



# ATTHEW

PART FOUR  
**KEYS OF THE KINGDOM**





# WELCOME TO MATTHEW

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

MALACHI 4:4-5



The above verse is the last portion of scripture found in the Old Testament. It is a closing of an era, but also a looking to the future. What is fascinating is that in one turn of the page, a reader goes from Malachi in the Old Testament to the first page of the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. What is hidden to many readers is the massive gulf between the page turn—between Matthew and Malachi. In that one turn of the page 400 years transpire.

For 400 years the people of God lived in this silence. In this time, there was much violence and war. Invaders from far off lands, evil tyrants, rulers who have no right to rule, exercised their power. Although at times it seemed as if hope was lost, the faithful clung to promises of old, promises that one day a good King would come to rule over his people. This King would exercise wisdom and implement the will of God. This King would be more than a King... he would be a Messiah.

Matthew tells his story in this context. When hope seems all but lost, when dictators rule, and when the promises of God seem like a long forgotten hope, Matthew introduces us to a man named Jesus of Nazareth. This is his story.





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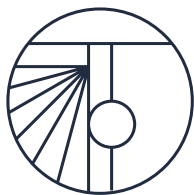
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# THE BAPTIST REVISITED

MATTHEW 14:1 – 12

<sup>1</sup> At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, <sup>2</sup> and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” <sup>3</sup> For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, <sup>4</sup> because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” <sup>5</sup> And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. <sup>6</sup> But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias

danced before the company and pleased Herod, <sup>7</sup> so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. <sup>8</sup> Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.” <sup>9</sup> And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. <sup>10</sup> He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, <sup>11</sup> and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. <sup>12</sup> And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.





## INTRODUCTION

While we all like to talk about fun and happy stories, there can be good reasons to remember accounts that are more difficult to hear. This session presents one such story. As a reader, it is important to think about the key characters—John, Herod, and Jesus—and try to understand why Matthew would use this story.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Did your parents or someone else ever tell you a “cautionary tale”? What was it? Why did they tell you the story?
- 2 Matthew 13:53-58 described Jesus’ hometown response to his teaching and miracles. Recall how they responded and compare it to Herod’s response to Jesus (and John) here. What seems to be the underlying motivation in each case?
- 3 Read Mark 6:14-29. What extra information do we get from Mark that may help us understand the full picture here in Matthew?

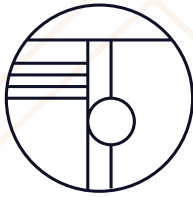
- 4 Why do you think Herod Antipas ties Jesus and John so closely together?
- 5 Describe several ironies in this account. From a Jewish perspective, what is the right thing to do? What is the wrong thing to do? Who has the greatest power at this party? Who seems to be controlling the outcome?
- 6 Matthew 14:3-12 is all about John the Baptist. Why does Matthew insert this story that is not about Jesus here? What would be the effect on a first century reader/hearer of the story?
- 7 Describe a time you got caught like Herod in an unfortunate commitment you made. How did you manage the situation?
- 8 What is your biggest roadblock to telling people about the gospel? What are you most afraid of? How does it affect your ability to live out your faith? What steps can help reduce the obstacle?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

The opinions of others can be a cruel master. Herod Antipas, the one with the power, is stuck, leading to tragic consequences for John the Baptist. Doing the “right” thing is rarely a popularity contest, in fact, proclaiming the gospel can be offensive. Are we prepared? Are we more like Herod who buckles under the pressure of the watching eyes all around him, or are we like John the Baptist who proclaims truth no matter what the personal cost? This story of John’s demise is meant to foreshadow another death, the most important death of all time. Here we see a want-to-be king pictured against the backdrop of the One True King. One will do whatever it takes to protect himself, the other whatever it takes to protect and grow his kingdom. He accepts a slave’s death to bring his own into a royal family. The cost is so high. This week take some time reading a couple of stories from the Voice of the Martyrs at <https://www.persecution.com/stories/> and think about what it sometimes means to live a life of proclaiming truth in a lost and sometimes adversarial world.



# THE KING'S BREAD

MATTHEW 14:13-21, 15:32-39, 16:5-12

14:<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. <sup>15</sup> Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup> But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

15:<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?" <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

16:<sup>5</sup> When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any







bread. <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." <sup>7</sup> And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how

many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

## INTRODUCTION

While the last session included an extravagant feast that had ominous implications, Matthew now turns to a feeding miracle pointing to a greater kingdom. Several sections are brought together this session to revealing Jesus bringing real sustenance to the people, but also that the kingdoms of this world only create cheap substitutes.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Do you ever entertain others with a meal at your home? How do you determine who gets invited to your table?
- 2 How is the feeding story here similar and different from the situation in Matthew 4:3-4? Why is Jesus' response different?

- 3 Miraculous provision of bread has Old Testament precedent. Read Exodus 16:1-18. Compare the Exodus passage with the feeding passages here in Matthew. What's similar and what's different? Earlier in Matthew, we may have seen another comparison of Jesus to Moses. What was it?
- 4 Compare Matthew 14:19 and Matthew 15:36. Who are the audiences? How similar is the language? Note the verbs used and their order. Now, compare this formula with Matthew 26:26. What might Matthew be highlighting in this similarity of language?
- 5 In both feeding miracles, how is Jesus' reaction different than his disciples? What is the word that is used in both stories that describes Jesus' attitude toward the crowds and what do you think it means?
- 6 What is the best example of a time from your own life when you experienced compassion, whether giving or receiving it?
- 7 Matthew 16:5-12 becomes more of a negative example using the image of bread. In Matthew 14, Jesus uses leaven in a positive sense. How is leaven like "teaching"?
- 8 In Matthew 6:30, 8:26, and 14:31, Jesus speaks of those with "little faith" as he does in this week's session. Compare them. How are the disciples doing when it comes to trusting and understanding Jesus?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Our culture often tells us, “be your own boss”, “be the best you can be”, or “you are the master of your own domain.” The reality we encounter is often the opposite—we are not in control, and we don’t have it all together. In these feeding miracles, Jesus works with what little the disciples have, but he brings more. This is one of the messages of his kingdom that cannot be lost. Many of us may feel like we bring little to the table. Whether you think your testimony is uninteresting, or your gifts and experiences are inconsequential, Jesus calls you to bring ALL that you have. Whether little or much, Jesus does the heavy lifting. He multiplies. He is the Faithful King who brings the results. You are NOT inconsequential to him. Look toward the cross, an ancient torture device, to see how Jesus values his creation and you. You have been invited to the great banquet. This week consider and pray about how life might look different if you lived knowing that Jesus wants to take what you have and make it more for his glory. What are concrete actions that will support your prayer?



# WALKING ON WATER

MATTHEW 14:22-36

<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." <sup>28</sup> And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup> He

said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" <sup>32</sup> And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." <sup>34</sup> And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. <sup>35</sup> And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick <sup>36</sup> and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.





## INTRODUCTION

After the first feeding miracle, we encounter another storm of sorts. This time Jesus is not with the disciples, but comes to them in such an unexpected way that they are afraid of both the storm and the One who rules over it.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Describe a time someone helped you do something you thought you couldn't do. Maybe it was the first time you rode a bike or when you dove into a pool headfirst. Who helped you? What did it require?
- 2 Review the last time Jesus showed his authority over nature in Matthew 8. How are the events similar and different? What was the object of fear in each passage?
- 3 Do you fear God? Are you afraid of what he might do? What part of your fear is healthy and biblical, and what part is not? Explain.

- 4 Read Job 9:1-12. How does Job's understanding of God and the imagery in today's passage relate?
- 5 Read Exodus 14:15-30 and compare it with today's passage. Who is in control in each passage? How do the disciples respond to Jesus once he gets into the boat?
- 6 Read Isaiah 42:18-43:7. What are we to understand about the Israelites and what are we to understand about God in this Isaiah passage? How can it speak to what is happening in Matthew 14?
- 7 Are you the type like Peter who would step out of the boat or are you more like the "other" disciples that did not? Explain. Which is the better choice?
- 8 Describe a time when you felt God "showed up" when you least expected it?
- 9 Was Jesus with Peter at every moment in this situation? Theologically, how might God's presence and involvement in our lives change our expectations and responses in each of our daily experiences?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Sometimes we are afraid when we shouldn't be and other times, we are not afraid when we should be. The One who can control Creation qualifies as One appropriate to fear. But the disciples seem more afraid of an apparition than the One who is mastering the elements. The good news is that Jesus wields this power for the disciples' good. He is present for the purpose of saving them. He is present for the purpose of saving us too! The most powerful, good, and faithful King goes into the cosmic storm of our unbelief and rebellion to destroy death for you and for me. What a gift! Some of you are in a challenging moment or you know someone who is in the middle of one of life's battles. Who needs to be reminded that the One who rules nature and conquers death is with them or, if they are not a believer, needs to know he wants to be with them?



# BLIND LEADERS

MATTHEW 15:1-20

<sup>1</sup> Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup> But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," <sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup> " 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' " <sup>10</sup> And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup> it

is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" <sup>13</sup> He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." <sup>15</sup> But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." <sup>16</sup> And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? <sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."







## INTRODUCTION

Ritual purity was a core aspect of the Law and held tightly by the religious elite. Here Jesus takes aim at cleanliness rules and how they were not at the heart of the Law. In fact, he reveals how such human traditions that go beyond the scope of the Law reveal hypocrisy in weightier matters.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Describe how you have seen a “rule” change or lose its initial purpose.
- 2 Think back through Matthew and identify other passages where Jesus has done something that could cause ritual impurity. Was he confronted by the religious elite in each of them? Why/why not?
- 3 Jesus has faced the scribes and Pharisees before. What makes this time different? What might this difference be pointing to?
- 4 Read Exodus 30:18-21 and Leviticus 22:1-6. To whom do these cleaning rituals apply?

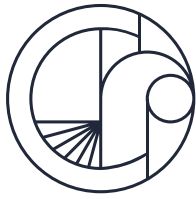
- 5 The disciples say that Jesus' challenge has offended the Pharisees. The Greek word used for "offended" is where we get our word "scandal." Has Jesus caused offense previously in Matthew? Why the strong response from the disciples now? What do you think they are worried about?
- 6 Read Isaiah 29:9-16. How does this Isaiah text connect to what Jesus is saying in Matthew 15? How might careful consideration of this text have influenced the scribe's and Pharisee's reactions to Jesus' words? Explain.
- 7 Compare Matthew 15:16-20 with Mark 7:14-23. The Gospel authors have slightly different points they are presenting. What is the difference?
- 8 Peter asks for clarification here and he is involved in another story about ritual purity later. Read Acts 10:1-43 and discuss the implications of ritual purity on the mission of the church.
- 9 Have you ever seen someone "rationalize" something that they were doing that was either neutral or bad as something that was actually good? Explain. What typically compels someone to do so?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Time and again throughout Matthew, Jesus has revealed new depths of the Law that challenge the understanding of the scribes and Pharisees. Their additions and clarifications to the Law have come to the point of clouding the original meaning and purposes. Jesus is showing that human hearts are broken. The darkness on the inside makes its way out. A new heart is required, and the amazing news is that Jesus dies to make sure his Creation will receive the transplant necessary to love God and others as he does. Are there any rules or ideals that you are holding on to that no longer belong within your faith? Have you manufactured any rules like the Pharisees' demand for cleanliness? Take time self-evaluating this week.



# ANAAANITE WOMAN

MATTHEW 15:21-31

<sup>21</sup> And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs

that fall from their masters' table."

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

<sup>29</sup> Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, <sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.





## INTRODUCTION

It is less obvious to us, but Tyre and Sidon are outside of Israelite territory. Jesus withdraws to foreign places and still finds people that are in need. It may seem that Jesus is resistant to reveal his kingdom to this non-Israelite woman in this foreign land, but his kingdom is revealed regardless of national lines and ethnic boundaries.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever had someone come ask you for help in a moment when it wasn't ideal timing? What did you do?
- 2 Go back and read Matthew 8:5-13 and compare and contrast the encounters with the Centurion and the Canaanite woman.
- 3 In the previous session, Jesus challenges the purity rules. How does that possibly set up the encounter in this session? What are the possible implications?
- 4 Does this interaction with the Canaanite woman bother you at all? What makes it challenging? Does the end of the story relieve your concern? Why/why not? Does a person's general attitude toward Jesus impact how they might interpret this text?

- 5 The dialog between Jesus and the woman is metaphoric using images of sheep, children, bread and little dogs. How would you translate the dialog after removing these metaphoric images?
- 6 In Matthew 15:32-39, which comes directly after this passage, Jesus performs another feeding miracle, and many scholars use hints from the text to show it happened outside of Israelite territory. How might that miracle tie to this story of the Canaanite woman?
- 7 Matthew 15:29-31 describes a scene we have witnessed in different ways previously in the Gospel. Do you remember the last time Jesus went up on a mountain and sat down? (HINT: Jesus delivered one of his greatest teachings there). What was the significance then? What might be the significance now?
- 8 Even though Jesus and the disciples are now walking by the Sea of Galilee, what is hinted at by the term "God of Israel"?
- 9 How do you react to people from different ethnicities or nations? What has influenced your response? How can Jesus' teaching and actions challenge us to reach across these cultural divides?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Bread is an ongoing metaphor in this section. The woman's faith will settle for whatever "crumb" Jesus is willing to offer. The interaction reveals her hope that his power and authority can do something no one else can, and the stakes are the highest possible—her daughter is dying. Jesus commends even a "crumb-of-faith." The One rejected by his own people is good news to the outsider and foreigner. His offer and the church's mission target the ends of the earth. Think back over the last year or two. What do you think has been commendable about your own faith? Where have you trusted Jesus in a way that seems important? Has it been visible to outsiders and those who don't know him?



# CONFESSIO OF PETER

MATTHEW 16:13–23

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom

of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. <sup>21</sup> 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 on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”







## INTRODUCTION

Simon Peter stands out in the text this session. He seems to get it. Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One. The issue is that Peter's idea of the purposes and plans of the Messiah are drastically different from the Messiah's own understanding of his purpose and plan. Peter thinks his own ideas are better, but Jesus doesn't hesitate to call out Peter's error.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever had a conversation with someone where you left feeling like you were on the same page, only to discover that you both were thinking of quite different conclusions? Did it cause a problem or conflict? Explain.
- 2 The term "messiah" which is an Old Testament term meaning "anointed one" that gets translated as "Christ" in the New Testament, has been used sparingly by Matthew. Read Matthew 1:1, 1:16-18, 2:1-4, and 11:1-6. How has the term been used so far? Which clearly point to Jesus, and which are more implied? How do they compare to Matthew 16:16?
- 3 As a reader of the gospel, skim through the previous passages of the book and discuss the other tactics that Matthew has used to identify Jesus as Messiah without having to give him the title.

- 4 Jesus says some very important things about Peter in Matthew 16:17-19. What are some things that happen after the resurrection that reveal Peter stepping into the role Jesus has given him? Read Matthew 18:15-19. Do the other disciples have similar roles?
- 5 Compare this text with Matthew 14:28-33. What is consistent about Peter's actions?
- 6 What are the biggest misunderstandings you have had in your Christian walk? For example, have you ever misunderstood a biblical truth such that you got caught looking ignorant or foolish? Explain.
- 7 Read Matthew 4:8-10 and compare it to Matthew 16:22-23. Jesus is consistent, but here we see a strong correction. How do you respond to correction from the LORD? Do you ever recognize that your thoughts or actions can look more satanic, than saint-like? Explain.
- 8 What parts of your faith have you left for others to sort out? Where is your faith maybe too reliant on others rather than pursuing it with them?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Until now, many of Matthew's accounts of Jesus' interactions leave both the physical audiences and the readers asking the question "Who is this man?" Collectively, the narratives speak to One with utmost authority. They tell of One who can heal and save, both physically and spiritually. They reveal One who will stand up to the power structures of the day, seemingly unconcerned with potential repercussions. This is the One that Peter rebukes, but later worships in both life and his own death. Church tradition tells us that Peter chose to be crucified upside-down because he did not feel worthy to die in the manner of his King. Do you know this King? Who is he to you? What would you do for him? From this point in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus heads toward the cross for you and for me. Every morning this week, wake up, get on your knees, and submit yourself fully to him. There is no allegiance more fitting than allegiance to Jesus, our Messiah and King.



# CROSS-SHAPED KINGDOM

MATTHEW 16:24 – 17:13

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. <sup>28</sup> Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." <sup>1</sup> And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and

his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. <sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son





of Man is raised from the dead.”<sup>10</sup> And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?”<sup>11</sup> He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things.”<sup>12</sup> But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they

did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.”<sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

## INTRODUCTION

Something has changed. Peter’s messianic pronouncement and his devilish folly seems to have signaled a turning point in the story. And in a scene we moderns have trouble comprehending, the heavens will declare the glory of Jesus and men dead for hundreds of years show up to participate.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Describe someone you know who has done very well by earthly standards. What did it take to get there? Would they say it was worth it?
- 2 What would you say is the opposite of denying oneself and taking up one’s cross? Can you give an example from your own life?

- 3 Is Matthew 16:24 a good definition of discipleship? Why/why not?
- 4 “What shall a man give in return for his soul” is a great question. How do you think an average person might answer?
- 5 Reading Matthew 16:27-28, do you think Jesus is talking about his resurrection, his second coming or something else? Explain.
- 6 In the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah show up. From what you know about them, what might they represent? Who else might you expect to show up and why?
- 7 This is not the first time we hear a voice from heaven. Read Matthew 3:13-17. Compare the two scenes. Why are these two moments significant? Now read Luke 8:28-36. (Verses 30-31 provide a helpful addition).
- 8 Elijah was discussed last session as well. What was said in that session that Jesus implicitly addresses here? What does this say about the disciples understanding of Jesus?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

We might wonder what the disciples were thinking when Jesus said, “take up your cross.” Carry your own torture device seems like a strange command. While crucifixion was a norm in the Roman world, choosing it would be far from one’s mind. It’s one thing to know that a wrong move might mean a slave’s death on a cross, but the cross being the goal? Preposterous! But consider the initial hearers and readers of Matthew’s Gospel. This statement in Matthew 16 would likely ignite a powerful symphony of emotions. Sitting in their first century communities, they had heard the stories. They knew how the story ended . . . and so do we. The tremors of the imminent, selfless act of King Jesus rings out from these pages like a call to arms. We arm ourselves with love, humility, and not only the will to die to our own desires, but to actually die for another if God’s glory is at stake. What sacrifice seems like a bold step for you? Get on your knees, close your eyes, and imagine kneeling before his cross. You can picture the body of your King on one just like it. Do you know that by the power of the Spirit, you can pick it up and follow him?



# DEMONIZED BOY & THE TEMPLE TAX

MATTHEW 17:14-27

<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, <sup>15</sup> said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water." <sup>16</sup> And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." <sup>18</sup> And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>20</sup> He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." <sup>22</sup> As they were

gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, <sup>23</sup> and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed. <sup>24</sup> When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" <sup>25</sup> He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" <sup>26</sup> And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. <sup>27</sup> However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast 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 me and for yourself."







## INTRODUCTION

Faith and taxes. These are two things that are hard to talk about in our society without getting into rough cultural waters. But whether challenging those with little faith or paying the temple tax, Jesus reminds us to trust in the Father. He is the only one who will provide in each and every situation.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 How do you respond to bad news? Whether a sick loved one, or a job loss, how do you typically respond?
- 2 It is clear from this text that sickness can be connected to the demonic. Discuss the implications. Does this mean we should cast out “sickness” demons when people have the flu or when they have a chronic illness? Explain.
- 3 “Little faith” has been used four times previously. Read Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, and 16:8. How is this situation different? How are the disciples portrayed and with whom are they implicitly grouped together?

- 4 Consider the last five years, and then describe your own faith. Is it growing? Is it receding? Why?
- 5 Read Matthew 16:21 and compare it to Matthew 17:22-23. How is the emphasis different?
- 6 Have you ever witnessed a Christian attempting to resolve a problem outside of their control entirely without God? Have you ever done the same? Explain.
- 7 Jesus often uses a similar image to explain different things. Read Matthew 13:31-32 and compare it to Matthew 17:20. What are the common understandings of the image that are useful in both sayings? Is it meant to encourage?
- 8 For some explanation on the temple tax, read Exodus 30:11-16 and Nehemiah 10:32-33. Is Jesus making a statement about taxes in Matthew 17:24-27 or something different? What message would Jesus send if he chose not to pay the tax? Give examples of how the act of NOT paying the temple tax would conflict with Jesus' previous actions.





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

When we read about Jesus speaking to Peter here maybe we are missing the beauty of what he is doing. Jesus does not want people to misinterpret his actions. The hero of our story is the God of Israel, the God worshipped in the temple. He is the One who provides for his children because he loves them. He will provide for small things like the temple tax, but it will not stop there. He will stop at nothing to bring his children back to himself. He will pay the cosmic debt. It will require the tearing down of the perfect temple, the place where heaven and earth truly meet. It will require the destruction of his Son. Maybe you get upset about lesser things like taxes or politics in general. Maybe this week is time to remind yourself that you were bought for more than some percentage of your worth. Maybe we all should try to reevaluate our current and fleeting frustrations in light of the salvation we have received, as free sons and daughters of the King.



# CHILD-LIKE HUMILITY

MATTHEW 18:1-9

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened

around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. <sup>7</sup> "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! <sup>8</sup> And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.





## INTRODUCTION

The greater in humility, the greater in the kingdom. This is a calculation that does not reckon well in our culture. Jesus calls his disciples to a humility that is rare and difficult, the kind visible in a child. In fact, the passage is speaking about “entering life” and “little ones” who believe, but seemingly spoken to adults.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever wanted to be the best at something? If so, describe it. What was the reason? Is it still a goal and if so, how are you doing?
- 2 When you look at a child, what are the greatest qualities you see. Why are they praiseworthy? Are they praiseworthy in our culture?
- 3 What do you think “turn and become like children” means here?

- 4 "You will never enter the kingdom of heaven" has come from Jesus' lips before. Read Matthew 5:20 and discuss the two statements. How do they relate? After reading much of Matthew, what might the two statements in combination say about righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees?
- 5 When Jesus says "these little ones who believe in me," of whom does he speak?
- 6 Even more of these words are resonating from an earlier event in Matthew. Read Matthew 5:27-30. Compare the language in both sections. How does the context differ? Is the message the same or different? Discuss.
- 7 Jesus is talking about the better things to do when "entering life." What does this language assume of those who are alive and hearing his words? Read John 3:1-9. How does Nicodemus respond to similar language? What are the measures that Jesus suggests for those entering life?
- 8 "Hell of fire" and "eternal fire" are both used here. What does the imagery point to in the context? How do you feel about these kind of images? Why does Jesus use these images?
- 9 Give an example of humility that you have witnessed. Did it seem like a good thing? Why/why not?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

The words humble and humiliated share a common root. Jesus was humiliated in the most public way. In all the horrors that lead up to his death, he was “made humble.” Here is what gets lost in the language, and the point we often forget. He allowed it! In fact, there is a pastor and author named Joshua Ryan Butler who in his book *The Pursuing God* says, “Jesus is a lion; the cross is his prey.” We can’t forget this beautiful reality. He continues “The cross doesn’t happen to Jesus; Jesus happens to the cross.” What happened on the cross was for you and me. We needed it. All of Creation needed it. What are steps you could take this week that would work toward Jesus’ ideal of humility which sometimes doesn’t look very praiseworthy to the watching world? How can you reveal his kind of humility?

# LOST SHEEP & FORGIVENESS

MATTHEW 18:10-35

<sup>10</sup> "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. <sup>15</sup> "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth

shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." <sup>21</sup> Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup> "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.







<sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported

to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

## INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness and mercy are core to this session. Jesus reveals the heart of the Father in his forbearance and desire to bring every last sheep back into the fold. But it also underlines how withholding forgiveness can be a failure to understand the Father's heart and a recipe for disaster.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Grade yourself on forgiveness. Are you good at it? Do you hold grudges? Discuss.
- 2 How does Matthew 18:10-14 connect to the previous verses from last week? What are the linking words? How are the ideas taken further? What does it reveal about God's heart?

- 3 Read Deuteronomy 19:15-21. How might this relate to Matthew 18:15-20? What is different about the intended situations? What is the general wisdom being prescribed? Now Read 2 Corinthians 13:1 and 1 Timothy 5:19 and discuss what seems common to both.
- 4 Matthew 18:20 is most often quoted in our culture generally regarding prayer. What is the greater context of this verse? In what situation might you refer to this verse? Does it necessarily change the validity for the verse's use regarding prayer?
- 5 Read Genesis 4:19-24. Jesus alludes to this story in his response to Peter in Matthew 18:22. How does he do it? How do you think this early story from the Bible gives Jesus' words more weight?
- 6 The term "church" is used here only for the second time in Matthew. The church as we know it is not completely established until after Jesus' death and resurrection, so in this context, what is the meaning?
- 7 What are the most shocking elements in the parable in Matthew 18:23-34? Why are they shocking to you?
- 8 How well does the parable in Matthew 18:23-34 mirror the discussion in Matthew 18:10-22? When you read it, did you need explanation of what the parable meant? Discuss.
- 9 Read Matthew 5:7 and 6:14-15. Considering this session's text, why are mercy and forgiveness so essential?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Little bits of God's character are on display when we are merciful and when we offer gracious forgiveness. We are acting like him. The parable of the King settling accounts carries this weight but showing it from the opposite direction. Those that receive the King's gracious mercy and then refuse to show the same do not understand who they serve and are reflecting something entirely different. Did you happen to notice? The disciples didn't ask for explanation of this parable. We don't need it either. There is weight to its message and the best response is silent self-examination. The Lord's Prayer offers a perfect exercise. It says, "Forgive us our debts, as we also HAVE FORGIVEN our debtors." Past tense. Pray this prayer throughout each day this week and try to discover where your mercy is lacking, knowing that you can already celebrate the King's mercy toward you.



# MARRIAGE

MATTHEW 19:1-15

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. <sup>2</sup> And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. <sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was

not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." <sup>10</sup> The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." <sup>11</sup> But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. <sup>12</sup> For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it." <sup>13</sup> Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, <sup>14</sup> but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." <sup>15</sup> And he laid his hands on them and went away.





## INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a difficult topic, so we enter this discussion cautiously. Truth be told, this passage is often labeled as being about divorce, which is true, but, at its root, it is more about the covenant of marriage. Jesus calls back to the ancient roots of the first divinely appointed institution and reveals truth about the fallen human heart in the process.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 If you are married or have been married, what is the hardest thing you have discovered about being married? If you have not been married, what is the most important thing that you can imagine about marriage?
- 2 Marriage is called a covenant. Do your best to describe what you know about covenants.
- 3 Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Is the Old Testament text that the Pharisees refer to a command as they have said? What is the intention of the regulation? Who do you think it protects? How have the Pharisees been misunderstanding the Law from Jesus' perspective?
- 4 Read Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:24. Why do you think Jesus goes back to the beginning? Why would he include Genesis 1:26-27? Doesn't Genesis 2:24 contain all that is necessary? Discuss.

- 5 Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-16. How does Paul view marriage? What are some similarities and how has he gone further? How does he talk about divorce?
- 6 Jesus identifies “sexual immorality” as a reason for divorce. What is at the root of this exception? Does he mean that “sexual immorality” requires divorce?
- 7 How might “sexual immorality” be defined in our cultural context that is different than in the first century?
- 8 Read Isaiah 54:4-8 and Hosea 2:14-20. How do you think God’s marriage to his people might be connected to Jesus’ view of marriage? Thinking through what you know of scripture, does God plan to break his covenants with his people?
- 9 Jesus speaks of “eunuchs” in Matthew 19:11-12. What do you think Jesus is describing here? Read 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. How is Paul describing a similar idea?
- 10 Take a moment and think about someone you know who is married that embodies what marriage should be. What makes them such a good example? Would our culture see the same things positively?





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Marriage in our day has become about personal fulfillment rather than a covenant. In fact, the Pharisaical view of marriage has come full circle today, but this time whether husband or wife find "any indecency" in the other, they can call it quits and move on to another. The good news is that God does not treat marriage in such a way. God chases down his adulterous bride, which includes you and me, to make her clean again. We are saved by the Son and purified by the Spirit and the end of the Bible depicts a wedding. Read Revelation 21:9-14 to see what the bride becomes by God's design. The most beautiful wedding you can imagine is coming because the bridegroom will stop at nothing to bring his bride back. Pick a few couples you know. Pray for them this week every day, and if you get a chance, remind them of the importance and beauty of the marriage covenant.



# RICH YOUNG MAN

MATTHEW 19:16-30

<sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

<sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."

<sup>18</sup> He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, <sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

<sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person

enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." <sup>27</sup> Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" <sup>28</sup> Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. <sup>30</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first."







## INTRODUCTION

A young wealthy man seeks out Jesus, and seems truly interested in the wisdom Jesus can provide. No matter how much of the Law he has followed he seems to think there might be something missing. He is interested in the answer to a question that seems common to every time and every place. Jesus' reveals the hidden problem within the man and within the question.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 What good deed have you ever thought you should do because you thought it might earn you eternal life? What corrected your thinking?
- 2 Read Deuteronomy 6:4-6. When Jesus claims there is "only one who is good," this ancient Jewish prayer is likely what he is referencing. At the time, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 was combined with other Old Testament verses and recited morning and evening by many Israelites. What do these verses from Deuteronomy draw the reader to think about? Why might this echo be used here?
- 3 Is there anything odd or interesting about the commandments Jesus specifically states (and those that he does not)? Discuss.

- 4 Jesus confronts the man with one thing—riches. The man went away sorrowful at the thought. Is there something you are holding on to that you believe Jesus would like you to lay at his feet? What is it? Why is it so difficult?
- 5 Think back on Jesus' teaching and actions so far. What are some things that Jesus has already said about rich and poor?
- 6 Read Luke 19:1-10. What does this passage say about riches? Now compare this session's text with the text in Luke. What do they say about the one who holds the riches?
- 7 In our context, how would you determine if someone is "rich"? What are the measures? How should Christian measures be different than cultural measures? Are you rich? Explain.
- 8 Matthew 19:30 seems a bit cryptic. What does it mean? Considering the context, why might Jesus insert this slogan here? Is it a response to Peter's question or a note about the idea of riches? Discuss.





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

Sell EVERYthing and follow. These words can make most of us anxious or at least drive us to come up with rational reasons why doing so is “unwise” or “unwarranted.” Maybe we read about the rich young man and attempt to satisfy our own consciences by saying that “riches are not my problem, so this teaching is better suited for someone else.” A current statistic says that 85% of the world lives on less than \$30 per day. The God of the Bible gives and gives and gives out of his wealth. His grace is shockingly lavish and totally undeserved. We only need look to our tortured King hanging torn, exposed, and shamed on the cross to understand the depth of God’s grace. So, it’s worth asking . . . how are we being generous? I mean if we have truly experienced God’s generosity on our behalf, how are we being generous? As those who follow Jesus, we are supposed to look like him, so maybe this week is a time to consider how rich you truly are and to know that even the things you have earned are simply another sign of God’s undeniable grace. All you have been given is worth sharing. Who could be a recipient of your generosity this week?



# MASTER OF THE VINEYARD

MATTHEW 20:1-28

<sup>1</sup> “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ <sup>5</sup> So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ <sup>7</sup> They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ <sup>8</sup> And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ <sup>9</sup> And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> Now when those hired first

came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, <sup>12</sup> saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last.” <sup>17</sup> And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, <sup>18</sup> “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will





be raised on the third day.” <sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” <sup>23</sup> He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant,

but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

## INTRODUCTION

Parable. Prediction. Redefinition of Greatness. God’s good pleasure is spotlighted in this session and his grace is on full display. At the same time and much like the experience with the rich young man, Jesus is turning idea of what greatness truly is on its head.

## DISCUSSION

- 1 Have you ever discovered someone was making more than you for the exact same job? How did you respond? Was there a reason for the disparity?
- 2 What would you say is the main point of the parable of the vineyard workers? Explain.

- 3 How would you compare Jesus' use of "the last will be first, and first last" axiom in Matthew 20:16 compared to last session with the rich young ruler? Why would the last be first in this context? What differentiates them? How do the verses that follow Matthew 20:16 complete the thought?
- 4 Here we get the third prediction of Jesus' death. Read Matthew 16:21-23 and 17:22-23 and compare them with Matthew 20:17-19. How have the predictions progressed? What is shared by all three? How might Matthew be using this progression for his purposes?
- 5 Given we are talking about "cups" and "thrones," what does the mother's request mean? Is the mother's understanding of "drinking a cup" the same as Jesus'? Discuss.
- 6 How does our society define "greatness"? How does it resemble the request of the Zebedee's mother? What are other signs of "greatness" that our culture might claim as important?
- 7 Terms like "servant" and "slave" are uncomfortable. What is Jesus achieving by using these terms here? Explain.
- 8 Much of Matthew's Gospel has pointed to Jesus' authority. In Matthew 20:25-28 a new understanding of authority is revealed. Pick a segment of your life, whether home or school or work and discuss specifically how it would be different if everyone started to live with this text in mind.





## GOSPEL MOTIVATION

The parable's words ring out, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" Our desire to earn our way can cause a failure to recognize and marvel at God's grace. Should God's grace create a feeling of joy in us? Absolutely. Should we have joy when that grace is lavished on others? For sure. What about those who we think do NOT deserve it? While we know the answer, it is far more difficult to grant. Brothers and sisters, look to the crucified King and see the One who received what others deserved so they could receive what only he deserves. Here he makes it clear that neither Jew nor Gentile is innocent of shedding his blood, but both are the target of his ransom. In this text, he strides toward the cross to conquer death by his death. How could you define greatness in your life? If you have children, how could you reveal this different kind of greatness? Who could benefit from you being a servant rather than a master?



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