Jesus was crucified on a day of preparation because He was crucified on Passover, and the next day was a High Day Sabbath
 - In John's account we get confirmation that this was the case in that year

John 19:31 Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

- John says Jesus died on the day of preparation before a High Day Sabbath, not a regular weekly Sabbath day
 - So that means Jesus could have died on any day, and in fact, we know He didn't die on a Friday
 - If He had died on a Friday, then the next day would have been a regular Sabbath, not a High Day Sabbath as John says
- As we will learn when we get to Chapter 28, the day after Jesus died was Friday, which means Jesus died on a Thursday
 - Which also means that in the particular week that Jesus died, there were two Sabbaths in a row
 - The day after He died was a High Day Sabbath, and the next day was a Saturday, which is the normal weekly Sabbath
 - And then the third day was Sunday, the first day of the week, and that day is a third feast, the Feast of First Fruits
- This may surprise you, and many in the Church today follow a tradition of observing "good Friday" before Easter to remember the day of Jesus' death
 - But now you see that this tradition is entirely inaccurate...we've been remembering the wrong day picked because of a misunderstanding
 - This may be the single greatest misconception within the church regarding the account of Jesus' death
 - If you asked 100 Christians what day of the week did Jesus die, how many do you suppose would answer "Friday"?
 - 95? 99? 100?
 - And yet that answer is wrong, and the fact that this is the wrong answer has been

staring us in the face in the Bible since the first century

- How did this misconception get started? It's simple really...someone said that Jesus died on a Friday and we believed it
- And when someone established "Good Friday" the idea was cemented in church culture
- You may wonder why I make so much of this little issue, and for the most part, I agree the mistake itself is insignificant and mostly harmless
 - But it's an example of a much bigger and more serious issue that does impact every Christian
 - And that issue is trusting tradition or even our teachers rather than studying Scripture for ourselves
- If we become comfortable depending on Church tradition rather than learning Scripture, we are in trouble
 - At first we may only be susceptible to small errors like thinking Jesus died on a Friday
 - But just as assuredly we will be taken in by bigger errors too because we won't be able to tell the difference
- And I've encountered Christians everywhere I go who are suffering the consequences of wrong beliefs or practices that brought them harm
 - They have been misled, disappointed, discouraged and hurt, but not by God or the Bible...by false teachers and false traditions
 - That's the danger of not doing our homework, of not going to the source of truth for what we know
- Let me suggest that we all carry around bad assumptions, bad traditions, and bad teaching that we've collected over the years
 - Don't think that because you grew up in the church or you went to "Bible churches" you are immune
 - Did you believe that Jesus died on a Friday? Ask yourself why you believed that...where did you find that written in the Bible?
 - And for that matter, are you going to double-check what I've taught you from Scripture today?
 - The only way we move beyond such things is to remain teachable and to study the Bible carefully
 - And you need both to move ahead in spiritual maturity
 - If you are teachable yet don't turn to Scripture, then eventually you may be taught by the wrong people or the wrong traditions
 - And if you study Scripture without a teachable heart, you will reject out of hand anything you find that doesn't agree with you
 - The Bible itself tells us that we would do well to pay attention to what's written in this book

2Pet. 1:19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

2Pet. 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- Peter says we do well to pay attention to the word of God in the same way we pay attention to a lamp shining in a dark place
 - Think about that analogy for a moment...when you enter a pitch black dark space with a flashlight, where does your gaze fall?
 - You focus your attention where the light is shining naturally
 - And if you want to see something in the corner of the room or in the closet...
 - You move the light to that place first and then look in the light
 - That's what Peter is saying we should do with the word of God, because it is the light of knowledge of God
 - When you want to see something, to know the truth, you look at the word of God for your answers
 - It's like a person staring at a flashlight beam to see into the dark
 - And when we need to investigate something that lies in the dark, you don't leave your flashlight behind and go searching the dark do you?
 - No, first you move the flashlight to the new place and then you follow the light
 - Similarly, when you have questions about life or God or the world or what comes next, you don't go searching in the dark
 - You don't go to the unbelieving world, to Barnes and Noble, to Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), to the internet...that's searching in the dark
 - No, first you move the light...that is you move to the place in the word of God where you might expect to find that answer
 - And then you let the light lead you through the darkness
 - That's the analogy Peter is using to explain the value in resting in the word of God for your answer in everything
- And Peter gives us confidence in this pursuit by reminding us that nothing in the Bible was written merely by the thoughts of human beings
 - These words came from God Himself and He will show us what they mean in the course of time...if we come to it with a teachable heart
 - That's why this church and ministry exists, it's why I stand behind this pulpit each week
 - If I didn't believe in what I'm telling you, if I hadn't seen it work in my own life, I wouldn't waste my time telling you about it

- There is still a lot to cover as we head toward the end of Matthew's Gospel, and there is still many misconceptions to address
 - But this pursuit isn't just about righting misunderstandings...this is about rethinking where we go for our answers
 - And ultimately, it's about changing our hearts because of what we learn
 - As I like to say, when you teach the Bible, good things happen

- Today we move another step ahead in the story of Jesus' death on the cross on Passover
 - Jesus has been condemned by Pilate in the Antonian Fortress, and in short order, Jesus will be nailed to a wooden cross
 - Matthew's account moves extremely quickly through these events often giving just a single verse to a significant moment
 - The other Gospel writers fill in the gaps, of course, and we will venture outside Matthew here and there as needed
 - But I want to remain true to the Gospel we're studying, so we will largely stick with the text of Matthew
 - I also want to remind you of the three areas of focus for our study of Jesus' suffering and death
 - First, we want to understand as best we can what Jesus experienced on our behalf
 - Secondly, we want to understand the purpose and meaning of these events... that is, why did they happen this way?
 - Finally, we want to pay close attention to the timeline of events so we can dispel any myths or incorrect understanding
 - Today we pick up at v.32, and immediately you'll notice right away how much Matthew packs into a single verse

Matt. 27:32 As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

- Matthew moves directly from Pilate's condemnation of Jesus to Jesus with His cross headed to his execution site outside the city walls
 - This is the only verse Matthew devotes to that entire journey, and because he jumps so quickly, I want to slow down just a bit
 - First, let's get oriented...Jesus is leaving the Antonian Fortress where Pilate condemned Him before the crowds
 - The fortress is located inside the city walls on the northern end of the Temple
 - The crucifixion site sat on a small hill just outside the walls to the west/northwest of the city
 - The historical path Jesus took doesn't exist any longer since the city has been destroyed and rebuilt several times since Jesus
 - But today there is a memorial path called the Via Dolorosa (Way of Suffering in Latin) that roughly retraces Jesus' path
 - Except if you walk the Via Dolorosa today you'll notice that it begins and ends *inside* the city walls
 - Naturally, this confuses some people because we know that Jesus was crucified *outside* the city walls

- The current path lies entirely inside the city because the current walls around the old city of Jerusalem are not the original walls
 - The walls of Jesus' day enclosed a smaller area that placed Jesus' burial site outside the city just to the west
 - A decade or so after Jesus died, the walls were greatly expanded by King Agrippa to encompass Jesus' burial site into the city
- The Romans destroyed the city walls in the revolt of AD 70 and centuries later the Ottomans rebuilt walls in the 1500s
 - The Ottoman walls enclose a smaller area than the Roman walls, but they still encompass Jesus' burial site
 - So now Jesus' burial site is inside the city walls and is marked by a magnificent church built by Constantine in the 4th century
- The actual distance from the Fortress to the crucifixion site is about 500 meters or so, which is about a quarter mile
 - An average person can make a walk that distance in about 15 min
 - But given Jesus' debilitated state following the beatings and a scourging, He would have found this walk to be an ordeal
 - And adding to that difficulty considerably, Romans forced the condemned to carry their cross to the crucifixion site
 - The Romans used any one of four different cross designs for crucifixion so we can't be sure the type of cross used in Jesus' day
 - Based on certain details in the story, the traditional "t-shaped" cross was likely the one used for Jesus
 - And if so, then Jesus would have carried only the horizontal cross beam to the crucifixion site
 - The beam would be placed across the person's shoulders and tied to his arms for the walk
 - The beam wasn't especially large or heavy...just large enough to support the person's weight
 - But Jesus was in no condition to carry anything, so this task was quite difficult and we see the evidence in v.32
- In v.32 we're told that as soon as Jesus picks up His cross and begins to the walk, He falls
 - Right away the Roman guards realize Jesus can't make it to the crucifixion site on His own, so they conscript a nearby passerby to help
 - Matthew says they chose a man named Simon from Cyrene, a place in northern Africa, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover
 - Like the rest of the crowd, Simon was likely there to see the national Passover Lamb sacrificed in the temple at 9 AM
 - But now he is required by the guards to follow Jesus for the entire walk to the crucifixion site carrying the wooden beam

- Here's another opportunity for us to correct a common misconception about Jesus' death
- Jesus didn't carry His own cross except for a brief moment at the very start of the journey
- For the most part, Jesus walked to His death carrying nothing because he could barely manage the walk at all
- And for Simon, being forced to carry Jesus' cross was much more than an inconvenience; he was now a participant in the horrors of crucifixion
 - Though Simon wasn't nailed to the cross, he shared in the abuse that Jesus endured on the way there
 - As an accused walked to his execution site, he traveled through densely packed crowds in narrow city streets
 - These crowds pressed in on the man jeering at him, hurling abuse, spitting on him, throwing objects and even beating him
- In such tight and chaotic quarters, anyone near Jesus would have found themselves in the crossfire
 - Although the abuse wasn't intended for Simon, those misdirected rocks, spit and punches still landed with a sting
 - And the closer Simon walked with Jesus, the more of the abuse came his way
- At the same time, Simon's role also gained him the benefit of a front row seat to witness Jesus' personal suffering
 - Matthew doesn't record any details from the journey to the cross, but the other Gospel writers record one notable moment
 - John and Luke tells us that following Jesus were women wailing loudly over His predicament
 - But these women were not truly lamenting Jesus' fate, and in fact, they probably didn't even know Jesus
 - These women were professional mourners who wailed and lamented for income
 - In Jewish culture it was considered dishonorable for someone to die without someone expressing sorrow for them
 - This expectation gave rise to professional mourners, who wailed for those who lacked enough friends or family to mourn them
 - Family members of the deceased would compensate them for their work in honoring their relative
 - When Jesus sees these women mourning for Him, He knows no one will pay them, so He offers them compensation in the form of advice:

Luke 23:27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.

Luke 23:28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping

for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

Luke 23:29 “For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’

Luke 23:30 “Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, ‘FALL ON US,’ AND TO THE HILLS, ‘COVER US.’

- Jesus offers these women a warning prophecy concerning the coming judgment on Jerusalem
 - He tells them to save their crying for their own children at the time of the future destruction of their city
 - This judgment came against Jerusalem for their rejection of Jesus, and it came to pass as promised in AD 70
- So as Simon followed closely behind Jesus, he experienced moments like this and perhaps others that aren’t recorded in the Gospels
 - At the very least, Simon witnessed the way Jesus handled these unbearable circumstances, including noticing what Jesus was *not* doing
 - Normally, a convicted criminal headed to the cross was in no mood to be pleasant or kind with the abusive crowd
 - So as the crowd hurled insults and rocks, the condemned man would return the favor by screaming obscenities at the crowd
 - Jesus responded so differently, even showing concern for women who pretended to mourn Him, that it must have puzzled Simon greatly
 - Jesus never uttering an insult against anyone involved in His death, no cursing, no crying even
 - Jesus accepted the abuse willingly, as we studied earlier, and certainly it would have made an impression on Simon
 - So if Simon walked closely with Jesus, he saw and heard remarkable things but staying close to Jesus also meant enduring more abuse too
 - On the other hand, if Simon dropped back to leave space between himself and Jesus, he lessened the abuse he received
 - But if he did that, Simon also experienced less of Jesus, heard less of Jesus’ word and witnessed less of Jesus’ behavior
 - And I wonder what mattered most to Simon in that moment?
- I think the Lord arranged for Simon to walk with Jesus so we would have an example of how our walk with Jesus brings both sacrifice and blessing
 - The closer we walk with Jesus, the more we will suffer as He did, because as Jesus said, they hated Him first, so they will hate us too

John 15:18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

John 15:19 “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

- The world loves its own, and for the same reason the world hates God because God convicts the world for ungodliness
- And if the world hates God, then it will also hate anything or anyone who represents God
- And since we have been chosen by God to be His ambassadors, then Jesus says we have become enemies of the world
 - Therefore, the closer we walk with Jesus, the more we look and sound like Jesus to the world, so the more the world will hate us
 - We’re like Simon walking closely with Jesus, carrying our cross as Jesus told us to do
- As we walk we will be subject to the same hatred and abuse directed against Jesus
 - But when that happens, they aren’t hating us...they’re hating Jesus and God...we’re just collateral damage
 - Also like Simon, we can lessen the abuse if we distance ourselves from Jesus, fading back in our walk, blending into the crowd, etc.
- But of course, if we do that we also lose the experience of walking with Jesus, watching Him at work and hearing His word
 - We can’t have it both ways...we can’t walk closely with Jesus and avoid the negative consequences that naturally follow
 - Christians can’t be friends with Jesus and friends with the world

James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- So this man was enlisted into the story of Jesus’ death to remind us that Christ desires followers who are willing to be identified with Jesus
 - Interestingly this man is named Simon, the same name as Jesus’ chief disciple Peter, whose original name was Simon
 - We have one Simon present that day following Jesus to the cross, while the other Simon, the rock, was notably absent
 - I wonder what if Peter had been present that day, might he have carried the cross instead of Simon of Cyrene?
 - After all, Jesus assigned Simon Peter the responsibility for leading the early church and for setting the example for everyone else
 - Peter was the rock upon which Jesus would start building His Church, and yet where was Simon Peter now?

- That Simon was hiding somewhere trying to avoid the abuse that was falling on Jesus, while this Simon took his place
- Which is a reminder that if we won't walk with Jesus and serve Him, Jesus will find someone else who will
 - When we fail to walk with Jesus, He doesn't lose out...but we do
 - There are marvelous, amazing and sometimes challenging things you will experience following Jesus...
 - And I'm not just talking about coming to faith in Jesus...I'm talking to the believer who has faith but is following at a distance
 - You don't know what you're missing
- And one final thought...Simon followed Jesus, suffering along the way, but he didn't suffer the death that Jesus did
 - Once he made his way to the cross, Simon was free to go...he just walked away
 - Jesus stayed behind to die that day, which reminds us that even as we follow Jesus, He still takes our place when it matters most
 - Jesus took the death Simon deserved and that we deserve
- And that's why our walk with Him will never bring us to a place where we have to pay for our own sins...that payment was made once for all
 - Yes, we are called to bear a cross of service *to* Jesus, of identity *with* Jesus and of suffering *for* Jesus
 - But He bears the marks of the cross and suffered for us so that we won't have to suffer in eternity
- So Jesus makes His way to the execution site with Simon following...

Matt. 27:33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,

- As Jesus exits the city gate He quickly reaches a rocky outcrop called Golgotha located only a few meters outside the walls
 - The name is an Aramaic word that Matthew translates for us as "place of a skull" which refers to the fact that Romans executed many people here
 - Prisoners carried the horizontal beam of the cross to this point, and then their crucifixion would begin
 - In typical Roman fashion, the process happened very quickly and very brutally
 - First, the condemned was forced to lie down with arms outstretched on the horizontal beam and thick iron nails were driven through the wrist
 - In John's Gospel, we are told Jesus had wounds in His "hands" but in the ancient world the word "hand" also referred to the wrist
 - Since we know the palm is not strong enough to support the weight of the

person, the nail must have gone through the wrist

- As the nails penetrated the wrist, it severed ligaments and nerves, causing shooting pains and involuntary contractions of the fingers
 - Then the horizontal beam was raised with a hoist or ropes and the person was lifted by their outstretched arms
 - As the body weight hung from the outstretched arms, one or both shoulders were likely dislocated
 - A dislocated shoulder is an intense pain all by itself, made worse by the pain of the body pulling against the nail in the wrist
- The horizontal beam is then nailed to the vertical beam, and the man's feet are nailed one on top of the other to the vertical beam
 - The feet are positioned so that the knees are bent, which was another Roman innovation to extend the suffering of crucifixion
 - While hanging in this position, the man's diaphragm can't expand the chest cavity, so the person can't breathe
 - Leon Morris describes the experience this way:

To breathe, it was necessary to push with the legs and pull with the arms to keep the chest cavity open and functioning. Terrible muscle spasms wracked the entire body; but since collapse meant asphyxiation, the strain went on and on. This is also why the sedecula [a piece of wood that served as a small seat in some cases] . . . prolonged life and agony: it partially supported the body's weight, and therefore encouraged the victim to fight on.

- According to Mark, Jesus is placed on the cross on the third Roman hour of the day, which is 9 AM on our clock
 - This began the first of three divisions of time on that day, and the first division runs from 9 AM to noon (12 PM)
 - From 9 AM until noon, Jesus is suffering from the actions of mankind
 - Sinful men put Jesus on a cross that day, and sinful men are tormenting Jesus as He hangs
 - This three-hour period serves the purpose of Jesus experiencing the consequences of sin, not His own but of ours
 - Spiritually speaking, each of us put Jesus on the cross that day, and if you think you would have done better in that day, think again
 - There is nothing fundamentally different between us and the people who mocked and tormented Jesus that day
 - They are sinners, we are sinners; they hated God, and apart from the grace of God, so would we
 - I assure you that had you been a first century Jew in Jerusalem that day, you

would have spit on Jesus too

- Jesus will now hang until He dies, and the typical cause of death in crucifixion was asphyxiation or shock from exposure
 - The prisoner would weaken over time and eventually lose the strength to push themselves up for a breath, and the process could take days
 - Here again, the Romans wanted to prolong the agony, so they offered the prisoner vinegar to drink throughout the ordeal
 - Near the end Jesus will say He was thirsty and He will drink a little then
 - But the Romans did make concession to mercy: they offered a prisoner the chance to drink a potion to help with the pain

Matt. 27:34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

- This combination of gall with wine potion had a slightly anesthetic effect which helped cut the pain of the experience somewhat
 - But notice Jesus refuses this drink, and He does so because He was not supposed to avoid the pain of the cross
 - Quite the contrary, the point of this experience as we learned earlier was for Jesus to experience suffering full force
 - He was there to suffer for our sake, and so He refuses to take anything that might decrease His suffering
- Finally, as Jesus hangs Matthew tells us that the Roman guards assigned to watch the prisoners that day begins profiting from the work that day

Matt. 27:35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

Matt. 27:36 And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.

- Roman soldiers were often paid in spoil, either from conquests in war or from prisoners they oversaw
 - Prisoners were crucified completely naked as a further act of shame, so their clothing was left for others to take
 - There were multiple guards assigned to the duty that day, and each would receive something
 - Typically, a person in that day wore an outer garment, inner garment, head covering, sandals and a heavier outer coat
 - These items had varying value, and the coat fabric, which was the most useful, was often torn into pieces and shared among the men
 - But Jesus' tunic was seamless, according to John, which means it was a more

expensive robe usually worn by the upper class

- Jesus probably received it as a sacrificial gift from some follower, and these Romans don't want to ruin it by dividing it
- So they throw lots or dice to see who will get it
- Why is that little detail included in the Gospels? Primarily for the same reason many other such details were included...
 - Because they all are fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy
 - For example, listen to this description of the crucifixion in the Psalms

**Psa. 22:11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.**

**Psa. 22:12 Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me.**

**Psa. 22:13 They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravener and a roaring lion.**

**Psa. 22:14 I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.**

**Psa. 22:15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.**

**Psa. 22:16 For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.**

**Psa. 22:17 I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;**

**Psa. 22:18 They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.**

- David describes the experience of Jesus on the cross, though David knew nothing of what that experience would be like
 - When David wrote that psalm, crucifixion wasn't known...it wasn't invented until the Persian empire centuries later
 - This is God giving David and us a preview of what was coming for Jesus and doing it in a way that validated Jesus' ministry
 - Starting in v.11 he says there was none to help, and as we know Jesus had no allies present apart from a few women and John
 - Then in v.12 many bulls of Bashan surrounded Him referring to the Roman soldiers
 - A Bashan bull often pictures the most powerful of warriors or enemies in

Scripture which is an apt description of Rome

- Next he says the people opened their mouths at Jesus roaring at Him with insults and jeers like lions
- And Jesus felt as if His life was being poured out of His body as He was scourged and beaten and nailed to the cross
- Next in v.14 He says His bones are out of joint, referring to His shoulders separating from hanging on the nails
 - And His heart is like wax melting in the sense that He can feel His heart weakening and fading under the stress and loss of blood
 - His strength is sapped, His mouth is dry and His tongue sticks to His mouth
 - All these symptoms perfectly match a crucifixion experience
- And then Jesus says dogs surround Him, and dog was the Jewish preferred term to describe a Gentile...another reference to Romans
 - This band of evildoers has surrounded Jesus at His feet as He hangs above them, referring again to Roman soldiers
 - And then notice in v.16 these same ones are responsible for piercing His hands and feet...just as the Romans did
 - How do we explain a reference to piercing hands and feet centuries before crucifixion was invented except by God
- Finally, vs.17-18 say none of Jesus' bones were broken, and that too will be confirmed in the Gospel account
 - And that they (the dogs) cast lots for His clothing, dividing them among themselves just as we studied
 - These little details are included in the Gospel story to point us back to these prophecies so we will know Jesus is the Messiah
- That's how God reveals Himself to people...by giving us details to connect Scripture in such a way that we find the answers God has hidden for us
 - Think back one more time to Simon the Cyrene...
 - Mark writes in his Gospel that Simon was the father of Rufus
 - He gives his Roman readers that detail as if Mark expected them to recognize the name and understand the connection
 - Later in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he also mentions a Rufus, who was a believer living in that city
 - So perhaps Mark wanted us to connect Simon's experience with Jesus to the faith of Simon's son, Rufus, to show us the impact of that moment
 - Specifically, it seems Simon's experience that day changed him, brining him to faith in Jesus and he passed that along to his sons
 - I wonder if Simon saw and heard things that day that reminded him of Scripture like Psalm 22
 - Somehow in that moment Simon came to realize that this wasn't an ordinary man

dying that day but the Promised One of Israel

- That's why details in Scripture matter, it's why we study it the way we do, so that faith may come to those who hear the word
- And that for those of us following behind Jesus, our confidence and trust in the word of God may grow

- As Jesus hung and died on the cross, the Father brought to completion His plan of redemption which He determined from before the foundations of the earth
 - Everything in the word of God and every action God has taken throughout human history has revolved around these few hours
 - So we're studying these events carefully, deliberately and with the intention of understanding all that we can about them
 - And that study begins to deepen today, as we consider the hours Jesus hung on the cross
 - Here again, we need to ask the question why is Jesus dying in this way? Why didn't the Father want His Son to die immediately?
 - We know He must die on Passover, since the Passover feast itself was given to Israel to picture the Messiah's sacrifice
 - But what did the hours He spent on the cross accomplish prior to His death
 - There are some challenging and important answers to those questions we need to consider
 - The Gospels divide Jesus' experience on this day into thirds and each third accomplishes something different in the plan of God
 - Jesus hangs alive on the cross from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, a total of six hours
 - The number six is the number for sinful man, which reminds us that Jesus is taking our place in suffering for sin
 - These six hours are divided into two parts of three hours
- The first third from 9AM – 12PM happens in daylight, and during these three hours, Jesus suffers the curse of sin, sometimes called the wrath of man
 - We give it this name because this time on the cross was a period of suffering brought by the hands of men
 - During this time, Jesus experienced the painful consequences that are common to all mankind because we sin
 - Jesus' body was hurt, His pride was shamed, He was treated as a criminal, He was mocked, He was rejected
 - Ultimately, Jesus experiences physical death, which is the final and ultimate consequence for sin
 - In fact, Jesus even had to make plans for His death like we do, telling John to care for Jesus' mother, Mary, after He died
 - So Jesus suffered at the hands of men taking the consequences of sin in our place
- After those first three hours of suffering, Jesus experienced an even deeper level of suffering called the wrath of God
 - During the second division of three hours, from noon until 3 PM, the world is plunged into complete darkness
 - And during this time Jesus experienced separation from God, a spiritual death,

called the Second Death in the Bible

- The Bible says the Second Death is existing in an eternal separation from the love of God and under the wrath of God
- Jesus took our place in this judgment also, suffering separation from the Father on the cross as God's wrath was poured out
- Finally, at 3 PM Jesus will give up His spirit, and His spirit will go down to the inner parts of the earth leaving behind a lifeless body to be buried
 - From 3 PM to 6 PM Jesus' body will be prepared for burial and placed in the tomb before sundown that day
 - And three days later, His spirit will return to resurrect His body and walk out of the tomb
- These are the consequences that humanity suffers because of sin, first a physical death and then after the body dies, separation from God
 - Jesus suffered these consequences without cause in our place so that we might receive His perfection, as Paul taught the Church

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- But did you notice, we experience physical death first followed by spiritual separation unless we have faith in Jesus
- But Jesus suffered them in reverse order: separation from the Father first, followed by physical death second
- In a future week, I will explain why it was necessary that Jesus experience these in reverse order
 - Today we return to v.37, and as I said last week Matthew's account of Jesus on the cross is very parsimonious
 - He explains major moments in just one or two verses, so we need to pause and unpack each verse thoughtfully

Matt. 27:37 And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

- Romans customarily placed a sign on each criminal's cross recording the condemned man's crime for all to see
 - The whole point of crucifixion was to be a deterrent, so Romans wanted passersby to connect the crime with the punishment
 - Matthew says the sign was posted "above" Jesus, which is a strong clue that Jesus was crucified on a "T" shaped cross
 - On other styles of Romans crosses, the inscription was posted below the person

- Pilate recorded Jesus' crime in a way he knew would upset the Jewish leaders whom he detested for manipulating him
 - Rather than write Jesus *claimed* to be king of the Jews, Pilate simply stated Jesus *is* king of the Jews
 - He wrote it in three languages – Greek, Latin and Hebrew – so all who passed by could read it
- If you compare the various Gospel accounts, we find different readings of what Pilate wrote, so we need to combine them all
 - Doing so we arrive at “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”
 - And predictably, Pilate's choice of words provoked the religious leaders to complain, but John tells us Pilate ignored them
 - So Pilate wrote the truth for all to see that day, that Jesus was dying because He was Israel's King, not for any sin or crime
- Now as you imagine this scene, don't imagine Jesus high off the ground while on His cross...this is another misconception
 - There was no advantage for the Romans in lifting a condemned man any higher off the ground than necessary to kill him
 - So Jesus' feet were probably nailed only a foot or two above the ground level
 - And with His knees bent, Jesus' head and the sign above it were probably only about 6-7 feet off the ground
 - Then Matthew moves to the final major event of Jesus' first three hours on the cross
 - But as usual, we begin with just one verse

Matt. 27:38 At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.

- Matthew tells us there were two other men crucified with Jesus on that day
 - Crucifixions were a daily occurrence in Roman life, because Romans didn't hold criminals in penitentiaries for long periods
 - Romans only jailed a person temporarily while awaiting trial or an audience before an official like Caesar or a governor
 - But convicted criminals were never punished with confinement, because Romans viewed confinement as free living
 - Confining a man meant guarding and feeding and caring for the person for free, and Romans didn't operate that way
 - So punishments were divided into minor crimes and major crimes
 - Minor crimes were punished either with a fine or scourging
 - Major crimes were pushed by death, either decapitation for Roman citizens or by crucifixion for non-citizens

- So crucifixions were a common occurrence, therefore it's no surprise that Jesus would not be alone on Golgotha that day
- Matthew says these men were robbers, but robbery was not a capital (i.e., death penalty) crime under Roman law
 - If these men were just thieves, they would have been scourged, not crucified, so their crime must have been something greater
 - The Greek word used here for robbery is sometimes used to describe insurgents, as in someone "stealing" power in a coup
 - Josephus, an ancient historian of Jesus' time, used this same word to refer to those trying to overthrow Rome
 - And rebellion against Roman rule *was* punishable by death
- So these men were likely associates of Barabbas, who was also an insurgent, and had it not been for Jesus, all three of those men would have died today
 - Which means on either side of the king of the Jews were men who tried to bring a new Kingdom to Israel by force
 - Jesus came offering Israel a Kingdom from God, and these men tried to install their own version of that kingdom
 - They were thieves in the sense that they tried to take something that could only be obtained through the Messiah
 - And their presence was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12, which says the Messiah will be numbered with transgressors in His death
 - It's meaningful that God arranged for these men to join Jesus on this day, and understanding why is important
 - But first Matthew describes the scene taking place around Jesus and these men

Matt. 27:39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads
Matt. 27:40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Matt. 27:41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying,

Matt. 27:42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

Matt. 27:43 "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

- The Romans placed Golgotha directly outside a city gate so criminals were crucified in full view of travelers going in and out of the city
 - Remember, the whole point of crucifixion was to deter crime, so the Romans wanted people to witness the process

- And since this was Passover, the traffic at the city gate that day would have been especially heavy
- As these passersby came and went, they stopped to read the inscriptions above each dying man out of curiosity
- When they read the sign above Jesus, many recognized this Man to be the One Who amazed Israel for months claiming to be Messiah
 - Maybe they heard Jesus teaching in the temple or on the hills of Galilee
 - Others saw Jesus curing people or raising people from the dead, or they heard the stories of His miraculous healing
 - One passerby even remembered Jesus said He could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days
- But all of them wondered the same thing...if this Man was the Messiah with power from God why doesn't He perform a miracle for Himself?
 - Save yourself, they demand...get yourself off that cross and prove your claims
 - If Jesus were truly the Son of God, then let Him be rescued by God
 - The religious leaders were also enjoying the moment, mocking Jesus by saying they would believe in Him if He left the cross
- These comments were deeply cynical and ignorant, and they miss the main point
 - If the test of messiahship was whether Jesus could save himself now, then he would still be a pretty pathetic Messiah
 - Because what kind of Messiah even allows himself to end up on the cross in the first place?
 - If saving Himself from the tyranny of men is a true test of His claims, wouldn't He have acted long before this point?
 - Wouldn't He have stopped His false trials? Wouldn't he have stopped the beatings and scourging?
 - Wouldn't He have stopped the nails before they entered His hands and feet?
 - So it's not even logical for these passersby to claim that Jesus could prove His claims by coming down from the cross
 - They are just a good example of how we misjudge God's purposes when we don't understand His plan
 - The crowd sees Jesus' predicament as a lack of power because they didn't understand Jesus was *voluntarily* dying on that cross
 - The Bible is clear in testifying that *no one* put Jesus on a cross...Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified, as Jesus Himself told us

John 10:17 “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

John 10:18 “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up

again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

- As many have observed, those nails did not hold Jesus to the cross...Jesus held Himself there by His determination to obey the Father
 - Jesus had the power to save Himself from the cross with only a word at any time during the entire process
 - But as we studied already, Jesus went silently, like a lamb to slaughter, because He wasn't going to use that power
 - And no one in the crowd considered that possibility, so out of ignorance they mocked God's plan to save humanity
- Had Jesus chosen to save Himself on that day, then He wouldn't be able to save us today, and knowing that explains everything
 - There are many times when we too mock or criticize or question God because we don't understand what He's doing in a set of circumstances
 - When things don't go our way, we may turn to blaming God or questioning His power or love for us
 - But instead of questioning God's power or intentions, we should question our understanding...because that's the problem
 - Our ignorance is always the problem, and often you can't solve that problem, because our understanding of God's ways will always fall short
 - When it comes to God's plan for the world and for our lives, He's always way ahead of us, and we just can't comprehend it all
 - As the saying goes, God is playing chess while we're playing checkers...in fact, we're not even playing checkers
 - We're like a 6-month old babbling baby, drooling on checkers pieces
 - That's why God tells us to place faith in Him and in His word, so that when He says He works all things to our good, that's enough for us
 - We can wait until Heaven, if necessary, to get the rest of the story from God directly
 - And when we have the full story, we'll understand why God did what He did and how it showed His love and wisdom
 - This crowd mocked Jesus for being weak, when the reality was Jesus was acting in strength
 - Can you imagine how hard it would be for you to stay on a cross if you possessed the power to end it all with just one word?
 - That was Jesus' situation...mocked for weakness but displaying unequalled strength in securing salvation for us
 - As the Psalmist wrote, Jesus did it by His own strength

Psa. 98:1 O sing to the LORD a new song,

**For He has done wonderful things,
His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.**

Psa. 98:2 The LORD has made known His salvation;

He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.

- This crowd was ignorant of God's plan, so they doubted Jesus rather than their own understanding, and in the process, they were unknowingly serving Satan
 - Satan is always working to stop God's plan, especially His plan of redemption through Jesus, but he's also playing catch up with God
 - Initially, Satan thought it best to turn Israel against Jesus and to use Israel to put Jesus to death on the cross
 - But now as Satan watches Jesus dying *willingly*, Satan starts to wonder if he's overplayed his hand
 - He realizes that Jesus' death is part of God's plan to defeat sin, so now he scrambles to undo it
 - He prompts the crowd to call for Jesus to come down from the cross in the hope he can tempt Jesus to give in to the pain and give up the plan
 - If Satan had been successful at this point, it would ruin God's plan of redemption, which would have been a disaster
 - So the crowd assumed Jesus was wrong, and in the process they played into the devil's hand
- That's what happens when we fall into despair or doubt in the midst of our trials and accuse God in some way or doubt in His plan
 - We do the devil's bidding and take his bait to respond to our trials in the wrong ways, but here's a simple tip to avoid the schemes of the enemy
 - Never assume God is wrong, never assume His word is wrong...always assume you're wrong
 - So when the Bible doesn't make sense to you, don't assume the Bible has error, assume your understanding is lacking
 - When you're sure God isn't speaking to you, assume you weren't listening when He was speaking
 - When you suffer the consequences of sin, recognize it's you who made the mistake, not God
 - When we don't understand God, let's not blame God....because it's not Him, it's us, and in time we will know the truth
 - As Paul told us

1Cor. 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

1Cor. 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

1Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child,

reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

1Cor. 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

- When you get to that day when we know all, we'll appreciate what God was doing and why it was needed, and we will praise Him for it
 - Let reach that moment without regret
 - Knowing we will praise with understanding in that day, let's praise Him now for our trials even in our ignorance
- I'm sure these spectators looked back with regret for their mocking, and along with them were the other two thieves who joined in the mocking

Matt. 27:44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

- Unbelievably, two men hanging painfully on crosses choose to use their dying breaths to mock a fellow sufferer
 - Their lives were essentially over at this point, because they knew they would not be rescued
 - Their death was only a matter of time, and in that way crucifixion was a unique form of execution
- In every other case, once the process starts, it ends quickly and the person has no time to reflect on their destiny
 - Even someone sitting on death row awaiting their day of reckoning can hold out some hope of a rescue
 - But once you were nailed to a cross, there was no doubt how it would end...a slow, painful death, but death nonetheless
 - And under those circumstances, you would think you would choose your final thoughts and words carefully
- But these men show no fear of God as they mock a fellow condemned man, and Matthew uses this moment to show a fulfillment of scripture
 - Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 foretold the Messiah would die utterly alone and without allies
 - Jesus truly had no friends...not even those who are suffering beside Him could resist the urge to mock Jesus
 - That illustrates powerfully how utterly alone Jesus was in that moment...truly the Creator of the Universe had no one
- But according to the other Gospel accounts one of the thieves stops mocking Jesus after a time, but Matthew doesn't record that part of the story
 - Had Matthew mentioned that thief's change of heart, it would have undermined his

point, so he left it out

- Nevertheless, the other Gospels tell us that although Jesus was alone in the beginning, He soon turned an enemy into a friend
- As Matthew wrote, both these men mocked Jesus at first, but then the Spirit of God began to work in one man's heart
- And Luke tells us that near the end of the first three hours, he suddenly stops rebuking Jesus and begins to rebuke his fellow thief

Luke 23:40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Luke 23:41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

- In this short passage, the thief rebukes his partner, confesses his own unrighteousness, acknowledges Jesus' righteousness, and asks to be saved
 - This is the most dramatic deathbed confession ever recorded
 - This thief was a dead man walking (or hanging)...as close to death as one can be while still conscious
 - And in his final hours, the man makes a turn so dramatic it's almost unbelievable and obviously a work of God
 - One minute he's mocking the Lord, and the next He's acknowledging Jesus by faith and calling out to Him
 - And I'm sure that most of us remember Jesus' response to this man...Luke records it this way

Luke 23:43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

- Speaking in gasps Jesus assures the man that He would be with Jesus in Paradise, meaning He would be saved
- If I were Jesus I think I might have been tempted to point out that a few minutes earlier He was demanding Jesus save Himself
- But much to everyone's relief I'm not Jesus, because that's not how the love and grace of God works
 - When a person repents and turns to Jesus in faith, He receives us in mercy and without a single mention of our past sins
 - As Jesus said:

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

John 6:37 “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

- Jesus received this man without a moment’s hesitation because He knew the man’s repentant heart proved the Father’s will
 - The Father sent this man to Jesus at this moment, and all who the Father gives Jesus, He will certainly not cast out
 - Jesus promised the man that on that very day, after both of them died, they would be in Paradise together
- Paul uses this same word, Paradise, to describe heaven in 2 Corinthians 12, and Jesus uses it again for Heaven in his letter to Ephesus in Revelation
 - In simple terms, Paradise means being in Jesus’ presence in a state free from sin
 - This man entered that presence the moment he died because of his faith in Jesus which he expressed in his final hour on the cross
- And this moment is a perfect illustration of how new faith always comes...it starts with a heart of repentance
 - The thief said he was suffering justly and receiving what he deserved, yet Jesus was suffering though He had done nothing wrong
 - True repentance recognizes that we lack the righteousness that God alone possesses, and that’s the standard for Heaven
 - Only perfection enters Paradise, and without God giving us that perfection, none of us can get there
 - None of us are perfect, and therefore we all need God’s mercy
 - And the thief must have understood Jesus was dying as a sacrifice for his sins because how else could he explain His Savior dying next to him?
 - So with time running out, the thief asks Jesus to remember Him in the Kingdom
 - The words he used were not the same words we might use today, but the heart is the same...it’s an appeal for mercy
 - Whatever we say to God, He knows our heart, and when we reach out to Him with faith in Jesus’ atoning death, He responds in mercy
 - That thief placed his faith in the sacrifice Jesus was making next to him, and he believed it was sufficient to bring Him to God
 - And Jesus assured him it was
 - How did that man come to know all these things, especially in that short moment and without anyone explaining it?

- He learned it the same way we all learn it...because the Father in Heaven revealed it to him by means of the Spirit of God
- As Jesus told Peter after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Lord

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

- Flesh and blood did not reveal this truth to the thief, but the Father in Heaven revealed it, and that’s how all faith comes to everyone
 - Someone may preach the Gospel to us, or maybe no one does
 - We might read that Jesus is Lord somewhere or hear it on the internet, or we may hear it in a dream
 - The method God uses to reach us isn’t important...the point is that message wasn’t revealed by flesh and blood, not even our own
 - It was revealed to us by God the Father
- This short exchange is as important to sound Christian doctrine as perhaps any other single conversation recording in the Gospels
 - Consider all the things we learn from this man, as well as all the false teaching we can quickly refute because of his experience
 - First, we know that faith alone saves, because if good works were required, then this man would have been toast
 - We know he was a criminal and certainly not a man of God, since he was even mocking Christ at the start of his own crucifixion
 - So if works were required for salvation...*even one work*...this man could not have gone to Paradise because he was in no position to do anything
 - This man did not keep the Law, or do any good works to make up for his sin, and yet he was saved
 - He didn’t say a prayer, he didn’t go to church (or a synagogue), he didn’t make a tithe or sacrifice, and he never got baptized
 - So if you tell me I must belong to a certain church or denomination, or attend a special class, or possess some secret knowledge to be saved...
 - ...I will tell you to consider the thief on the cross
 - If anything of those were required to bring us into Heaven, this man could not have qualified to go
 - Yet based on his profession of faith alone, Jesus promised him paradise that very day...no works, no purgatory, no doubt
- Secondly, this man’s experience proves that it’s never too late for anyone to be saved nor is anyone too far gone to be reached with the Gospel
 - This man was so hardhearted that as he was being crucified he was willing to mock another man dying in the same way

- That's hardhearted...that's the kind of person we might conclude can't be saved...especially so close to death
- He was so close to death you could measure it in minutes, and then out of nowhere, he professes faith in Jesus
- And what's more, he does so without anyone trying to persuade him to believe... well, that's not quite true actually
 - One Person did persuade Him to believe...the only One Who *can* persuade anyone to believe
 - God brought faith to this man's heart, and as God can do it for this man, He can do it for anyone
 - Don't give up on that person in your life who hasn't believed...don't give up even when they are on their death bed
- And if that person confesses Christ with their dying breath, don't doubt that it could be a true conversion
 - If this man could turn at this point in his life, so could anyone, because when God gets hold of someone, miracles happen
 - The thief on the cross is our proof that it's never too late for anyone to believe and be saved
- Finally, the thief's experience reminds us of what we've been studying today...God can use the worst of circumstances to produce the most good
 - This man started his morning facing perhaps the worst experience any human being can face and knowing he would be dead in hours
 - From his point of view, this day was terror and disaster and the end of everything he knew
 - And yet on this day, the Father placed him a few feet away from his Messiah, his Savior
 - And to make sure this hard-hearted thief didn't leave too soon, God had him nailed to a cross
 - And because of that terrible experience and the pain done to his body, this man's soul was saved for all eternity
 - Once again I assure you that when you speak with this man in Heaven, as you will one day do, he will tell you it was so worth it
 - And we too should take confidence that in our darkest moments, the Lord is still there, next to us, working for our good
 - So when you don't understand why bad things are happening, don't blame God in your ignorance...just look to Him in faith

- We return this morning to our verse-by-verse, hour-by-hour study of Jesus' time on the cross in our study of Matthew
 - Our High Priest is sacrificing Himself on Passover even as the high priest of Israel was in the temple that same hour sacrificing the national lamb
 - On Passover each year, one lamb was brought to the altar, its throat cut, the blood drained, and the flesh burned on the altar
 - That national Passover lamb served as a representative sacrifice for all Israel
 - And this year at that same moment, 9 AM, the true, once-for-all-time Passover Lamb was being nailed to a cross
 - Few in Israel on that day understood the connection to Jesus' death on the cross, and certainly no one could appreciate its significance
 - As we've already studied, Jesus' death on the cross involved several periods which each held significance
 - For the first three hours from 9 AM to noon, Jesus experienced the wrath of men, otherwise known as the consequences of sin
 - Jesus experienced physical pain, emotional suffering, and psychological torment, things coming to every sinner
 - But these consequences were foreign to our sinless Savior until He took them upon Himself on our behalf
 - During those three hours, the words of the writer of Hebrews became true:

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Heb. 4:16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- Jesus experienced every temptation we can know, including the temptation to escape the consequences of sin, to avoid death
- But He never gave in to His temptations as we routinely do, and in that way He qualified Himself to be our high priest
- That will be the focus of our study today...Jesus taking our place in death
 - Jesus took the place of sinners in death, which means He had to experience every aspect of death to serve as our substitute
 - The penalty for sin is both a physical death, the death of the body, and a spiritual death, the death of the spirit
 - Therefore, Jesus will experience both physical and spiritual death on the cross as He makes Himself our Passover sacrifice
 - But as I mentioned last week, Jesus will experience spiritual death first followed by physical death, which seems backwards to us

- In our experience, we endure the physical death of the body before we experience the second, spiritual death of the body
- But as we learn today, there is a good reason why Jesus must experience these in a different order to serve God's purpose
- But first, we'll examine how these two experiences came to Jesus beginning with the first; spiritual death
 - And that moment is marked by darkness everywhere

Matt. 27:45 Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.

- Matthew says darkness fell at the sixth hour, and Matthew is using the Jewish system for reckoning time, which starts counting hours at sunrise at 6 AM
 - So the sixth hour begins at noon, 12 PM, and Matthew says that at that moment all the land was dark until the ninth hour, which is 3 PM
 - The word translated "land" in v.45 is *ge* (pronounced "yee"), which is literally translated as the Earth
 - So the whole earth was dark for 3 hours...Luke's account confirms it was the whole earth
 - In fact, archaeologists have discovered multiple records of other ancient cultures from that time that record this supernatural moment
 - An ancient record of Dionysius, a Greek scholar, reported a strange darkness coming upon Heliopolis at that time
 - Another scholar named Diogenes living in Egypt at that time, reported a blackout of several hours and offered an explanation
 - He said, "the solar darkness was such that either deity Himself suffered at that moment or sympathized with one who did"
 - A third writer in Turkey wrote the day turned to night at the sixth hour and stars were visible and earthquakes shook the empire
 - So remarkably, the entire planet plunges into an unexpected, unexplainable blackout lasting three hours
 - Why has God placed the earth in darkness? Because the Father has withdrawn His presence from His Son
 - For the first and only time in all eternity, God the Son and God the Father were not in fellowship
 - Jesus now hangs for three hours separated from the Father's love, and it is a unique kind of suffering
 - Notice the next thing Matthew records in v.46

Matt. 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI,

ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

- Near the end of the three hour separation from the Father, Jesus cries asking God why He has forsaken Him, which is a fulfillment of Psalm 22
 - Matthew records Jesus' words in the original Aramaic before translating them for us for a couple of reasons
 - First, Matthew wanted us to know that Jesus addressed the Father in a unique manner at this moment
 - Jesus calls out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"
 - This is the only time in the Gospels when Jesus addresses His Father as "My God"
 - Every other time Jesus speaks to the Father Jesus addresses Him as "My Father" so this moment is significant
 - So in this moment, Jesus isn't relating to God the Father in the same way
 - The intimacy Jesus once knew with the Father is gone...the Father has become distant...He's now just God
 - For three hours, Jesus couldn't feel the Father's presence...for the first time, God the Son was separated from the Father
 - During these three hours Jesus experienced the ultimate consequence for sin: spiritual death, otherwise known as the wrath of God
 - Sin brings many devastating consequences in this life, but its ultimate consequence isn't found on earth
 - The ultimate and final consequence for sin is the wrath of God, manifested as an eternal separation from the love of God
 - The Bible calls this consequence the "Second Death" referring to the death of the spirit following the body's death
 - The Second Death is not a cessation of existence or the destruction of the spirit...it is a "death" in the sense that it is a separation
 - The first death is our spirit separated from our physical body
 - The second death is our spirit separated from God
- The Second Death is the penalty God decreed for all who end this life without having received the provision of Christ
 - Those who endure the Second Death spend eternity away from the love of God, and this is far worse than the first death
 - But for those who place faith in Jesus Christ, the Father's wrath toward us is transferred to Jesus
 - Jesus took that wrath on the cross during these three hours as He experienced the wrath of God for our sin
 - Near the end of that period of separation from the Father, Jesus is in anguish and so

distraught that He asks God why He is alone

- Jesus asks why God has forsaken Jesus, and the Greek word translated forsaken literally means “to be left behind”
- Jesus was left behind by the Father for these hours to experience the greatest suffering He ever could know
- You may remember in the Garden when Jesus prayed to the Father asking that the cup be taken away from Jesus
- That cup was the cup of wrath that Jesus is now experiencing in darkness
- And that worldwide darkness was God’s way of communicating to the earth that He had removed His presence from His Son
 - The Bible frequently uses the light of the sun as a symbol for the love of God or the presence of God
 - Remember these words from the beginning of John’s Gospel

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

John 1:5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

- That is just one example, but across Scripture we find the same relationship...light pictures God’s presence and darkness the opposite
 - In fact, we’re told that in the New Heavens and the New Earth that comes to replace this world there will be no sun at all
 - Why? Because the light of that time comes entirely from the presence of God dwelling among men
 - In that day, the light of the world *will be* God, literally
- So as God withdraws His presence from Jesus, He also withdrew light from the earth, and I can’t begin to explain what Jesus felt during that time
 - Nor am I suggesting that this separation meant Jesus ceased being God...Jesus remained God even as He was separated from God
 - If that confuses you, then join the club
 - After all, we can’t fully understand the Trinity in the first place, much less what it means for God to be separated from God
 - In fact, none of us have *ever* experienced the complete absence of God’s presence in our lives, including the time before we came to faith in Jesus
 - Because the Bible says God extends common grace to every human being in the course of daily life

Luke 6:35 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Matt. 5:45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

- Even the most ungodly people on earth still experience the love of God and the provision and goodness of God in countless ways
- James says every good thing comes from the Father of Lights
- So try imagining an existence in which there is nothing good whatsoever because God’s presence is completely absent?
- We’ve never known that experience, and although Jesus knew it for just three hours, it was enough to bring Jesus to despair
 - Can you imagine what it will be like to spend eternity apart from God?
 - We can’t imagine Jesus’ suffering and thankfully we don’t have to try...we can put the thought of it out of our mind
 - Because we have heard and believed the Gospel, the Bible assures us we have overcome death, as Jesus Himself promised

Rev. 2:11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

- Going back to the text, the second reason Matthew specified the Aramaic words Jesus used in v.46 is because it led to a misunderstanding

Matt. 27:47 And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, “This man is calling for Elijah.”

Matt. 27:48 Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.

Matt. 27:49 But the rest of them said, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.”

- In Aramaic, Jesus said “Eli Eli” which means My God, My God, but the word “Eli” could easily be mistaken for the name “Elijah”
 - So someone assumed Jesus was calling for Elijah to rescue Him
 - But expecting Elijah to save Him made little sense, so from one misunderstanding came another
 - The crowd concluded Jesus was delirious from shock, so they gave Jesus a drink

from a sponge

- Then they add “let’s see if Elijah does come to save Jesus”
- This crowd wasn’t giving Jesus a drink out of pity...they wanted to keep Jesus alive a little longer to see if Elijah might appear
 - Matthew includes this exchange to help us appreciate how callous and indifferent the crowd was to what was happening
 - They are like children poking at a dying animal with sticks curious to see what will happen to it next
- Jesus was utterly alone and without anyone to help Him or even sympathize with Him
 - And even the help Jesus did receive was not intended for His benefit but merely to extend His suffering
 - The irony is the sin they were committing against Jesus at that moment was the very reason He hung on the cross in the first place
- So for three hours on the cross, Jesus experienced spiritual death in our place, but because He had no sin of His own, His spiritual suffering comes to an end
 - And then at exactly 3 PM, the ninth hour, the darkness ended and Jesus and the Father were restored in fellowship
 - In a sense, we could call this a spiritual resurrection...a return from spiritual death, which is separation from the Father
 - And at that moment, the work of paying for sin had been completed
 - John tells us that at this moment Jesus uttered His next-to-last statement from the cross

John 19:30 Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

- In Greek Jesus spoke a single Greek word, *te-telestai*, which is an accounting term meaning “paid in full”
- God’s wrath for sin was now fully appeased, fully satisfied by all that Christ had done on our behalf
- The sin debt Jesus came to pay was paid in full, and no additional payment or work of any kind is necessary
- Notice, Jesus made this statement before He died physically, which means that Jesus’ physical death was not part of that payment
 - Jesus’ physical death was necessary to the plan of redemption, because without a physical death there could be no resurrection
 - And by His resurrection Jesus will prove His claims to have overcome death and to possess eternal life
 - But by the time Jesus experienced physical death, the payment for our sins had been made in full

- We will study Jesus' physical death next, but before we do, you may wonder why did Jesus only experience three hours of spiritual death?
 - If we die in our sins, we spend an eternity separated from the love of God in torment, so why did Jesus only spend three hours in our place?
 - First, we need to understand unbelievers spend an eternity separated from God after death *because they are forever sinful*
 - The only way to cease being sinful is to be born again by the Spirit through faith in Jesus and to receive Christ's righteousness
 - But that opportunity ends at death, and if we die in our sins, we remain eternally in a sinful state and forever away from God
 - But Jesus is not like us...He "became" sin on our behalf, but He had no sin of His own, therefore He had no need to suffer for an eternity
 - Jesus' suffering was a propitiation for sin and the Father determined it would be an acceptable payment
 - Once God's wrath had been appeased and the debt paid, then Jesus' suffering could end
 - And the Father accepts Jesus' payment in our place, instead of us suffering for an eternity – that's the deal of a lifetime...literally
- So with the debt paid in full, Jesus' suffering can now come to an end

Matt. 27:50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

- Matthew doesn't record what Jesus said, but Luke tells us that Jesus said, "Father into Your Hands I commit My Spirit"
 - The precise timing of Jesus' death and His final words confirm His earlier promise that no one takes Jesus' life but He lays it down
 - Jesus decided the exact moment of His own death by commanding His spirit's departure from His body at 3 PM
- Literally speaking, Jesus didn't die of crucifixion...the cause of Jesus' death was not due to any of His physical wounds
 - We all die as the result of some biological process, but the Bible says that the cause of death is sin and the curse God decreed
 - But Jesus was without sin so even in His wounded state, Jesus would have lived forever except that He took on the curse
- So Jesus committed His spirit into the Father's hands and His body died
 - Next time we will look at what followed Jesus' death including the burial preparations and the supernatural events that marked His death
 - But today we still need to understand the significance of Jesus' physical death and why it came after His spiritual death
 - And let's begin by setting aside some bad assumptions about what His death

accomplished

- First, some assume that Jesus' physical death was part of the payment for sin, but as we discussed earlier, our debt was paid in full before He died
 - So though His physical death is an important part of the plan of redemption, it wasn't a payment
 - Secondly, some assume that He died to go to Hell and that Jesus then suffered in Hell in our place
 - But that too is wrong, and Romans tells us that God's wrath was satisfied by death alone, not by time spent in Hell

Rom. 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Rom. 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- To be clear, Jesus never experienced torment or suffering or even bodily decay during His time in the grave, as Scripture testifies:

**Psa. 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.**

**Psa. 16:10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.**

- So our debt was paid in full before He died, and therefore His time in the grave served a different purpose
- That time was preparation for His resurrection, fulfilling Scripture and ensuring no one could deny that Jesus did die
- And while Jesus' body was in the grave, Paul and Peter report that Jesus' Spirit descended to the inner parts of the earth to join the Old Testament saints
 - Those saints were held in one side of Sheol, a place of comfort where they had waited since death for their Messiah to arrive
 - These saints died with faith in a future Messiah, but they couldn't enter the Father's presence before Christ's sacrifice
 - But after Jesus died, His Spirit descends to proclaim to them that their debt has been paid in full and they were released
 - Then after three days, Paul says Jesus escorted these captive spirits free and took them to Heaven where they are now
 - But while Jesus was there, Peter says He also announced Himself to the unbelieving souls experiencing torment in the other side of Sheol

- The point in that pronouncement was not to offer opportunity for salvation, for that time had passed
- The point of this proclamation was to confirm that the promise of the Messiah had been fulfilled despite their unbelief
- Finally, why was Jesus' physical death and spiritual death reversed from our experience?
 - The answer comes from understanding that the Bible calls Jesus the Second Adam, in the sense that Jesus restarts the Human race
 - In the Garden, God told Adam that if Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, in the very day he ate of it, he would surely die
 - But we know that when Adam ate of the fruit, he didn't die physically on that very day...in fact Adam lived 930 years
 - So the death God was promising Adam for sin was not physical death, it was spiritual death, and on that day Adam died spiritually
 - Later God came into the garden and pronounced a curse in response to Adam's sin declaring Adam's body would also die
 - So Adam's spiritual penalty came before his physical penalty
 - So all that who descend from Adam share both his spiritual penalty and physical penalty...until we are born again by faith in Jesus
 - Jesus is the Second Adam, the Man Who comes to save us from the penalty of both spiritual and physical death
 - So Jesus takes our place in suffering both, and He experiences them in the same way Adam did
 - First, Jesus dies spiritually and then Jesus dies physically, taking our place in both

1Cor. 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

1Cor. 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

- In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes:

1Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- Paul tells the church that the thing of first importance for every Christian, the thing we must understand, is a very simple idea
 - Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures foretold
 - He was buried and He resurrected to life on the third day, all according to what God foretold in the Scriptures
 - These simple truths are of first importance for every believer
- By our faith in these things, we are reconciled to God, our sins are forgiven, and we receive eternal life...things of first importance
 - And now in our study of Matthew's Gospel, we have reached the point where these are the thing in view
 - Last time we met we stopped at v.50, at the first step in these things: Jesus dying
 - As we learned last time, no one took Jesus' life from Him...He lay His life down as an act of sacrifice in obedience to the Father
- Jesus hung on a cross for a total of six hours; three hours to receive the wrath of men and three hours for the wrath of God
 - Jesus neither invited the wrath of men nor deserved the wrath of God, yet He willingly took both to stand in our place on that day
 - And after experiencing three hours spiritual separation from the Father in total darkness, Jesus declared "it is finished"
 - He had satisfied the wrath of God, He has paid the price for our sin, and now He could be released from His suffering
 - So Jesus bowed His head and yielded up His Spirit to the Father, and His body died
- Now at this point, we move into the final three hour period on this day of Passover, the events leading to Jesus' burial – the next essential thing
 - Jesus' body must be prepared for burial before being placed in a tomb, and these events must be done quickly
 - Because at sundown, approximately 6 PM, the Passover day ends and a Sabbath day begins
 - As we learned in an earlier lesson, Passover is always followed by a week-long feast called Unleavened Bread
 - And according to Exodus 12:16, the first and last days of this feast are to be Sabbath days regardless of which day they fall
 - Jews called these special Sabbath days High Sabbaths to distinguish them from the

usual weekly Sabbath that came every Friday evening

- And they called the day before any Sabbath a day of preparation because certain preparations had to be made for a Sabbath
- Since work couldn't be done on a Sabbath day, Jews spent the day prior completing essential chores
- They lit fires, drew water and prepared food so they could rest on the Sabbath day
- And if someone died, they rushed to bury the person so their body didn't remain unburied over the Sabbath day
- John records that the Passover day was a day of preparation because the next day would be a High Sabbath day
 - But this year, Passover fell on a Thursday, so that meant there would be not one but *two* Sabbath days in a row
 - First the High Sabbath on Friday followed by the usual weekly Sabbath on Saturday
 - Therefore, if Jesus' body were not buried before sundown, He would remain unburied for two days...a great dishonor!
- So the next three hours will be a scramble to get Jesus in a tomb, and that period begins with a series of supernatural signs

Matt. 27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

Matt. 27:52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;

Matt. 27:53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Matt. 27:54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

- Matthew gives us the most detailed account of these events reporting there were three types of supernatural signs to announce Jesus' death
 - The veil in the temple was torn, dead bodies were resurrected out of tombs and a great earthquake shook the ground
 - Let's start with the earthquake since it's the simplest to explain
 - As Jesus died, God shook the earth resulting in rocks breaking and structures falling down scaring everyone who experienced it
 - The Lord commonly uses earthquakes to announce important events during His plan for the Creation
 - Jesus told us in Chapter 24 that the occurrence of earthquakes increasing will be a sign of the last days and the approaching end of this age

- And in Tribulation God uses earthquakes to devastate the earth and as signs that judgment is near
- So God announces the death of Messiah with an earthquake...why an earthquake? Because it's hard to ignore an earthquake
 - There are few experiences in life more humbling or better at reminding us of our insignificance and of God's power
 - And that's the point here: it was an awesome display of the power of God to redeem mankind from sin and death
 - Jesus' dying wasn't God's plan failing or God being powerless to save His Son... it was exactly as God planned
- And the sign worked...notice in v.54 how a centurion and the others who were at the cross standing guard react to the earthquake
 - After 3 hours of unexplainable darkness, then suddenly the sun begins shining again and exactly at that moment Jesus says it is finished
 - Then Jesus gives up His spirit, selecting the precise moment of His death, and the earth shakes with a massive earthquake
 - These guys didn't need to be theologians or geo-physicists to put 2 and 2 together – clearly Jesus was in control
 - So they became frightened as they recognize they were watching the Son of God dying voluntarily
 - Because of these powerful events their hearts were moved, and in response they confess faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - Of course, their positive response is evidence that God extended His grace to them
 - And they receive grace because of a prayer request Jesus had offered on their behalf earlier
 - As Jesus was nailed to the cross and the soldiers stood below gambling for His clothes, Jesus prayed this:

Luke 23:34 But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

- Jesus knew they were just soldiers doing their jobs that day, so Jesus asks the Father to extend forgiveness to them that day
- And when Jesus asks the Father to forgive someone, the Father hears the Son, and they receive forgiveness
- They weren't just forgiven for the sin of crucifying Jesus...they were forgiven of all their sins just like any believer
- So the first sign was an earthquake, and the second sign was saints (i.e., believers) resurrected from the tombs

- But notice carefully how Matthew says this happened...starting in v.52 Matthew says first the tombs were opened
 - A tomb is an above-ground burial place, usually a cave or a sarcophagus
 - A body is wrapped and placed inside the tomb, then the entrance is sealed with a large bolder or cut stone
- As Jesus died, many of these tombs were opened, which means the stones sealing the entrance were miraculously moved out of place
 - But this event was just a prelude to the real miracle
 - In the second half of v.52, Matthew says many saints were resurrected, meaning their dead bodies returned to life
 - But in v.53 Matthew says these saints didn't walk out of their tombs *until after Jesus was resurrected on the third day*
 - So the Lord opened the tombs at the moment Jesus died, but He didn't resurrect the saints until the three days later
- The odd way in which these resurrections took place – first the tombs opened and later bodies walked out – is a illustration of the Gospel itself
 - As Christ died, He paid the price for sin, declaring “it is finished”
 - Jesus' atoning work on the cross opened our tomb, so to speak, making a way for everyone to escape the penalty of death
 - The stone blocking our escape was rolled away, the seal broken, the way out prepared
- But before we can leave our sentence of death, we must first accept the truth of Jesus' resurrection
 - As Paul says plainly:

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

- To be saved....to walk away from your death sentence...you must first believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead
- You need faith in His resurrection before you can experience your own resurrection
- As Paul told us...the thing of first importance is to know that Jesus died, He was buried and He was resurrected
- Speaking of resurrection, these saints were resurrected in a manner similar to the way Lazarus was raised in Bethany during the week prior to Passover
 - As John tells us, Lazarus died and after three days, Jesus came to Bethany and called Lazarus out of his tomb
 - Lazarus returned to life and walked out, but as he did he emerged with the same, earthly, sinful body as before

- He wasn't resurrected into a new eternal, sinless body like the one we will all receive in preparation for the Kingdom
- Lazarus was probably disappointed to learn he would have to die again someday, because Lazarus experienced a temporary resurrection
 - And that's the same situation for these saints as well...they are being resurrected into their old bodies as a sign or testimony
 - Those who knew these saints before they died would recognize them, and seeing them alive would be an undeniable miracle
 - But in time those resurrected saints died again, and they now wait for a future day to be resurrected for life in the Kingdom
- So there was an earthquake and resurrections to announce the Messiah's death, and then finally in v.51 Matthew says the temple veil was torn
 - This final sign is perhaps the most important, but it's also one of the most misunderstood details in the story of Jesus' death
 - To understand this sign properly, we need to start with some background on the temple and the veil itself
 - Remember, the temple was modeled on the tabernacle which came before it, though much larger and more ornate
 - Both structures were divided into three sections or areas
 - The first area was an outside courtyard created by a fence or wall that encompassed the tabernacle or temple building proper
 - Then the inside of the building itself was further divided into two sections
 - The larger of these two sections was called the Holy Place and the smaller was called the Most Holy Place
 - These two sections were also sometimes called the outer sanctuary and the inner sanctuary
 - The Holy Place or outer sanctuary held furniture like the menorah lamp and the table with showbread and the incense altar
 - This space was only accessible by the priesthood of Israel, who entered this place daily as part of their service in the temple
 - They burned incense and applied the blood of daily sacrifices to the altar of incense, kept the lamp lit and set out the bread
 - The third section of the temple, the Most Holy Place or the inner sanctuary, was divided from the Holy Place by a curtain called the inner veil
 - Behind the inner veil sat the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat, upon which the glory of God dwelled perpetually
 - Josephus reports that in Jesus' day, this space was completely empty, since the ark disappeared during the Babylonian invasion
 - Nevertheless, the Holy of Holies remained a protected space reserved for the presence of God and inaccessible behind a large veil

- The only exception was on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest of Israel entered to make atonement for the nation
- Apart from that one day a year, the Most Holy Place remained off-limits
- So back to the text, when Matthew reports the veil of the temple was ripped, most assume Matthew was speaking of this veil, the inner veil
 - But there were *two* veils in the temple, not just one, since Exodus 26:36 required a veil to cover the entrance to the Holy Place as well
 - We call this veil the outer veil to distinguish it from the inner veil
 - Listen to Josephus' description of the temple and its outer veil from *The Wars of the Jews*

War 5:209 (5.5.4) but then, as the entire house was divided into two parts within, it was only the first part of it that was open to our view. Its height extended all along to ninety cubits in height, and its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty;

War 5:211 (5.5.4) but then this house, as it was divided into two parts, the inner part was lower than the appearance of the outer, and had golden doors of fifty-five cubits altitude, and sixteen in breadth;

War 5:212 (5.5.4) but before these doors there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful...

- Josephus reports the entry to the Holy Place was protected by two huge doors covered in gold and before these doors was a purple veil
 - In Jesus' day, this outer veil was even larger and more ornate than the inner veil
 - Elsewhere Josephus describes the outer veil as 60 feet high, 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick, which means it weighed 3,100 lbs
- This is the veil that could be seen by everyone since it hung outside the building entrance, especially if standing up on the Mt of Olives
 - But for the same reason, the veil prevented anyone from seeing into the Holy Place even when the doors were open
 - That was the point...the veil obscured the way into the Holy Place and in doing so it sent a message to the world
- The writer of Hebrews explains it this way, speaking of the outer veil of the temple

Heb. 9:8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing,

Heb. 9:9 which is a symbol for the present time. ...

- The writer says the way into the “holy place” was not revealed while the “outer” tabernacle was still standing
 - He was referring to this opening into the structure which say its very design became a symbol
 - By its very design – complete with doors, veil and priesthood – it symbolized that the way to God was restricted
- It was only open to the Levitical priests, so if you wanted to worship God, you had to go to God through the priests
 - You had to bring your gifts and offerings and petitions and sacrifices to a priest who carried them into the Holy Place for you
 - The priest worshipped on your behalf while you stayed outside
 - You couldn’t even see what was happening inside because that heavy veil covered the doorway and blocked your view
- But as Jesus died, the Lord sent another, unmistakable message for all to see by announcing things were about to change
 - And God ripped the veil from top to bottom, from heaven to earth, to say this was a change instituted by God, not men
 - And the message was clear: we no longer stand outside while priests represent us before God out of view and behind a veil
 - A new covenant was being established with a new priesthood that would function in full view of the world
- I imagine crowds must have gathered on the Mt. of Olives for days and weeks after this moment to get a glimpse
 - The priests who served in the Holy Place on that day had no choice but to work in full view of everyone for the first time
 - And although they probably replaced that veil in time, it didn’t last because the end of the temple was coming soon
- So why was it important to understand the outer veil was torn and not the inner veil?
 - Because it makes a fundamental difference in how we respond
 - If we believe that the inner veil was torn, then we might assume that the way to the Father and the mercy seat has been revealed
 - But that isn’t true...we don’t have direct access to the Father except through our High Priest, Jesus Christ
 - We serve a great High Priest Who has entered the Holy of Holies on our behalf to reconcile us with the Father
 - We depend on Jesus’ intercession everyday, His atoning work, His word, His plan, His grace

Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with

hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

- Christ is our High Priest and the only One qualified to enter into the presence of the Father and to make atonement for us
- As Jesus said, if we do not abide in Him we can do nothing
- But if we understand that the outer veil was removed so that we might enter the Holy Place, then that changes everything
 - Because who can enter the Holy Place? Only a priest, and so if the outer veil has been torn down, then it means we're all priests
 - And if we are all priests, then we are all called to serve Jesus in an important way
- The Bible says we are now priests, and we enter the Holy Place to worship and serve God everyday
 - As Peter says:

1Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- Everyone who places faith in Jesus Christ is part of a royal priesthood serving our High Priest, Jesus
- So just as the priests of the temple made daily sacrifices and offered up incense and tended to the light and bread, so do we
- Where is our temple, our Holy Place? Paul says it's our very body

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- As a priest of Christ we make daily sacrifices too, but not with animals...we are called to make ourselves living sacrifices
- We sacrifice our desires, our priorities, our resources...we crucify our flesh and its sinful desires as our service of worship
- We are supposed to set aside anything that gets in the way of Christ's priorities and the needs of the Kingdom Program
- We also make intercession, just as the priests of Israel lit incense on the altar in the Holy Place each day
 - We are called to intercede through prayer everyday, and our prayers rise to God like incense, the Bible says
 - And we also attend to the light and the bread just as the priests of Israel attended to the menorah and the show bread

- Our light are our good works, Jesus said, and our daily bread is the word of God
 - We are to shine our light before men so they may see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven
 - And we share the bread of life from God's word with everyone we meet by teaching the good news of Jesus
- But if we are all priests, who are we ministering to by these things? Who are we representing before God?
 - We are priests to those who have no access to God...to all unbelievers who cannot approach God even through prayer
 - As Peter says, we proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness, so we may lead others to Him
- So in every way that the priests of the Old Covenant served God in their Holy Place, we serve Him even more in the New Covenant in our Holy Place
 - They served God in a building, behind a veil and out of view, but we serve God with our lives, in the open and every place we go
 - Knowing that Jesus tore the outer veil tells us that we may enter the Holy Place
 - And if we may enter the Holy Place, then we are priests, and if we are priests, then we are called to serve Jesus sacrificially
 - Again, Hebrews says it this way

Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

Heb. 10:20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

Heb. 10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

- The signs at Jesus' death indicated that the Messiah had finished the work of redemption
 - But those signs also declared that Jesus' death was about much more than avoiding Hell
 - It meant you can have a new life serving the living God, a new purpose as a priest of the Almighty God
 - Not someone strutting around in robes or acting pious...just ordinary men and women saved and empowered by grace
- I know this year has made serving God harder for many of us, but not impossible
 - And in many ways, it's opened up new opportunities and created new needs
 - Do you understand the significance of that veil being removed?
 - Are you taking advantage of all that God has placed in front of you to serve Him?
 - Do you carry yourself as a priest of the Living God?



Matthew - Lesson 27H

Chapter 27:55-28:1

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- Time is running out to get Jesus' body in the tomb before sundown on the Passover
 - At 6 PM a new day begins in Jewish reckoning, the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread
 - The first and last days of Unleavened Bread are always High Sabbaths
 - And since Passover fell on a Thursday this year, the High Sabbath was followed by the weekly Sabbath in that year
 - That meant there would be two Sabbaths back-to-back which made it all the more important to get Jesus buried on Passover
 - Once that double Sabbath began, all work ceased until Sunday, including the work of preparing a body for burial
 - And Jesus' friends could not bear the thought of leaving Jesus hanging exposed on the cross for that long
 - So they are searching desperately for a way to get Jesus off the cross, to prepare His body and bury it before sundown
 - Even the chance to bury Jesus before the end of the day was unusual, since most victims of crucifixion survived a day or longer
 - Eventually, the victim succumbed to shock, fatigue and ultimately suffocation
 - If that process went on too long for the Romans, they would hasten death by breaking the legs of the person
 - Without the use of their legs, the person could no longer push up to gain a breath, and suffocation would follow in minutes
 - But when Jesus died at 3 PM by giving up His spirit, it meant a Passover burial was possible...and it fulfilled Scripture
 - In Exodus 34, God told Israel that nothing of the Lamb could remain at the end of the Passover feast
 - The lamb was to be fully consumed by the family or else burned so that as the Passover ended, nothing of the lamb was left
 - That requirement pictured the body of Christ, the Lamb of God, buried out of sight before the end of Passover
- So Jesus dies early enough on Passover to give opportunity for His disciples to arrange for His burial before the start of a Sabbath
 - But there are several hurdles standing in their way
 - First, there were very few disciples available to do the work and they were all women for the most part

Matt. 27:55 Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him.

Matt. 27:56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

- Matthew and the other Gospels report that as Jesus dies, a few women looked on from a distance

- Specifically three “Mary’s”: Mary Magdalene, Jesus’ mother Mary, and Mary, the mother of the apostle James the Less
- Given the male-dominated culture of Jesus’ time, it was shameful that only female members of Jesus’ inner circle remained to help
- And the absence of men stands in the way of burying Jesus before 6 PM
 - These few women did not have the physical strength to remove nails from the cross and lower a body by themselves
 - So if Jesus is to be buried before sundown, it will require at least one or two men to step forward to offer assistance
- Secondly, the Romans had to give permission for family members to bury a crucified prisoner, and that was not easy
 - Romans preferred to let crucified prisoners rot on the cross for days or weeks because it reinforced the deterrent effect
 - So someone with political clout would be needed to convince Pilate to release the body that day
- Finally, someone needed to secure a nearby place to bury Jesus, and that was probably the hardest problem to solve
 - Grave sites were owned by families, but an itinerant person like Jesus would have had no family burial site in Jerusalem
 - So someone with means would need to arrange for the purchase of a tomb, which is nearly impossible to do in such a short time
- Each of these barriers were significant, but taken together they made the prospect of burying Jesus before 6 PM seem almost impossible
 - But of course, God was going to make sure His Son was placed in a tomb before sundown as planned
 - And the Lord solves all three problems with just one man
 - So as minutes tick away and the situation grows ever-more desperate for these women, a man finally steps forward

Matt. 27:57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.

Matt. 27:58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

Matt. 27:59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

Matt. 27:60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Matt. 27:61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

- In v.57 Matthew says it was now evening, which refers to the final hour of daylight, so the start of the Sabbath was fast approaching
 - Jesus was still hanging on the cross, and the women were likely pleading for anyone to help them get Him down

- There were few believing men in the vicinity who heard their pleas but hesitated to respond
- If someone stepped forward, they would be exposed as a Jesus-sympathizer which was a great risk
 - There was real reason to fear what the Jewish leaders would do to such a person
 - Being known as a disciple of Jesus could result in persecution in various ways
 - A man's family could be ostracized from Jewish society...he could lose everything: his livelihood, his home, his life
- Which makes what happens next all the more remarkable...a rich man of great power and with much to lose steps forward to assist the women
 - The man is Joseph from Arimathea, the home of Samuel located 21 miles from Jerusalem
 - The other Gospel writers tell us that Joseph was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin Counsel
 - And that he, along with fellow Pharisee Nicodemus, were secret disciples of Jesus on the Sanhedrin
 - Over the past couple of years, these men followed Jesus from a distance while remaining loyal Pharisees serving on the counsel
 - Perhaps they told themselves they could do more good for Jesus in their behind-the-scenes role than if they came out publicly
 - Perhaps they thought they could use their influence on the counsel to help Jesus in one way or another from time to time
 - If so, then they were trying to have their cake and eat it too...they tried to retain their positions of power and authority in this life...
 - While at the same time, being devoted to their Messiah and expecting Him to receive them warmly in the Kingdom
 - But Jesus told His disciples that they couldn't have it all...we can't seek unity with this world while also preparing for the next
- Jesus summed it up this way:

Mark 8:34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Mark 8:35 “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

- Jesus said if our priority is “saving” this life, meaning preserving the status and wealth and comfort and achievements found in this life...
 - Then we are putting at risk those same things in the next life...we will lose our life in the sense of our eternal rewards
 - Because you can't simultaneously work for the rewards of this life and the rewards of the next life

- We have to pick one, so Jesus told us to be willing to lose this life when necessary to gain what He may have for us in the next
- We gain the rewards of eternity by serving Jesus sacrificially now
- Jesus always describes discipleship in this way, as an “either/or” proposition
 - Either we follow Jesus, or we chase after the world
 - Either we seek to please Jesus, or we seek the approval of men
 - Either we serve God or we serve wealth...you can't serve both
- Joseph and Nicodemus were good men – righteous men even – but until this moment, they were trying to have both
 - They wanted to remain on the Sanhedrin Counsel and with the approval of the other Pharisees and Sadducees...
 - While at the same time, they wanted credit for following a Messiah that the rest of the Counsel despised and wanted to kill
 - But there was literally no way they could have both...one allegiance would always win out over the other
- Luke tells us in his Gospel that when the counsel convened on the night before Jesus died and voted to condemn Jesus, these two men were not there
 - Their faith in Jesus would not allow them to be party to a vote to condemn the Messiah to death
 - Mark tells us that when the Jewish counsel condemned Jesus, it was an unanimous decision
 - So had these two men been present, they could have voted against condemnation, and perhaps altered the outcome
 - That's the challenge facing every disciple of Jesus...we are called out of the world by our faith, and yet we remain in the world for a time
 - So that presents a dilemma...which world will we serve? Do we serve the interests of this world or the interest of the Kingdom?
 - Serving this world means agreeing with the world, thinking like the world, approving what the world approves
 - It means conducting marriage and raising kids and following careers according to the values and priorities of the world
 - But Jesus said we must be willing to “lose” this world so we can serve the interests of the next, and that means making different decisions
 - And as we make different choices than the world makes, we will inevitably offend the world and the world will turn against us
 - Following Jesus may mean losing a few friends, losing promotions or your job...it may even mean losing your life
 - That's the dilemma Jesus places in front of *all* His disciples...which is why Jesus asked us to count the cost of following Him
 - Matthew tells us Joseph was a rich man, so we would understand the great sacrifice he was making by stepping forward
 - He would likely lose his position on the counsel, his place in society, the

respect of his peers, and his means of support

- Joseph couldn't know for sure, but it didn't take a genius to understand that if you side with Jesus, it meant trouble
 - And as he does, Joseph also fulfills Scripture
 - Isaiah 53:9 says the Messiah dies among criminals and He is buried in a rich man's tomb...
- So now as Joseph and Nicodemus heard the pleas of the women, they recognize it was time to count the cost and to stand in the gap
 - So in v.58, Joseph steps forward and begins to solve the three challenges to burying Jesus before sundown
 - First, Joseph goes before Pilate and asks for permission to claim the body of Jesus and remove Him from the cross
 - Given how much the counsel fought with Pilate to crucify Jesus, Pilate would not have been inclined to release Jesus so easily
 - He was probably concerned that the Sanhedrin would return to him complaining that Jesus had been let go too easily
 - So it's likely that the only person who could convince Pilate to release Jesus would be a member of the Sanhedrin Counsel like Joseph
 - So because a member of the Sanhedrin requested Jesus' body, Pilate was willing to release Jesus for burial
 - And in v.59, Joseph returns to the cross, and with Nicodemus' help, they remove Jesus from the cross
 - And then with the women's help, the men prepare the body for burial, wrapping it quickly with linen but without embalming spices
 - Normally a body was prepared with embalming spices that helped dry the body over time
 - But with time running out and with no chance to buy the necessary spices, they are forced to use linen only
 - This was to be a temporary concession on their part
 - The women were planning to return to the tomb on Sunday after the double Sabbath to apply the spices
- So with Joseph's help, the women have claimed Jesus' body and removed Him from the cross, which leaves only the final challenge of where to bury Him
 - In that day, burial was typically a two-step process
 - First, a body was wrapped and placed in a tomb, either a cave or a sarcophagus, where it would decompose over a few years
 - Later, the bones would be retrieved and placed in an ossuary for safekeeping in a home or for burial underground
 - Most people were entombed in caves shared by many other bodies but the wealthy could afford to purchase a private tomb
 - These tombs were multi-room affairs, with a low passage leading to separate rooms for different family members

- They were hewn out of solid rock and sealed with a large rolling stone
- Joseph being wealthy had recently completed construction on just such a tomb in a quarry close to the city
 - Carving a new cave out of rock was a labor-intensive business, so this cave would have been quite expensive to build
 - Some estimate it might have cost Joseph as much as \$40,000 in today's money
- But with time running out and no other options, Joseph gives up his tomb so that Jesus could have a proper burial that day
 - Joseph stepped out of the shadows, exposing himself publicly as a follower of Jesus and made a significant sacrifice in the process
 - He most likely sacrificed his career, friends, and perhaps his security as well
 - To say nothing of the sacrifice of \$40,000 in the form of that tomb
 - He traded things of this life for the rewards of the next just as Jesus said
 - But notice what he gained...first, by his faith in Jesus, Joseph traded death for life
 - Jesus took the penalty for Joseph's sin, dying in his place, which is beautifully pictured by Jesus taking Joseph's place in the tomb
 - What's more, Joseph's name is recorded in Scripture for all eternity, forever after known as the man who buried Jesus
 - Finally, Joseph even got his tomb back, because as it turned out Jesus only needed it for a few days
 - That's the power of obedience...serve Jesus sacrificially and become a part of His story and be blessed in the end
 - We may not see our names in Scripture, but we will see ourselves making an impact for the Kingdom
 - And even if our worldly accomplishments seem impressive to us now, they won't seem so impressive in the Kingdom
 - But the things you did to serve Jesus will never be forgotten, and in the Kingdom they will become crowns of glory
- Then notice in v.61, Matthew once again mentions the women looking on as Jesus is buried
 - Matthew's showing us how these women are acting as a chain of custody to authenticate the story of Jesus' resurrection
 - In detective work, it's important to maintain a chain of custody for all evidence, so that no one can question its authenticity
 - From the moment a piece of evidence is collected, the police must be able to prove how that evidence was handled
 - That chain of custody assures that the evidence is trustworthy
 - Without these women present, Jesus had no witnesses to testify concerning the most important moments of His ministry
 - Remember, Paul called those three things – death, burial, resurrection – of first importance for the Church

- So we're thankful these women were courageous enough to remain with Jesus after the men had run away
- And because they did, they served as a chain of custody for Jesus' body (more to follow)
 - These women were present from the moment Jesus died on the cross until the tomb was sealed
 - And as we'll see in Chapter 28, they will be the first to visit the tomb on Sunday morning to find it empty
 - They could testify that Jesus did, in fact, die, spend three days in a tomb and resurrect
- And ironically, Jesus' enemies, the religious leaders, unintentionally added to the authenticity of their claims

Matt. 27:62 Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate,

Matt. 27:63 and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.'

Matt. 27:64 "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."

Matt. 27:65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how."

Matt. 27:66 And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

- On the first day of the Sabbath, the chief priests and Pharisees made a special visit to Pilate
 - They had begun to worry that Jesus' disciples might try to fake a resurrection by stealing the body
 - Had this happened, it would have been especially troublesome for the Sadducees, who were the majority party on the counsel
- Sadducees were from the liberal wing of the political spectrum, and they didn't believe in a literal resurrection
 - They believed that we die, we exist in spirit form only and will never occupy a body again
 - So if Jesus' body disappeared and people claimed He was resurrected, it would undermine the Sadducees' position
- So they and the Pharisees demand that Pilate guard the tomb, and Pilate, weary from dealing with these men, agrees to give them guards
 - The religious leaders take the guards to the tomb, secure it with a seal of some kind, and station the guards there
 - Ironically, these men were worried about someone faking Jesus' resurrection

- But in the end, they only succeeded in making Jesus' actual resurrection all the more believable
- To end today's lesson, we look at the first verse of Chapter 28, where we find our final proof to know that Jesus died on a Thursday, not Friday as tradition holds

Matt. 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.

- The same women who were present when Jesus' tomb was sealed are the first to return to the tomb after the double Sabbath on Sunday
 - Notice Matthew says they came to the tomb as it began to dawn on the first day of the week
 - The first day of the Jewish week is Sunday just as it still is today
 - Technically, the Sabbath ended at 6 PM the night before, but women didn't venture outside the city walls at night
- So they wait until shortly before dawn on Sunday, and then Mark tells us they visited the tomb to finish the job of embalming Jesus

Mark 16:1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.

Mark 16:2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.

- Mark says they first had to buy spices, which they did after the Sabbath ended on Saturday night
- When the weekly Sabbath ends on sundown Saturday evening, shops reopen and Jews go out for the evening shopping
- So the women bought spices in the city Saturday night and then left the city early Sunday morning to visit the tomb
- But when they arrive at the tomb at daybreak, they find it empty
 - We'll study more about Jesus' resurrection next week
 - But for now Matthew 28:1 gives us the final piece of data we need to fix the day of Jesus' death with certainty
 - And not just the day of the week, but we can also fix the specific date in history when Jesus died
- Since we now know that Jesus resurrected prior to daybreak on Sunday, let's focus our timeline on the days of Thursday–Sunday
 - We know the day Jesus resurrected, but the Bible never tells us what day Jesus died...but he does give us the way to figure it out
 - In Matthew 12 Jesus gave us the math to use in calculating the day of His death

Matt. 12:40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- Jesus said He will spend three days and three nights in the grave, referring to periods of daylight and darkness
- So let's count periods of day and night, and to start let's count from Friday, since Friday is traditionally considered the day of Jesus' death
 - We don't count Sunday's daytime since the Gospels tell us Jesus' grave was empty by daybreak
 - So counting the rest of the day and night periods between Friday and Sunday we find there are only two of each period
 - There is simply not enough time for Jesus' prophecy to be true if Jesus died on a Friday
- There are some creative counting methods used by scholars to get around this problem, but it's completely unnecessary
 - The problem is of their own making...there is no reason to assume Jesus died on a Friday
 - There is no Scriptural reason to insist on a Friday death...it's just tradition
- If we move back one day to Thursday, sure enough the problem goes away and everything fits
 - Jesus died on a Thursday, and there are three periods of day and night between Thursday and before daybreak Sunday
 - Furthermore, the double-Sabbath created by the High Sabbath and Weekly Sabbath ensured the tomb remained undisturbed
 - God had designed the calendar on that year to ensure that no one would visit the tomb until Jesus was resurrected
 - This further ensured that the chain of custody was preserved
 - So now with the day of the week fixed by Scripture, it's possible to calculate the exact day of Jesus' death using other data in Scripture
 - We know Jesus born about 2 years before Herod died in 4 BC (Matthew 2:1; 13-16)
 - Luke tells us Jesus began His ministry at age 30 (Luke 3:23)
 - And by counting the number of Passovers in Jesus' ministry we know it lasted 3 years
 - Putting all that together, we can calculate that Jesus must have died in either AD 27 or 28
 - Since Jesus died on a Thursday, we consult astronomical tables to see if one of these years had Passover starting on Wednesday night
 - And sure enough, in AD 27 Passover began on a Wednesday night, April 9th
 - Which means Jesus died the next day, Thursday, April 10, AD 27
 - And interestingly, the 2,000 anniversary of His death will be April 22, 2027

- Should we care about this detail? We should care about getting our interpretation of Scripture correct, and little details like this test our teachability
 - Are we willing to accept the Scripture over tradition and popular opinion?
 - And more importantly, are we willing to change our minds when the Bible challenges our prior understanding on any matter?
 - I have a saying I use a lot: I would rather know the truth than be “right”
 - Being right means stubbornly clinging to my ideas or opinions even when better information comes along
 - It means pridefully thinking I’m right every time I open my mouth because being wrong about anything is more than I can stand
 - I know that feeling too...I like being right...but I would rather know the truth than be right
 - And that means I would rather be corrected by someone who has the truth than to continue in my wrong beliefs
 - Because when I face Jesus, then everything that is true will be known and we will all see where we were wrong
 - And when I get to that moment, I want to be wrong about as few things as possible
 - So better to be shown that I’m wrong here and now so I can be right when I see Jesus

- Our three-year study of Matthew is nearly complete, and out of the 1,071 verses found in this book, we are down to the final 20 verses
 - In these verses we study the third of three key truths that Paul said were the things of first importance for Christians
 - In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul said these things all Christians must know are that Jesus died, was buried and three days later rose again
 - That simple but profound three-part story is everything to our Christian faith; it defines our faith
 - To this point in our study, we have studied the first two of these three parts of Jesus' story: Jesus' death and His burial
 - Therefore, today in Chapter 28, we move to the third part: His resurrection, which is really the key to everything in the Bible
 - Do you realize that if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, nothing else in this book would matter?
 - As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is useless because we have believed in a lie
 - So if Jesus' death was the end of Him (as death is for every other person), then Jesus was no different than anyone else
 - But by returning to life, Jesus proved He was something else
 - Only God has the power over death...human beings do not possess that power
 - So if someone can bring His own dead body back to life, He must have the power of God
 - And if so, then what that Person says about obtaining eternal life matters
 - And that's why we've studied this book in such detail for the better part of the last three years
- So now it's time to focus our attention on the resurrection moment as Matthew explains it, and that takes us to the beginning of Chapter 28 again
 - Last week we looked at just the first verse so we could understand conclusively what day of the week Jesus died
 - We learned that Jesus died on a Thursday, not on a Friday as tradition holds, and in the year 27 AD
 - All that was interesting, of course, but that is not the main point of this chapter, of course, nor even the main idea of verse 1
 - The point of v.1 – and the rest of this chapter – is that the impossible happened on that day
 - A dead body returned to life after three days, and walked out of the tomb alive again
 - As Jesus said, what is impossible for us is possible for God
 - So let's understand how that happened

Matt. 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.

Matt. 28:2 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.

Matt. 28:3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.

Matt. 28:4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

- Repeating v.1 from last week, Matthew tells us that the two Mary's (Magdalene and Jesus' mother) came to the grave at daybreak on Sunday
 - Matthew names Mary of Magdalene specifically, because she will be critical to this part of the story
 - But notice how Matthew refers to Jesus' mother merely as the other Mary
 - In fact, John and Mark both refer to this Mary as the mother of James, not the mother of Jesus
 - These are just examples of how the Bible consistently downplays the significance of Mary as Jesus' earthly mother
 - Yes, Mary was a significant Bible character, no different than Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Peter or the Apostle Paul
 - And yes, she had the high honor of being chosen to carry the Messiah in her womb
 - But Mary's importance stops at that point...Mary was no more than those things in God's plan
 - Mary was just a sinner saved by grace and greatly honored by God's favor to have an important role in Messiah's first coming
 - But assigning Mary any greater theological significance than that is idolatry, and we can clearly see how the Bible avoids that here
- Moving on, these women have come early on Sunday morning to finish the burial preparations for Jesus
 - They waited until the daybreak to leave the city in safety, but they probably left at earliest twilight, maybe 4 AM
 - They brought the spices they purchased the night before in the city after the end of the Sabbath on Saturday night
 - We have to ask what was going through these women's minds...they saw the tomb sealed with the stone so they know it's closed
 - That stone would have been far too heavy for these women to move on their own, so how did they expect to gain access to Jesus' body?
 - Mark says that as they went, they wondered aloud who would move the stone away for them
 - Maybe they thought the Roman soldiers would unseal the tomb for them

- It appears they go in blind faith hoping for a miracle of some sort
- No one would have blamed these women if they had said it's not worth going, it's impossible, and then stayed home that day
 - Everyone would have understood and probably everyone would have agreed
 - In fact, I suspect some of the disciples may have tried to talk these women out of going to the grave that day
 - Maybe some thought "silly women" as they watched them running off to the tomb with spices before dawn
- So from a human perspective, there was no reason to bother going and no reason to expect the tomb to be open
 - But still they went anyway...early in the morning and eagerly expecting to see Jesus' body, though without a plan
 - And because they did go, they were privileged to become witnesses to the greatest miracle in history
- That is the payoff for walking by faith...you get a chance to witness God doing something amazing, something impossible, through your obedience
 - If we limit our service to God to situations where we can see the path to success in advance, then we're going to miss a lot of miracles
 - God tells you to start a ministry, but you say there's no money, there's no time, I don't have the expertise or the ability
 - Remember when Moses tried to use those same excuses in Exodus 4...then God told Moses, I will take care of those things
 - God says go pray with that stranger on the park bench, but you say they will think I'm strange or that's not going to help them
 - If we only pray for the things we think we can accomplish, then we never see what God might be prepared to accomplish
 - If we only go when the task seems doable, we'll never be used by God to do the unthinkable
 - If we only go when it makes sense to us, then we won't be there when God parts the Red Sea or feeds 5,000 or opens a tomb
 - And we'll miss the point in all this...God doesn't need us in the first place...He is inviting us to join in work He is going to do
 - God was going to raise Jesus on this day...with or without these women
 - So the only question was whether they were going to be there to see it happen
 - You may be the miracle for someone today, the one who showed up to join the work just as God did something no one expected
 - But you have to first be willing to walk in faith, to shut up that inner voice of reason, to ignore the critics
 - We don't bring about miraculous outcomes merely by our involvement or even by wishing for God to do a miracle

- But when He calls us to a certain path, one that appears impossible, remind yourself there may be a miracle waiting
- These women didn't have a way to open that tomb, but they expected God to provide a way, and He did it in a most unexpected and miraculous way
 - In v.2 Matthew tells us that before the women arrived, an earthquake took place during the night when Jesus resurrected
 - There was also an earthquake at the moment of Jesus' death too
 - So God marked both Jesus' death and resurrection in this way
 - Next, an angel descended specifically to move the stone aside, and then the angel hung around for a while hosting an open house at the tomb
 - The angel's arrival scares the Roman guards nearly to death, and in fact they fall to the ground unconscious
 - So as the women arrive, they come upon this strange scene...tomb open, guards on the ground, angel waiting on the stone
 - At this point we need to consult the other Gospels for a better picture of what happened that morning, because Matthew has combined things
 - According to the other Gospels, the first person to visit the tomb was just Mary Magdalene who came by herself
 - When she arrived the tomb was already open, but she didn't investigate further...she just ran back to tell the apostles
 - She assumed that the body of Jesus had been stolen and she wanted to report it to the men
 - Then a short time later the other Mary and Salome arrive and these two are the first to enter the empty tomb
 - This is the encounter that Matthew writes about next

Matt. 28:5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.

Matt. 28:6 “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.

Matt. 28:7 “Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

Matt. 28:8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.

- The angel greets these two women with the standard angelic greeting, “Do not be afraid...”
 - He then informs the women that the Lord wasn't in the grave because He had risen from the dead just as He promised

- Then angel invites them to inspect the tomb, where they see the empty stone bench in the cave and the linen wrappings
- Finally, the angels tells the women to report to the disciples telling them Jesus is going to Galilee where He will meet them
- Jesus wanted His disciples to leave Jerusalem immediately to flee the Romans and the prying eyes of the Pharisees
- Once up in the Galilee, Jesus and His disciples could meet and talk in safety and without worry of interruption
- So while Mary and Salome are conducting the open house with the angel, Mary Magdalene is back in Jerusalem with the disciples
 - She's trying to convince the men that she saw Jesus' tomb open
 - But the men won't believe her and they refuse to go look for themselves
 - In that culture and in that day, men viewed women as unreliable witnesses and didn't trust their reports
- Then a short time later, the other Mary and Salome return to the disciples to report their encounter with the angel at the tomb
 - Now with a second report of an empty tomb, Peter and John decide to check out the women's story by going to the tomb
 - When Peter and John get to the tomb, they find it empty, with the linen wrappings by themselves, but no angel anywhere
- So Peter and John return to the disciples' hiding place in Jerusalem to confirm that the tomb was empty but still assuming Jesus was stolen
 - Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene decides to go back to the tomb a second time and when she does, she sees not one but two angels in the tomb
 - And then almost immediately, Mary turns around to see Jesus alive outside the tomb
 - She's overjoyed to see Jesus alive and tries to embrace Him, but Jesus commands her not to touch Him
 - Instead, He tells her to report to the disciples and we assume He repeats His instructions for them to go to Galilee
 - It's interesting that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Lord and that fact argues for the authenticity of the Gospel accounts
 - If you were inventing the story of Jesus' resurrection, you wouldn't make your first eye witness in your story to be a woman
 - Given the cultural bias against women eye witnesses, this detail would make your story less believable, not more believable
 - The only reason someone would say a woman was the first eye witness to something so remarkable would be if it's true
 - Moreover, the Lord's choice to work through the women rather than the men is confirmation of something we saw last week

- The women were a chain of custody proving the authenticity of Jesus' claims of death, burial and resurrection
- In fact, since these women were the only ones present throughout Jesus' ordeal, they are the only ones who could testify
- Because they stood by Jesus during His trials, they were now privileged to be present for His triumph as well
- It almost seems as if Jesus was mocking the lack of faith among His male disciples and their continued lack of faith would bear out that choice
 - Twice these men received reports by women who saw the Lord's tomb empty and who heard from angels
 - And now they've heard a report from a woman who saw and talked with Jesus alive
 - And if that weren't enough, these men even saw the empty tomb for themselves
 - Yet still they wouldn't believe that Jesus was resurrected, and they certainly weren't heeding His instructions to go to Galilee
 - Simply put, because they didn't believe in the resurrection, they weren't going to follow Jesus much less obey Him
 - And on the one hand, we can sympathize with their response to these reports
 - If after three days you visited the grave of someone you buried and found it empty, what would you suppose?
 - Would you immediately suppose that the person returned to life and was walking around in perfect health, alive and well again?
 - Or would you would assume someone took the body?
 - On the other hand, they had strong eye witness reports from the women who they knew and trusted
 - Clearly, the women didn't expect to find a resurrected Jesus either...they went carrying spices to embalm His body!
 - So they had no reason to lie, and the disciples had every reason to believe their reports and respond in faith
 - But they just couldn't accept it, and I wonder if Jesus was training them for the future when they were sent out with the same message
 - One day these men would be the ones proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus to others...and dealing with doubters
 - Because the idea of a dead man returning to life is truly outside anyone's expectations
- And if you cannot accept the resurrection of Jesus, then you will not accept His commands...you will accept nothing at all
 - It just goes to show that resurrection is the key to the Gospel...if Jesus wasn't raised, nothing else matters
 - And that's what the Christian faith requires...at the heart of our faith is the

belief in these testimonies

- By faith in the word of God, we believe that Jesus' resurrection is true, that He returned to life as He promised He would
- And not only did Jesus resurrect...but we believe it's going to happen to every single human being who has ever lived
 - One day soon, resurrection will be our experience too, and eventually it will be everyone's experience
 - So let's understand just what was involved in Jesus' resurrection, that is, what happened to Jesus and to His physical body
- And to do that we must first define what life and death are, according to the Bible
 - A living person consists of two parts, according to Scripture: we have a physical body and a spirit (or soul)
 - God fashioned the body of the first human being, Adam, from the dirt of the ground, literally from earth
 - God gave Adam a physical body because Adam was intended to live in a physical world
 - But at first, Adam's physical body was lifeless...it was no more alive than the dirt from which it came
 - Before his body could be alive, he needed a spirit, so God breathed a living spirit/soul into Adam's body and Adam came to life
 - Adam's wife, Eve, came to life in a similar way...God made her body from Adam's body and then gave her a living spirit as well
 - Thereafter, every human being has come into existence through procreation between a man and woman...flesh creating flesh
 - But God still makes the spirit for each child conceived through that union...we each receive a living spirit from the Giver of life
- Death is just the opposite of that experience...it's the separation of the body and the spirit
 - At death, our spirit leaves the body lifeless and immediately the body begins to disintegrate
 - But our spirit lives on, and where our spirit lives next depends on what we believed while we were alive
 - If the person believes Jesus was their Savior, then God counts their faith as righteousness and He welcomes their spirit into Heaven
 - A believer exists in Heaven as a spirit without a physical body while they await a future resurrection and the coming Kingdom
 - On the other hand, if the person dies without faith in Jesus, they forever remain in their sins so they can never enter into the presence of God
 - The unbeliever's spirit descends into the heart of the earth away from God and held in a place of torment called Hades (Hell)

- They too exist in spirit form only awaiting a future resurrection day and a judgment moment
- So life is a spirit in a body while death is the separation of the spirit from the body, and therefore resurrection is the reuniting of spirit and body
 - Resurrection is not a spirit returning to life or regaining consciousness as some imagine it
 - A person's spirit never ceases to exist and is always conscious
 - Resurrection returns a spirit to a body so that the person can live in the created world again
- That's what these women reported to the disciples...Jesus' body was alive again, and it's what the Bible says will happen to each of us
 - In fact, as Paul told us, the resurrection of Christ is of first importance because it's the basis for our own hope

1Cor. 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor. 15:17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

1Cor. 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Cor. 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1Cor. 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

1Cor. 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

- So even as Jesus' resurrection was a miracle, He was just the first, and the hope of the Christian faith is that we will follow one day
- But there are some important differences between what Jesus experienced in death and at His resurrection and what we will experience
 - First, Jesus' Spirit took a different path in death than our spirit will take
 - In Matthew 12 Jesus told us where His Spirit would go:

Matt. 12:40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- When Jesus died, His Spirit would descend into the heart of the earth to a place called Sheol in the Old Testament
- Sheol is a literal, physical place in the center of the planet that God created to hold the

spirits of the dead for a time

- Until the time of Jesus' death, the spirit of every human being – whether believer or unbeliever – went down to Sheol at death
- Even though believers and unbelievers went to the same place, there was a big difference in the quality of accommodations
- Jesus tells us in Luke 16 that those spirits who were righteous by faith were held on one side of Sheol in a place of comfort
- But those who died absent faith in Messiah were held on the other side of Sheol in torment (called Hades)
- It makes sense that unbelievers are held in Sheol, but why did Old Testament saints go to Sheol too? Why didn't they go to Heaven?
 - Even though Old Testament saints were saved by their faith, they couldn't enter Heaven until Jesus' blood sacrifice covered their sin
 - So until Jesus came, God held the spirits of Old Testament saints in the heart of the earth in comfort to await the Messiah's appearing
- So after He died, Jesus' Spirit descended into Sheol so Jesus could address both groups of humanity...both the unbelievers and believers
 - The Bible tells us that Jesus first presents Himself to the unbelieving spirits held in the side of torment
 - In 1 Peter 3:19 we're told Jesus preached to the unbelieving spirits confirming the word of the prophets who foretold a Messiah
 - Jesus' preaching was not intended to convert or to offer a second chance, but to convict them for their unbelief in God's promises
 - Secondly, Paul says in Ephesians 4 Jesus then met with the Old Testament saints in Sheol introducing Himself as the Messiah they were expecting
 - They had died in faith not having received what was promised, but now they knew God's promises were being fulfilled
 - Finally, the Old Testament saints could put a face and name to the Messiah they had longed to see one day
 - Then Paul says Jesus escorted the Old Testament saints into the Heavenly realm while leaving the unbelievers behind to suffer in Sheol

Eph. 4:8 Therefore it says,

**“WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”**

Eph. 4:9 (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

Eph. 4:10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- Obviously when we die, our experience will be different, primarily because Jesus has already paid the price for our sin and emptied Sheol
 - Therefore, there is no need for our spirit to spend time in a layover in Sheol after we die
 - Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5 that the spirits of those born again by faith in Jesus Christ go immediately into God's presence at death
 - And in Luke 16 Jesus says our spirit will be escorted by angels into the presence of God when we die
 - So our spirit's experience of death is different than Jesus, and our dead body also goes through a different experience than Jesus' body did
 - After our spirit leaves our body, our body becomes lifeless, and begins to decay because of sin
 - God placed the human body and all Creation under a curse after Adam sinned, saying from dust we came so to dust we will return
 - But when Jesus' Spirit descended into Sheol, His body didn't decay

**Psa. 16:10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.**

- The Bible testifies that Jesus' body, though bloodied and disfigured, did not decay...it simply remained lifeless
- Our body decays because of the curse, but since Jesus had no sin and wasn't under the curse, His body didn't decay
- And that difference also explains why our resurrection will be different from Jesus' resurrection
 - When Mary Magdalene visited the tomb for the second time, she reported seeing Jesus alive...the same Jesus she knew before
 - Jesus' Spirit returned to the same body Jesus had before He died
 - His Spirit re-entered the body in the tomb, Jesus' heart started beating, He took off His wrappings, stood up and walked out
 - Even the damage done to His body on the cross began to heal quickly, though not completely
 - That's how Jesus resurrected, but that's not how we resurrect...our spirit won't return to our old body nor would we want it to do so
 - Our current body is corrupted by sin and under the curse, which is why it decays and turns to dust
 - The curse is also the reason our body gets sick, experiences pain and weakness, gets old, deteriorates and ultimately dies
 - Those are things we don't want to experience after our resurrection, so we don't want to go back into this body...once it does, it's gone forever

- When we resurrect, our Spirit will enter a new body, one created for eternity, one like Jesus' body
- The things we experience today in our present body won't be a part of our life in the new body
- We won't experience sickness, weakness, aging or death itself because those things end when our corrupt body dies
- So we join Jesus in resurrection though we receive a new body, and we will live with all resurrected saints in the promised Kingdom on earth
 - Imagine how different life will be for us in that coming time
 - Living in a world ruled by Jesus, so justice will be perfect
 - A world where our bodies are sinless and unable to die, so we live without fear of harm, violence, sickness, danger in any form
 - We will experience eternal peace and joy...it's literally unimaginable but it's real, and it's coming
 - And it's possible because Jesus went before us in death and in resurrection
 - And the same God Who brought Jesus' dead body back to life is the One Who has promised to resurrect you too
 - If He can do it for Himself, He can surely do it for you
 - Do you believe that Jesus resurrected back to life as He promised He would? Then by your faith, God will fulfill His promises to you as well
 - But if you don't believe these things, then the irony is you will still be resurrected one day
 - The Bible teaches that those who die without faith in Jesus are also resurrected in a future day
 - One day, the spirits of unbelievers are brought up from Hades, given new bodies, and then they stand for judgment
 - After judgment, they are convicted and thrown alive in the lake of fire to dwell in torment forever
 - So whether we believe in resurrection or not we will all one day experience it...the only difference is where we live for eternity
 - Better to believe in the promises of God than not
 - Better to believe that Jesus returned to life so that when we do too, we will live eternally with Him

On January 25, 2018, we began a verse-by-verse study of the gospel of Matthew

- ○ And after 129 lessons over 153 weeks and totaling 11,827 minutes of teaching, we are finally ending our study today
 - I listed these statistics for one reason only: to remind you there is no limit to how much we can learn from a study of Scripture
 - John tells us at the end of his Gospel that there aren't enough books in the world to hold all that Jesus said and did
 - So though we took a while to finish this study, still we only scratched the surface of what could be understood
- Yet because we spent that time together, we changed. Each of us changed in some way through what God taught us in this study
 - That's the power and purpose of studying God's word. It transforms and renews us Paul says
 - We become someone new and better spiritually and even physically by God's power working through His word
- So if you're into making New Year's resolutions, consider this one: studying the Bible more in 2021
 - Because that's the way to change everything else in your life
 - Peter says it this way

1Pet. 1:25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER."

And this is the word which was preached to you.

1Pet. 2:1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,

1Pet. 2:2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation

- In fact, if you study Scripture long enough, you may become unrecognizable to family or friends who knew you before
 - Better that we change that way than in other ways

A middle-aged woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she had a near death experience. Seeing God she asked, "Is my time up?" God said, "No, you have another 43 years, 2 months and 8 days to live."

Upon awaking in the hospital bed, the woman decided if she was going to live that much longer, she decided to make the most of the time. She arranged to stay in the hospital longer to have a face lift, lip implants, botox, liposuction and a tummy tuck. She even changed her hair color.

After the work was done, she looked like a new woman, and as she was released from the hospital she crossed the street and was immediately hit by a bus and died. Arriving in Heaven and standing before God, she demanded an explanation from God. "I thought you

said I had another 43 years?! Why didn't you pull me out of the path of that bus?"

God replied, "I didn't recognize you."

- So let's finish Matthew, returning to verse nine as Jesus makes His first appearance to His disciples to prove His claims to resurrect after three days

Matt. 28:9 And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

Matt. 28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."

- As we've seen, Matthew continues to abbreviate the story of Jesus' resurrection appearances
 - In just a few verses, he moves from Jesus' burial to His resurrection and then to the end of the story
 - But across the four Gospels, we have the full account of what took place and I can summarize what Matthew overlooked
- We know Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden near the tomb, and she reported that encounter to the disciples
 - The Lord told Mary to instruct the disciples to leave for Galilee where Jesus would greet them
 - But, when the eleven men heard her story, they thought Mary was hysterical and so they didn't believe her and didn't go
- Then later that same day in the afternoon, Luke tells us Jesus appears to two unnamed male disciples leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus
 - Jesus walked with these men for a distance but the men were prevented from recognizing Jesus initially
 - Then as evening was approaching, Jesus broke bread with them, and in that moment God allowed them to recognize Jesus
 - Immediately, these men run back to Jerusalem to report what they saw to the eleven apostles still huddled in Jerusalem
- So by the time we get to verse nine, the eleven have received multiple testimonies of Jesus risen and alive, both from women and from men
 - Mary, mother of Jesus, told them of the angel's testimony, Mary Magdalene reported seeing Jesus, and now two men report the same
 - Moreover, Peter and John saw the empty tomb for themselves
 - But despite the mounting evidence, the eleven refuse to believe and remain fearful and hiding in Jerusalem
 - And therefore, they aren't willing to go to Galilee
 - So because they won't go to Galilee to find Jesus, Jesus must come find them in

their hiding place

- Late on Sunday night, the same day He rose from the grave, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples
- That's the moment Matthew is now describing in vs.9, and John gives us a detailed description

John 20:19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

John 20:20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

John 20:21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

John 20:23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

- Tenderly, Jesus allows the men to believe He is alive, and then Jesus tells them that they will receive the Holy Spirit
 - By the Spirit's power, they will be ambassadors of the Gospel message, offering forgiveness of sins
 - And that was the point all along...the mystery and power of Jesus' resurrection wasn't meant just to impress the disciples
 - Christ's resurrection was the key moment in God's plan to extend salvation and forgiveness to the world
 - And that's why it was so important that these men start moving to Galilee...there was Kingdom work to be done!
- But instead of moving forward in the mission, the disciples were still struggling to believe that Jesus was resurrected and alive
 - The mission was on hold because they were still wrestling with the meaning of Jesus' death and testimony that He was alive
 - These men were facing very unique circumstances, but they were also acting according to a pattern many have repeated
 - Many Christians early in their walk with Christ can get paralyzed or stuck on step one of their faith: trusting the resurrection
 - And by that I mean, they have trouble moving beyond believing in Christ, which is step one for everyone, and into serving Christ
 - So many Christians I meet struggle for assurance that they are saved, or they worry they might somehow lose that salvation

- As a result, they become paralyzed with resolving questions about salvation, and that keeps them from moving forward
- It's hard to mature as a Christian or serve other Christians when you're distracted by the question of whether you are a Christian
- Some Christians worry if they can sin their way out of salvation or stop believing one day and lose their salvation, etc.
 - And as long as they remain trapped by these unnecessary worries and doubts, they will stand still in their walk with Jesus
 - They are like the apostles sitting in that upper room debating whether the reports of Jesus' resurrection were really true
 - Although all the evidence testified that Jesus was alive, the disciples couldn't believe and therefore they couldn't move
 - Out of fear they did nothing, meaning the Kingdom work was waiting and so was Jesus
- Is that you this morning? Are you stuck on step one, still seeking assurances you are saved or worried that it might be lost somehow?
 - If so, then I'm also certain you aren't serving Jesus in Kingdom work, at least not as much as you could or should
 - You're probably like one of those 11 men in that upper room
 - You've heard the proof many times, but you just have to believe the testimony and move ahead in serving Jesus
 - The testimony of Scripture says if you believe that Jesus is Lord and died for your sins, then you are saved by your faith
 - To believe in that message is to be born again, and to be born again is to become a child of God, adopted into God's family
 - And to be adopted into the family of God is to become a fellow heir with Christ of the good things to come
 - The Bible testifies these things are true and unchanging and eternal
 - Nothing and no one can reverse that born-again spiritual change that God accomplishes in the heart of a person
 - No more can you be unborn spiritually than you can be unborn physically
 - No more can you sin your way out of God's family than you can sin your way out of your earthly family
 - Your eternal inheritance is reserved for you in Heaven by the power of God and nothing can take it away

1Pet. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pet. 1:4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will

**not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,
1Pet. 1:5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation
ready to be revealed in the last time.**

- I like to remind believers, you've been saved, now get over it and press on...let's go to Galilee, so to speak, into the world to begin our Kingdom work
 - And effective service requires we set aside doubts about Jesus' resurrection or the certainty of our own salvation
 - We also need to set aside fear of what might happen if we go
 - God didn't save us so we could hide in our homes from the scary world, just counting down the days until we die
 - Nor did He call us to collect inside church buildings so we can create "community" with no purpose
 - He saved us to represent Him to the world, to go out into the middle of whatever may be happening around us as His ambassadors
 - We are to be light to darkness bringing good news
 - And to do that, we have to operate with trust that Jesus is going ahead of us and will meet us in Galilee
 - And whatever happens, we know it was in God's purpose
 - And better to reach the end of our life in our "going" than to end alone and waiting
 - We come back to the topic of going in a moment, but meanwhile Matthew lets us know that Jesus' enemies continued to oppose Him

Matt. 28:11 Now while they were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.

Matt. 28:12 And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,

Matt. 28:13 and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'

Matt. 28:14 "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble."

Matt. 28:15 And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.

- Matthew's account makes it sound like after Jesus appeared on Sunday night, the disciples went immediately to Galilee
 - But John tells us that one of the 11 was missing from that initial meeting
 - Thomas had been out of the room at the time, so later he returned and heard that Jesus had been there

- But Thomas wouldn't believe so he refused to go to Galilee, forcing the other men to waste time trying to convince him
- So eight days later, Jesus appears one more time to all 11 men, including Thomas, and this time Thomas believes Jesus is alive
 - Meanwhile, during those eight days, the news of Jesus' resurrection began to circulate among His followers in the city
 - At the same time, the Roman guards who watched Jesus' tomb had recovered and began talking
 - The guards had been witnesses to the earthquake and the angel moving the stone aside of the tomb and to Jesus being raised
 - The sight of these things rendered them paralyzed or unconscious but they remembered what happened
- Eventually, they reported what they saw to the chief priests, and the priests reacted much the same way as Jesus' disciples had done
 - They don't believe the reports, and that's no surprise, so rather than investigate to learn the truth, they conspired to pervert it
 - After consulting with the elders of the nation they give the guards a large bribe to change their story
- The official story would now be that the disciples came and stole the body, but that story would not have reflected well on those guards
 - They were the ones stationed specifically to prevent such a thing, so now they would tell everyone they failed in their assigned mission
 - Certainly, the guards would look like fools to repeat such a story, which is why they were bribed so richly
 - But that story would also get them in trouble with the boss, and probably bring death and no bribe was enough to compensate
 - So the chief priests told the Roman guards that they could handle their Roman superiors and an agreement is struck
 - So the guards take the money and the story of the disciples stealing the body would soon be shared widely
 - Years after whenever Jesus' disciples preached the Gospel, the common rebuttal they heard was His body was stolen
 - But that was fake news, and it didn't address the main part of their testimony
 - Such a story might explain the disappearance of a dead body, but it couldn't explain His resurrection appearances
 - And Paul tells us that there were more than a few eye witnesses walking around in that day testifying Jesus was alive

1Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

1Cor. 15:6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

1Cor. 15:7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;

1Cor. 15:8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

- Paul says that altogether there were over 500 first-hand witnesses who saw Jesus alive
- So that even in Paul's day over 20 years later, many of these witnesses were still alive and testifying
 - That's why the false story circulated by the chief priests couldn't stop the truth of the Gospel
 - The overwhelming evidence available to everyone proved Jesus was alive and that fact buried the conspiracy quickly
- And that's how the Gospel works. God's truth triumphs over the enemy's lies because God's word has power, Satan's doesn't
 - And that power will go forth and accomplish all that God desires
 - So consider what this means for our Kingdom work
 - Our work is to share a message with the world that tells the story of what Jesus did, not what we have done or can do
 - And our message is backed by the power of God to demonstrate its authenticity and trustworthiness
 - Wherever we go, Jesus goes ahead working to prepare hearts to receive that message
 - When we share the truth, the enemy will oppose it, of course, but his opposition stands no chance in the face of God's power
 - So why wouldn't we go out serving Jesus? What is stopping us? Just our own fears, doubts, or perhaps laziness?
 - And Matthew ends his Gospel with one of the better known passages of the New Testament to encourage us to overcome those obstacles
 - Beginning with the disciples making their way to Galilee at last

Matt. 28:16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

Matt. 28:17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.

- After eight days or so, the eleven apostles of Jesus finally make their way to Galilee, to a high place that Jesus designated

- While they wait there, Jesus appears and they worship Him, but notice Matthew says some remain doubtful
 - At first reading, we may suppose that some still doubted that Jesus was resurrected, but that doesn't make sense...He's there!
 - Matthew is referring to the disciples' doubts about what Jesus is telling them in Galilee
 - He's explaining how they are to serve Him in the Kingdom program, and some have doubts about fulfilling that mission
- Remember everything these men have experienced, and you can sympathize with their doubts over moving ahead without Jesus
 - For three years they followed a rabbi they knew to be the Messiah, seeing miracles He was doing in crowds
 - But suddenly His opposition took control, they kill Him, and suddenly they were facing the end of all their hopes and dreams
 - And then, just as suddenly, Jesus was alive again but speaking of leaving and of powers to come, etc.
- All this must have been thoroughly confusing and overwhelming
- And now in Galilee, Jesus is speaking of building a Kingdom by preaching His resurrection, and Matthew says some were doubtful
 - No kidding...who wouldn't be at this point? These men doubted many things, especially in their ability to convince others
 - Considering how hard it was for these men to believe Jesus was alive... how were they going to convince anyone else?
 - Have you ever felt that way? How are you going to convince someone to believe in the Gospel? We all know their doubts
- So because they were doubting, Jesus sought to reassure them that Kingdom work was going to be a lot easier than they imagined...
 - It's as simple as 1, 2, 3...just three steps, and collectively the body of Christ is responsible for doing all three
 - Individually, we don't necessarily do all three steps ourselves, at least not all the time or with equal effort
 - We may do one or two exclusively, but together the Church makes all three happen
 - These three steps are often called the "Great Commission," and Jesus explains them in the last verses of the Gospel

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

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

Matt. 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- Understanding the three steps of the Great Commission begins by recognizing these words were intended to reassure Jesus’ disciples
 - It was given in response to their doubts about serving Jesus and sharing the Gospel
 - So Jesus’ point is to give us confidence to know the mission isn’t difficult
- It starts with knowing the Father has given Jesus all authority in Heaven and on Earth
 - In other words, the power and authority to accomplish the Kingdom program is Christ’s alone, so the outcome doesn’t depend on us
 - We aren’t responsible for reaching the world with the Gospel, Jesus is
 - We aren’t responsible for convincing someone that the Gospel is true, Jesus is
 - We don’t need to find the perfect words or have answers for all the objections or worry that we might mess it up...He’s got this
 - And when we face earthly obstacles, it will be Jesus who finds a way around government red tape and supplies our financial needs
 - Jesus will give us everything we need according to His purpose and timing because He has all authority in Heaven and on Earth
 - He doesn’t need anything we bring to the table...He’s fully capable of saving anyone at anytime and growing His Church
 - But He is inviting us to participate in that work, and that means all the pressure is off our shoulders
 - We can go fully confident that our participating in Kingdom work doesn’t rely on ability, only on our availability
 - Not one less soul will be present in Heaven regardless of what we choose to do in serving Jesus...we’re just along for the ride
- You might be tempted to ask, “Well, if Jesus has all the power and I contribute nothing to the Kingdom outcomes, why should I even bother participating?”
 - The answer is rewards...our service to Christ brings opportunity for God to reward our service, reward us both now and in eternity
 - In the present time, our service is rewarded with earthly outcomes like joy, wonder, love and spiritual maturity
 - And these things also lead to greater peace and contentment as our lives becomes more centered on Christ and His purposes
 - Ultimately, our service and spiritual maturity brings eternal rewards which Christ assigns based on how well we please Him
 - In the Kingdom, we will enjoy the fruit of our Kingdom work now, and you won’t want to miss what God has prepared for you
 - It’s the best kind of reward system...everyone gets a trophy just for

participating...but you must be present to win

- Knowing Jesus has all the power and authority means we have nothing to lose in serving the Kingdom program and everything to gain
 - And that program is just three simple steps, the first two steps are found in v.19 and the third is in v.20
 - The three steps are go, baptize and teach, and together they can be summarized by the phrase “make disciples”
- Collectively, Kingdom work is about making disciples of Jesus, and making disciples is a process of going, baptizing and teaching
 - Collectively, the Church is called to do all three things, but not all Christians will do all three equally...we each play a part
 - We don’t all go in the same way or to the same degree
 - Nor do we all baptize or teach others to the same degree, but collectively we are all called to make these things happen
- The first step is to go, and we are all called to “go” as ambassadors of Christ reaching our world with the Gospel message, but we will go differently
 - Everyone has the opportunity to go to a next-door neighbor, to a workmate, to a family member, or to a stranger on the street
 - But some will go further and in greater ways than others, like a missionary to another country or a pastor into full-time ministry
 - Some will go in traditional ways like door-to-door evangelism, while others go in novel ways like on social media or YouTube
 - Some of us will “go” vicariously by funding those who will go or praying for those who have gone
 - But in all these cases, we are all participating, going out to reach the unsaved world, and that’s an important footnote
 - The Great Commission requires we cultivate a concern for the unsaved, for those who don’t have what we have in Christ
 - “Going” means evangelism, going beyond the gathering, beyond serving believers, beyond the church doors and to the world
 - Kingdom work is fundamentally being ambassadors
- The second step of the Great Commission is to baptize new believers in water, and this is fundamentally a step of building community
 - Water baptism is the way Christ calls His Church to confirm the arrival of the Gospel into a person’s heart and to confirm that believer in the body
 - When we believe in the Gospel, we show it first by receiving water baptism
 - And as a person takes this act, the body of Christ receives them as such, and the community grows
 - This is why baptism requires two people...we cannot baptize ourselves, because the purpose is to unite us through witness

- In modern times, some churches have used “altar calls” or other ways to encourage people to demonstrate their faith
 - But these newer methods are not the Bible’s method...water baptism is the Bible’s altar call
 - That’s the only method to affirm a new believer’s faith and to receive them into fellowship in the body
- Water baptism must be conferred in the name of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) because all Three Persons made that moment happen
 - The Father chose us from before the foundations of the earth
 - The Son died to reconcile us to God and give us eternal life
 - And the Spirit brought us saving faith, caused us to be born again so that we would confess and become a child of God
 - So our baptism moment is a testimony to give glory to all Three
- Finally, we are called to teach these new believers to obey all that Christ commanded us, which is a reference to the entire Bible
 - That’s why we teach the whole counsel of God’s word, because that’s what the Great Commission requires...it’s teaching you to obey Jesus
 - Teaching is perhaps the hardest step of the three because it never ends and it’s often overlooked
 - But without teaching Christ’s disciples to obey, the rest of the process eventually breaks down
 - By teaching, we prepare a new generation of disciple-makers, because eventually new disciples will be stirred by what they learn
 - Hearts are stirred to go, new disciples are made, more teaching takes place, and the cycle repeats by Christ’s authority & power
 - That’s why Church programs today don’t need to be fancy or innovative...they just need to be faithful to these steps
 - So as you attend here week after week, you are being prepared for this purpose, Kingdom work
 - Weekly, you come here to see step three of the Great Commission at work, as we teach believers to obey all Christ commanded us
 - And on some days we see step two at work, as we baptize new believers and welcome them into this body
 - But everyday of your life you should be participating in step one...going...being an everyday ambassador for Jesus
- Step one brings faith to the new believer, step two brings the believer into the Church, and step three brings the Church into obedience with the word
 - And in all these things, we are working in the power and authority of Jesus
 - We go because we know Jesus is directing us to those He desires to reach, giving us the right words and preparing hearts

- We baptize knowing that Jesus has the power to unite a diverse group of humanity into a likeminded, loving community
- And we teach knowing that Jesus by His Spirit will make all things clear so we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ
- It's such a simple formula...just wash, rinse and repeat, as the label says
 - We don't need to invent a new way of "doing church"
 - So as we start a new year, it's the perfect time to change our thinking and our ways...change them back to the old ways
- Set your mind in 2021 on Kingdom work, going to the world, welcoming new believers into our body, and teaching them to obey
 - We've got an exciting year ahead...and we've got Jesus' power and authority to make it a great year for Kingdom work